

*BUDDHISM IN A NUTSHELL*

*ESSENTIALS FOR  
BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND STUDY*



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## *ESSENTIALS FOR BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND STUDY*

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## PREFACE

For years, when someone new to Buddhism asked for a book recommendation, we hesitated. The books that came to mind were either too lengthy or too traditional to be accessible, or too incomplete and watered down to convey the depth and precision of view and practice that Buddhism has to offer. This book blends ancient wisdom with a modern perspective, while preserving the unique blueprint for enlightenment that Tibetan Buddhist practitioners have relied upon, with success, for centuries.

Buddhism in a Nutshell is an introductory course on Buddhism from the international Buddhist organization, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). This book and its accompanying MP3 disc give those who cannot take the course in an FPMT center the opportunity to benefit from these teachings. The book presents teachings and reflections on each subject covered by the lam-rim text, *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, by the great Tibetan saint, Lama Tsongkhapa. The teachings come from two extraordinary Tibetan Buddhist masters, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, along with a Western teacher, Venerable Amy Miller. The accompanying audio program contains ten hours of additional teachings and guided meditations led by Ven. Amy. These teachings are provided to enhance the reader's understanding and integration of the material and thus serve as an excellent companion to the text. However, neither the book or audio should be considered the property of beginners alone; the teachings offered here are profound and will be of benefit to even advanced students on the path to enlightenment.

Each chapter ends with a suggested meditation exercise. A practitioner could spend months, if not years, engaging in any one of these meditations. If you find one or two that particularly move your mind, there is no limit to the number of times you can

do these exercises. There is also no limit to the ways in which your mind can be moved by any one or all of them.

If you find this book and audio course useful, you may also be interested in other educational offerings from FPMT. We offer an extensive array of study programs in our centers and as homestudy or correspondence courses, starting with short introductory courses such as Meditation 101, and two foundational courses Discovering Buddhism and Foundation of Buddhist Thought. We also offer advanced programs for the study of philosophical texts in the FPMT Basic Program of Buddhist Studies, Maitripa College, and the seven-year Masters Program. More information on all of these programs is available at [www.fpmt.org/education](http://www.fpmt.org/education).

We would like to thank, first and foremost, the precious ones who initially taught this material: Lama Thubten Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and Venerable Amy Miller. Without their dedication to making the Dharma available and accessible to us, this book would not exist.

All the teachings in this book by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche were originally recorded, transcribed, and edited by the skilled team at the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive ([www.lamayeshe.com](http://www.lamayeshe.com)). The Archive's work is invaluable for preserving the teachings of these two precious lamas.

We thank Venerable Connie Miller for creating the original topic outline for this material, Mark Evans for tirelessly transcribing the recordings by Venerable Amy, and Heather Drollinger and Ed Gibson for creating the MP3 disc.

Finally, the deepest appreciation goes to our Spiritual Director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It is due to Rinpoche's constant guidance and unrelenting effort that FPMT has continued to expand, evolve and offer service to sentient beings for over thirty-five years. Because of Rinpoche's presence, we have hope and the light of Dharma to offer the world. Rinpoche, please live long.

You are about to embark on a journey of mind that has the potential to change your life in dramatic ways. Please enjoy your experience in every way.

Kendall Magnussen  
Gyalten Mindrol

*MOTIVATION FOR READING  
THIS BOOK*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*



## *MOTIVATION FOR READING THIS BOOK*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Whether or not this book becomes beneficial is up to you; it depends on your own mind. It is not a lama thing; I am not going to bring you to enlightenment in this short time. Instead of having too many expectations, it is better that you generate a pure motivation for being here. Expectations cause mental problems. Instead of being positive, they become negative. Instead of expecting something, dedicate in the following way:

“I am going to investigate and try to discover and understand my own nature. I am going to try to recognize my own false conceptions and mistaken actions. From the time of my birth up until now, I have been under the control of my conditioned, dissatisfied mind. Even though my only desire is for lasting happiness and enjoyment, I am constantly tossed up and down by external conditions. I am completely oppressed by my uncontrolled, dissatisfied mind. I have no freedom whatsoever, even though my fickle, arrogant mind always pretends, ‘I am happy; I am free.’ Any happiness I do experience is fleeting. If another person were to persecute or oppress me, I couldn’t stand it for even a day, but if I check more deeply I will see that from the moment of my birth, my uncontrolled mind has not given me the slightest chance to be freely joyful. It has been completely enslaved by external conditions.”

If you can begin to recognize the reality of your own nature, reading this book will have been worthwhile. Therefore, dedicate your actions during this time to discovering inner freedom through recognizing the negative characteristics of your own uncontrolled mind. Think:

“I completely dedicate these next days of my life to discovering inner peace – not only for myself but for all living beings throughout the universe. From the moment of my birth, I have been utterly under the control of the totally unrealistic and ridiculous philosophy of attachment and I always put myself first, wanting victory for myself and defeat for others. Therefore, the most meaningful thing I can do is to completely donate the next days of my life to others, with no expectation of receiving anything myself.”

Pure motivation is a function of the wise and open mind, which is the total opposite of the narrow, psychologically defiled, obsessed mind that is overly concerned with your own benefit and welfare. Completely donating your life to others has a great effect on your internal world. But this is not an emotional gesture. Dedicating yourself to others doesn't mean stripping naked and giving them all your clothes. Dedicating yourself to others is an act of wisdom, not emotion, and derives from discovering how harmful the mind of attachment is, how for countless lives attachment has accumulated in your mind, occupying and polluting it completely.

Thus, the purpose of this book is not simply for receiving information. It is a school for training the mind. If you can learn how to act out of wisdom instead of ignorance, out of universal consciousness instead of narrow conceptions, it will have been extremely worthwhile.

# *WHAT IS BUDDHISM?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*"We have created the situation in which we  
find ourselves and it is up to us to create the  
circumstances for our release."*

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

## *WHAT IS BUDDHISM?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Although different people have different views of what Buddhism is, I think it is difficult to say, “Buddhism is this, therefore it should be like that.” It is difficult to summarize Buddhism in a simplistic way. However, I can say that Buddhism is different from what most Westerners consider to be religion.

First of all, when you study Buddhism you are studying yourself – the nature of your body, speech, and mind – the main emphasis being on the nature of your mind and how it works in everyday life. The main topic is not something else, like “What is Buddha?” or “What is the nature of God?” or anything like that.

Why is it so important to know the nature of your own mind? Since we all want happiness, enjoyment, peace, and satisfaction, and since these things do not come from ice cream but from wisdom and the mind, we have to understand what the mind is and how it works.

One thing about Buddhism is that it is very simple and practical in that it explains logically how satisfaction comes from the mind, not from some kind of supernatural being in whom you have to believe. I understand that this idea can be difficult to accept because, in the West, from the moment you are born, extreme emphasis is placed on the belief that the source of happiness lies outside of yourself in external objects. Therefore, your sense perception and consciousness have an extreme orientation toward the sense world and you come to value external objects above all else, even your life. This extreme view that overvalues material things is a misconception, the result of unreasonable,

illogical thought. Therefore, if you want true peace, happiness, and joy, you need to realize that happiness and satisfaction come from within you and stop searching so fanatically outside. You can never find real happiness out there. Whoever has?

Ever since people came into existence they have never found true happiness in the external world, even though modern scientific technology seems to think that is where the solution to human happiness lies. That is a totally wrong conception. It is impossible. Of course, technology is necessary and good, as long as it is used skillfully. Religion is not against technology, nor is external development contrary to the practice of religion. However, in the West, there are religious extremists who oppose external development and scientific advancement, and we also find non-believers pitted against religious believers. It is all misconception.

First, let me raise a question. Where in the world can we find somebody who doesn't believe? Who among us is a true non-believer? In asking this I am not suggesting some kind of conceptual belief. The person who says "I don't believe" thinks he is intellectually superior but all you have to do to puncture his pride is ask two or three of the right questions: "What do you like? What don't you like?" He will come up with a hundred things he likes. "Why do you like them?" Questions like that immediately expose everybody as a believer.

In order to live in harmony we need to balance external and internal development; failure to do so leads to mental conflict. Buddhism finds no contradiction in advocating both external scientific method and inner mental development. Both are correct, but each can be either positive or negative as well. That depends on mental attitude – there is no such thing as absolute, eternally existent total positivity or absolute, eternally existent total negativity. Positive and negative depend on the background from which they arise. Therefore, it is very important to avoid extreme views because extreme emotional attachment to sense objects – "This is good; this makes me happy" – only causes mental illness. What we need to learn instead is how to remain in the middle, between the extremes of exaggeration and underestimation.

That doesn't mean giving everything up. I am not asking you to get rid of all your possessions. It is extreme emotional attachment to any object – external or internal – that makes you mentally ill, and Western medicine has few answers to that kind of sickness. There is nothing you can take; it is very hard to cure. Psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists: I doubt they can solve the problems of attachment. That is the actual problem.

The reason that Western health professionals can't treat attachment effectively is that they don't investigate the reality of the mind. The function of attachment is to bring frustration and misery. We all know this. It is not that difficult to grasp. Buddhism has ways of revealing the psychology of attachment and how it functions in everyday life. The method is meditation.

Too much concern for your own comfort and pleasure driven by the exaggerations of attachment automatically leads to feelings of hatred for others. Those two incompatible feelings – attachment and hatred – naturally clash in your mind and, from the Buddhist point of view, a mind in this kind of conflict is sick and unbalanced in nature.

Going to church or temple once a week is not enough to deal with this. You have to examine your mind all day long, maintaining constant awareness of the way you speak and act. We usually hurt others unconsciously. In order to observe the actions of our unconscious mind, we need to develop powerful wisdom energy, but that is easier said than done. It takes work to be constantly aware of what is going on in our minds all the time.

Most religious and non-religious people agree that loving-kindness for others is important. How do we acquire loving-kindness? It comes from understanding how and why others suffer, what is the best kind of happiness for them to have, and how they can get it. That is what we have to check, but our emotions get the better of us. We project our attachments onto others. We think that others like the same things we do; that people's main problems are hunger and thirst and that food and water will solve them. The human problem is not hunger and thirst; it is misconception and mental pollution.

Therefore, it is very important that you make your mind clear. When it is, the ups and downs of the external world don't bother you; whatever happens out there, your mind remains peaceful and joyous. If you get too caught up in watching the up and down world you finish up going up and down yourself: "Oh, that is so good! Oh, that is so bad!" If that world is your only source of happiness and its natural fluctuations disturb your peace of mind, you will never be happy, no matter how long you live. It is impossible. However, if you understand that the world is up and down by nature – sometimes up, sometimes down – you expect it to happen and when it does, you don't get upset. Whenever your mind is balanced and peaceful, there is wisdom and control.

Perhaps you think, "Oh, control! Buddhism is all about control. Who wants control? That is a Himalayan trip, not a Western one." But in our experience, control is natural. As long as you have the wisdom that knows how the uncontrolled mind functions and where it comes from, control is natural.

All people have equal potential to control and develop their minds. There is no distinction according to race, color, or nationality. Equally, all can experience mental peace and joy. Our human ability is great – if we use it with wisdom, it is worthwhile; if we use it with ignorance and emotional attachment, we waste our lives. Lord Buddha's teaching greatly emphasizes understanding over the hallucinated fantasies of the ordinary mind. Emotional projections and hallucinations due to unrealistic perceptions are wrong conceptions. As long as the mind is polluted by wrong conceptions, it is impossible to avoid frustration.

The clean-clear mind is simultaneously joyful. That is simple to see. When your mind is under the control of extreme attachment on one side and extreme hatred on the other, you have to examine it to see why you grasp at happiness and why you hate. When you check your objects of attachment and hatred logically, you will see that the fundamental reason for these opposite emotions is basically the same thing: emotional attachment projects a hallucinatory object and emotional hatred also projects a halluci-

natory object. Either way, you believe in the hallucination.

As I said before, it is not an intellectual, “Oh, yes, I believe.” And by the way, just saying you believe in something doesn’t actually mean you do. However, belief has deep roots in your subconscious, and as long as you are under the influence of attachment, you are a believer. Belief doesn’t necessarily have to be in the supernatural, in something beyond logic. There are many ways to believe.

From the standpoint of Buddhist psychology, in order to have love or compassion for all living beings, first you have to develop equilibrium – a feeling that all beings are equal. This is not a radical sort of, “I have a piece of candy; I need to cut it up and share it with everybody else,” but rather something you have to work with in your mind. Equalizing sentient beings is not something we do externally; that is impossible. The equality advocated by Buddhists is completely different from that which communists talk about; ours is the inner balance derived from training the mind.

When your mind is even and balanced, you can generate loving-kindness for all beings in the universe without discrimination. At the same time, emotional attachment automatically decreases. If you have the right method, it is not difficult; when right method and right wisdom come together, solving problems is easy.

However, we humans suffer from a shortage of intensive knowledge-wisdom. We search for happiness where it doesn’t exist; it is here, but we look over there. True peace, happiness, and joy lie within you; therefore, if you meditate correctly and investigate the nature of your mind, you can discover the everlasting happiness and joy within. It is mental, not external material energy, which always fizzles out. Mental energy coupled with right method and right wisdom is unlimited and it is always with you. That is incredible! It explains why human beings are so powerful.

Materialists think that people are powerful because of their amazing external constructions, but all that actually comes from the human mind. Without the skill of the human mind, there is no external supermarket. Therefore, instead of placing extreme

value on the normal supermarket, we should try to discover our own internal supermarket. That is much more useful and leads to a balanced, even mind.

As I mentioned before, it sounds as if Buddhism is telling you to renounce all your possessions because extreme attachment is bad for you emotionally, but renunciation doesn't mean physically giving up things. You go to the toilet every day but that doesn't mean you are tied to it. We should have the same attitude to all the material things we use and give them a reasonable value according to their usefulness for human existence, not an extreme one.

If a boy runs crazily over dangerous ground to get an apple and then trips, falls, and breaks his leg, we think he is foolish, exaggerating the value of the apple and putting his well-being at risk for the sake of achieving his goal. But we are the same. We project extreme attachment onto objects of desire, exaggerating their beauty, which blinds us to our true potential. This is dangerous. It is the same as the boy risking his life for an apple. Looking at objects with emotional attachment and chasing that hallucinated vision definitely destroys our own nature.

Human potential is great but we have to use our energy skillfully; we have to know how to put our lives in the right direction. This is extremely important.

# *WHO WAS THE BUDDHA?*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*“The only reason Guru Shakyamuni Buddha descended on this earth was to lead sentient beings to liberation - the cessation of suffering, and great liberation - the state of omniscient mind. His only purpose was to lead sentient beings to happiness.”*

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

## *WHO WAS THE BUDDHA?*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

The Buddha was born about 2500 years ago into the royal family of King Shuddodana and Queen Maya. Around the time of his conception, Queen Maya dreamed of a white elephant with six white tusks entering her right side – an auspicious indication that she would give birth to a special being. When the time of the birth drew near, she was traveling with her maid servants to visit her family home. However, they did not reach their destination in time and Queen Maya went to a beautiful garden in Lumbini, in western Nepal, to give birth to her son. She reached up to grab the limb of a banyan tree for support and the baby buddha sprang out of her right side without causing her any pain. The child was extremely alert and agile, unusually so for a newborn. After his birth, he took seven steps in each direction and lotus flowers sprang from his footprints. The baby was named Siddhartha Gautama.

At the time of the child's birth, a Brahmin prophet visited the king. The prophet predicted that the child was destined to either become a king of the world or a great spiritual teacher. The king obviously wanted his son to become heir to his throne. Therefore, he did not want to give the prince any reason to turn to the spiritual life in a quest for answers to difficult existential questions. Therefore, he shielded Prince Gautama from being exposed to any form of suffering.

Gautama lived a blissful life in the kingdom, full of luxury and splendor, where his every desire was fulfilled. He excelled in everything he did: his studies, the arts, and sports such as archery,

etc. He was also extremely handsome. Eventually, he married and had a child.

Not long after the birth of his son, Prince Gautama became insatiably curious about the world outside the palace grounds. One day, he snuck out with some of his servants and during his sojourn, he saw four things: a sick person, an old person, a dead body, and a wandering mendicant – a holy seeker. When he saw the sick person, he asked his attendants, “What is this?” The attendants were not sure how to proceed. They looked at each other and then said, “This is a sick person.” They explained how everybody gets sick and that at some point this would also happen to Prince Gautama and everyone he knew. He couldn't believe it. He had never seen sickness before.

When he saw the old man, he asked again, “What is this?” They explained to him that if you live long enough, you will eventually become old, and so will your father, your wife, and your son. Again, he was shocked.

When he inquired about the dead body, he was startled to hear that this would also happen to him, his loved ones, friends, and to everyone in the entire kingdom. He was extremely uncomfortable thinking that they would all die in this terrible way, full of suffering.

Then Prince Gautama saw the mendicant, looking serene and peaceful. He wondered, “What is this person doing? What is he searching for? Why is he wandering about? What is he learning?”

When the prince returned to the palace, he couldn't bear to see the exquisite buildings, the grounds, and all of the splendors of his royal life. He couldn't bear to endure a future in which those he loved were destined to suffer sickness, aging, and death. He resolved to leave and not return until he had found an answer to the problems of life, and one night, he secretly left the palace grounds, compelled to find a way to end all pain forever.

Prince Gautama explored many different spiritual traditions. With every teacher he met, he quickly surpassed their level of knowledge and meditative attainment, and found limitations to

their methods and understanding of reality. Eventually, with five of his fellow seekers, he began the practice of austere asceticism. Believing that forsaking the needs of the body would result in a very high state of meditative absorption and eventually freedom from suffering, they starved themselves, eating only one grain of rice a day.

After engaging in austerities for six years, Prince Gautama found himself too weak to meditate. One day, he was sitting by the Narañja River and a small wooden boat floated by. On the boat was a musician who was tuning a stringed instrument. The musician noted that for the instrument to play perfectly, it was important that it be tuned neither too tightly nor too loosely. For Gautama, this was a message that the path to liberation lay in a middle way, between living a life of indulgence and practicing extreme austerity. Neither path led to the end of suffering. At that point, a maiden appeared and offered Gautama a tasty rice and milk porridge. It had special qualities so that when he ate it, he received all the energy that he needed to proceed with his meditation and his journey to enlightenment.

With renewed determination, Siddhartha went to a place now called Bodh Gaya ("place of enlightenment"), not far from the Narañja River in the plains of eastern India. He sat down under a beautiful pipal tree and resolved not to move from his meditation seat until he had cleared the remaining obstacles to enlightenment from his mind.

As he sat in his final meditation, the last maras, or delusions, came to him and tried to disrupt his meditation. They threw intense mental obstacles at him: anger, confusion, attachment, and desire. He remained unshakable. Finally, they challenged him, saying "What gives you the right to believe you can attain omniscience?" Siddhartha touched the earth with the middle finger of his right hand and said, "The earth is my witness of all the rebirths that I have had, of all of the effort I have made to end my suffering, and of my wish to be of ultimate benefit to others." With that, the earth shook, the final maras were dispelled, and as dawn rose on

that day, Siddhartha Gautama became a buddha, a fully awakened one.

From the time Prince Gautama attained enlightenment, he was known as Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyas was the name of the clan over which Gautama's father was King; *muni* means "sage" and *buddha* means "fully awakened" or "all-knowing one." Shakyamuni Buddha was the "Fully Awakened Sage from the Shakyas clan."

At first, the Buddha decided not to teach what he had realized to others. He wasn't sure that people would accept his teachings or be able to understand. Then Brahma, one of the gods of our world, came and pleaded with Buddha many times to share his knowledge. When the Buddha reflected upon who would be his most suitable disciples, he concluded that the five ascetics with whom he had endured so much hardship on the quest for enlightenment were the students he should teach. He walked towards Varanasi, a holy city near the river Ganges. Just outside of Varanasi is a small village called Sarnath. Lord Buddha went there, to a beautiful park full of deer, and found his five fellow ascetics still engaging in austerities.

The five ascetics were quite judgmental of Gautama. They felt he had shown mental weakness when he ate the rice porridge, breaking from their avowed path of austerity. When they first saw the Buddha entering Deer Park, they wanted to reject him. However, after looking more carefully, they realized something very significant had happened. They spontaneously generated great respect and devotion towards him and sincerely requested him to teach them what he had learned. It was then, at Sarnath, that the Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths.

Lord Buddha taught for nearly fifty years. Around the age of eighty, he passed away in a town in eastern India called Kushinagar, and so gave one of his most profound teachings on impermanence. These days, there is a shrine there to honor the spot where the Buddha passed away. Inside that shrine is a Buddha statue, which is in the lion posture, the position the Buddha was in when

he passed away. This position, lying on the right side with the head resting on the right hand, is said to be conducive to subdue negative states of mind, particularly anger. It is a good posture to cultivate when going to sleep, training for the time of our death so that we may also pass into the state beyond sorrow.

### *BUDDHA'S LIFE AND OUR OWN*

Prince Gautama did not start out as a buddha. His journey to enlightenment exemplifies our own search for answers to the big questions in life. For many lifetimes as an ordinary being, even while he was a prince, his life was not so different from ours. Some of us enjoy relative affluence. Most of us come from countries or places where it is easy to obtain what we want. Many of us have not been directly exposed to the heaviest sufferings of life. What most of us want is to meet with happiness in all of its various forms again and again, and to separate ourselves from all unpleasantness and suffering, such as illness, aging, death, poverty, and pain.

The Buddha's extraordinary life story shows that it is possible for ordinary beings to transform negative states of mind into incredibly healthy, enlightened ones. The part of Buddha's life story that is difficult for us to hear is that it takes a tremendous amount of time and effort. Most of us are patterned to exert effort in many areas of life, but not necessarily towards the development of the mind. For some reason, we expect that to happen spontaneously.

We know how much time we spend getting educated, training and interviewing for jobs, and then working at those jobs. We also know the amount of time we spend on recreational activities, enjoying family and friends, and purchasing and consuming various things. Some people enjoy technology – getting a new computer, a mobile phone, or a digital camera. Every year the technology improves and part of our minds needs to have the newest, greatest thing that is out there. We make tremendous effort in these areas. However, if we check up, we often discover that for all of our efforts and activities, we never seem to find lasting satisfaction. This

is a common reason that inspires people to begin their search for a spiritual path.

Gautama knew a lot about this quest for pleasure from his life in the palace, which ultimately, he found unsatisfying. Similarly, there comes a time when we start to question, “Is this it? I have all these toys, but in the end I have to die.” Through the teachings of Gautama Buddha, we can find techniques – such as meditation or some aspect of philosophy such as emptiness or compassion – that will touch our lives in such a way that we are inspired to delve more deeply into the nature of mind; to see how to lessen the patterns that lead to dissatisfaction and enhance the positive qualities that make us and others happy.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA*

Place yourself in a comfortable seated posture with a straight back. Take a few moments to settle the mind by watching the breath, and then set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the life of the buddha.

Reflect on the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and compare it to your own life and journey of awakening. What inspired you to embark on this path? What events have served as powerful awakenings for you? In conclusion, reflect on the fact that one day you, too, will fully awaken. Imagine it.

Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.



# *WHAT IS DHARMA?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*When you yourself become knowledge, you  
yourself become comprehensive wisdom and you  
yourself become intensive awareness. That really  
is true Dharma.*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

## *WHAT IS DHARMA?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

The Sanskrit word Dharma refers to that which guides, or saves, our minds from suffering. There are thousands upon thousands of different types of suffering, and within these there are many different kinds. For example, there are hundreds of different kinds of illnesses, and therefore, there are also many different kinds of medicine. Similarly, within the Dharma, there are thousands of different kinds of Dharma practice, but they are all Dharma.

The effect of external medicines and the effect of Dharma are as different as the earth and the sky. External medicines are only temporary methods. They offer temporary relief; they don't cure disease permanently. For example, if you have the problem of diarrhea, medicine can temporarily cease but not end the experiences of diarrhea. Even if the suffering of the stomach is cured at that time, in a few months or years it can come back, and the person can again experience suffering. Even if you take medicine continually, it causes other problems; the medicine itself can cause other sicknesses in the body to arise. We can realize this when our wisdom is acutely perceptive. Sometimes even if medicine cures the physical problem it harms the mind. This also proves that medicine is by no means an ultimate way of dealing with disease.

It is the same thing with drugs. If you keep taking drugs with the belief that they will always give the same effect, you will go crazy or there will be danger to your life. This is well-known: because the first and second trip felt good, people continue to believe that the drug will give the same effect, so they use it more and more. This makes the person more unconscious and undisciplined in

body, speech, and mind. This proves that drugs are also not the ultimate method.

With Dharma practice, there is no problem. No matter how long you practice Dharma, you always benefit; you always profit. Your body, speech, and mind become more pure and there is never any danger to your body or your mind. Dharma practitioners don't need drugs. Drugs are for those whose minds are limited, who have no idea of Dharma or the meaning of life, who have no understanding of past and future lives, who believe just the limited phenomena they see before them.

Similarly, all the normal everyday things we do to protect ourselves from suffering, the kinds of things that animals do, are also merely temporary methods. Eating, drinking, wearing clothes, doing our jobs – none of these are ultimate methods that will put an end to suffering forever. No matter how highly we develop materially and technologically, none of this will put a final end to problems.

In ancient times, long before our modern, material development, people had problems. The very first humans on earth had many problems – mental problems, life problems, suffering, and dissatisfaction. Now there is even more confusion, fighting, and suffering. Over the millennia, there is been a much greater increase in suffering than in peace. This again shows clearly that external, material development is not an ultimate solution to problems. It shows that something is missing.

I am not saying that science and material development are bad; I am simply describing what is happening around us. Why can't medicine, drugs and every single thing we do put an end to temporary problems? Because they do not affect the cause of these problems. The actual cause of suffering is not in the external conditions. If you understand this, you understand the essence of Dharma. It also proves that everything we have ever done has not touched the cause of suffering. Why do these external methods fail to cease all suffering and its cause? Because the cause of suffering is not in the external conditions; it is within the

mind. Whether we are humans walking on the earth, worms in the ground, or insects in the air, the cause of suffering is within our minds. Therefore, we cannot escape from physical or mental suffering by going underground or flying to the moon.

Trying to solve a problem by traveling to another place instead of attacking its cause is like going for a run to get rid of a pain in your stomach. Instead of alleviating the pain, you simply make yourself tired and hungry. This example might seem stupid and childish, but actually it describes just the way we are. We're doing the same thing; we just don't recognize it. Running from suffering by train or plane instead of trying to recognize the cause of the problem and discover the right way of solving it can never be effective.

What kind of method should we all practice; what kind of method can destroy all suffering and its cause? We need the inner method – in other words, Dharma. Dharma is the inner method that can cease all suffering and its cause. By “cease” I mean to put a complete end to all physical and mental suffering, so that it never can recur. This inner method, Dharma, is beyond compare with any temporary method. Through the practice of Dharma, billions of different sufferings and their causes can all be completely destroyed.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*WHAT IS DHARMA?*

Place yourself in a comfortable seated posture with a straight back. Take a few moments to settle the mind by watching the breath, and then set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the Dharma.

Reflect on the meaning of Dharma as that which holds one back from suffering. Consider a current suffering situation in your life and, using methods similar to the examples above, see if you can shift your minds to a place of happiness through skillful re-consideration. Finally, make a determination to practice true Dharma. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

# *WHAT IS BUDDHIST REFUGE?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*The impulse to take refuge arises from seeing the necessity of developing our minds and cultivating our wisdom.*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

## *TAKING REFUGE*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Taking refuge is the first step on the Buddhist path to inner freedom, but it is not something new. We have been taking refuge all our lives, though mainly in external things, hoping to find security and happiness. Some of us take refuge in money, some in drugs. Others take refuge in food, mountain climbing, or sunny beaches. Most of us seek security in a relationship with a man or a woman. Throughout our lives we have drifted from one situation to the next, always in the expectation of final satisfaction. These involvements may sometimes offer temporary relief, but seeking refuge in physical possessions and sense pleasures usually deepens our confusion rather than ending it.

Buddhist refuge is a process of turning inward that begins with our discovery of our own unlimited potential as human beings. This discovery generates tremendous zeal for the development of our own inborn wisdom-energy. Complete, perfect wisdom is buddhahood. Perhaps the word “buddha” conjures up a remote and rather oriental image, but “buddha” is just a word that means totally opened mind. When we finally realize our human potential and arrive at this total openness of mind, we become buddhas.

However, at the outset we feel incapable of self-improvement. Buddha seems to be somewhere in the sky, completely out of reach, and we are nothing. We should not underestimate ourselves. Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, was once even more confused than we are, but by discovering his own latent wisdom energy, he attained enlightenment. All living beings have the innate capacity to unify their minds with the unsurpassable clarity of enlightenment.

During Buddha Shakyamuni's lifetime, many people attained profound insight and experienced miraculous bliss as a result of merely seeing him. In spite of the fact that he passed away long ago, we still benefit from the power of his wisdom and compassion. By cultivating our own power and continuously developing our wisdom, we too can immensely benefit others. However much the world around us changes, our inner world can remain stable and balanced when fortified by this profound understanding. Wisdom brings unfailing happiness, unlike those temporary objects of refuge, which bring only brief moments of pleasure.

The three objects of refuge are Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Taking refuge in the Buddha involves accepting the guidance of enlightened beings as the only remedy for the confusion and dissatisfaction of our present life. This is the only way we can realize our dormant capacity for attaining inner freedom. There are two aspects of refuge: the outer and the inner. Outer refuge means seeking guidance from living buddhas, since we are unable to achieve liberation without a teacher. Buddhas also provide inspiration and are sublime models for us to emulate. When we contemplate the enlightened state, its reflection within our own mind fills us with joyful, radiant energy. This demonstrates that though at present we are not fully enlightened, the seed of buddhahood is contained within each of us. Inner refuge is directed towards this seed of enlightenment, this inner buddha-nature. We recognize that, ultimately, we are our own refuge.

If we are convinced that we are beyond hope and incapable of change, or if we think we are already perfect, then there is obviously no reason to take refuge. But if we honestly examine our minds, our way of life, and the pattern of our relationships, we can clearly recognize our own spiritual sickness. The enlightened being we turn to at this point is, in effect, the doctor who diagnoses our ailments and restores us to perfect health.

The medicine prescribed by the Buddha is the Dharma. Dharma is wisdom: the wisdom that understands our own true nature and reveals our own latent power of self-liberation. Taking refuge

in Dharma means using that wisdom now. This will restore our previously obscured sense of human dignity and make us feel that we can do something positive about ourselves. Those who take deep refuge never feel lost or desperate. Refuge frees us from such mental states. As our self-respect and confidence increase, our relationships with others improve. Having discovered our own inner strength, we also recognize and respect the buddha-nature in others.

Dharma means understanding reality. Meditation and prayer are not Dharma; they are merely tools for reaching this inner wisdom. Even if we meditate all day, but totally lack Dharma understanding, we will achieve little. Nor are religious texts Dharma; they are merely books about Dharma, means for communicating information about Dharma. True Dharma, or religion, is a personal experience that each of us must elicit from within ourselves alone. There is a Dharma bell within us and we should use it to awaken and activate our own dormant wisdom. Usually our minds are completely occupied with stale, unprofitable, repetitious thoughts: clutching at fantasies and giving way to anger, jealousy, or despair when they elude us. Practicing Dharma means ringing our inner wisdom-bell, being always on the alert and clearing away the refuse that clogs our minds. By making this our daily practice, we ourselves become Dharma; all our energy becomes Dharma wisdom. Then we are truly taking refuge, allowing inner Dharma alone to regulate our lives.

The third object of refuge is the Sangha. Sangha consists of those who are endowed with wisdom. They are like the nurses and friends who help us to recuperate from an illness. Sangha doesn't only mean those who wear red or yellow robes, but also those friends who influence us beneficially. These spiritual friends energize and inspire us, and are therefore to be clearly distinguished from ordinary friends who hold us back.

In ordinary friendships, we often confuse attachment with affection. For instance, my friend might show his apparent affection for me by suggesting that we go on a drinking bout together.

If I decline, he might think me unfriendly and feel rejected, so I give in. This is how friends can bring us down. He didn't use force, but by displaying the kind of affection that consists only of clinging and attachment, he led me into a situation I would rather have avoided. It is therefore essential that we develop the wisdom-eye that distinguishes true love from mere attachment and can see the difference between what benefits us and what harms us. We should rely entirely on this wisdom, rather than on our ever-fluctuating emotional responses.

It should be clear by now that the impulse to take refuge arises from seeing the necessity of developing our minds and cultivating our wisdom. Being Buddhist is an inner experience and not one that can be measured by outward behavior. I often meet people who hold no particular religious or philosophical views but who, in a quiet and simple way, take refuge in wisdom. They are sensitive to their own and others' needs and try to give their lives meaning by developing themselves and helping others. In my opinion, such people are Buddhists, although they may never have heard of Shakyamuni Buddha or his Dharma.

Taking refuge is not difficult, but it would be a mistake to think that we can passively sit back and let Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha do the work for us. Buddha said, "You are responsible for your own confusion and you are responsible for your own liberation." What saves us from confusion is our wisdom. If we take refuge while fully understanding the meaning of the three objects of refuge, our wisdom will grow and fill us with energetic determination to follow the path to liberation.

Once we have formally taken refuge, we assume a certain responsibility for our behavior. We should watch our minds and examine the inner processes of action and reaction. "What is my mind doing now? What impulse is arising? When I act like this, what is the result?" For example, we should observe how others react when we utter empty, unnecessary words or when we talk without understanding what we are saying. Words are very powerful. Bodily communication also has a strong effect on others.

Since most of our problems involve other people, it is important to be aware of our behavior and to avoid harming anyone.

This process of action and reaction is called karma. Karma may seem like a technical philosophical term, but it is nothing other than our own experience. It tells us what results to expect from our actions, and this plays a vital role in spiritual practice. We want to meditate and develop wisdom, but if we make no attempt to control our behavior and our distraught, scattered mind, we won't get very far. We must act with discriminating wisdom in order to create the best internal conditions for achieving our aims.

At this point a question may arise. "If taking refuge is a matter of relying on our own inner wisdom, why do we have a formal refuge ceremony? Why is this ritual necessary?" The answer is that it reminds us how critical the moment of taking refuge is: it marks our arrival at a crucial insight into our own nature. So many times in the past we have sought security in trivialities but now we have discovered our innate capacity to fulfill the most exalted destiny of all: complete emancipation from suffering. We are determined that, from this moment on, rather than taking refuge in fictions, we will take refuge in our own pure, clear wisdom-energy and set out on the path to liberation.

## *WHAT MAKES A BUDDHIST?*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

All compounded phenomena are impermanent.

All contaminated things are unsatisfactory.

All phenomena are selfless.

Nirvana is peace.

*Buddha Shakyamuni*

What does it mean to be a Buddhist? Technically speaking, a Buddhist is someone who has taken refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and who lives according to the Dharma teachings. The word for Buddhist in Tibetan is *nangpa*; it means “inner-being.” Most people on a spiritual path are trying to transform their inner reality, their experience of the world. How does a Buddhist do this?

### *THE FOUR SEALS OF BUDDHISM*

In order for a particular teaching to be considered Buddhist, it must accord with the Four Seals of Buddhism. The first seal or defining characteristic of a Buddhist teaching is “All compounded phenomena are impermanent.” “Compounded phenomena” refers to the fact that everything exists as a product. Everything you see is determined by a combination of factors coming together, such as causes, conditions, parts, and your perception. Over time any one or all of these factors will change and so will the thing that was produced by their coming together. All things that are composites of other things are impermanent. They cannot last. The chair that you are sitting on will eventually wear out and

disintegrate. The clothes you are wearing will rip; their color will fade from washing; eventually, they will wear thin. Things and experiences don't last. This is the first seal.

The second seal is "All contaminated things are unsatisfactory." "Contaminated" refers to things that have arisen under the influence of ignorance, karma, and delusion – the things of samsara. Until we have achieved a wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, we are under the influence of ignorance and therefore, all things in our experience are contaminated. They will eventually cause us to suffer and are thus unsatisfactory.

The third seal is "All phenomena are selfless." The fact that things are selfless means they only exist in dependence upon causes and conditions. Phenomena do not have any essence of being what they are from their own side. This is the key to changing our experience of reality. This view of the selfless nature of reality is essential to being a Buddhist.

The fourth seal is "Nirvana is peace." When you put a final end to your mental afflictions, you will be at peace. This is very encouraging; peace is not something outside of ourselves. We already have peace within us, within the very nature of our minds.

Any teaching or philosophy which embraces these four seals is a Buddhist teaching. What makes you a Buddhist is your commitment to a personal exploration of these teachings until they become your own direct knowledge and experience.

### *BUDDHISM AS A WAY OF LIFE*

The most basic Buddhist precept is "Do not give harm to any living being." One very practical tool to help us live by this precept is to take vows or live according to what are known as the five lay precepts: to avoid killing any living being, including insects, to refrain from stealing and lying, to avoid sexual misconduct, and to avoid intoxicants. Intoxicants alter your state of mind, which can lead to harming yourself or others. Living by these precepts makes your life rich and meaningful. You can try it by spending a week not killing insects. Killing insects is a habitual tendency

with which many of us are raised. However, that insect cherishes its life just as we value ours. Instead of killing it, we could just leave it alone or try escorting it outside by carefully placing it in a cup. You can try this practice and see if it does anything to your mind. Then, do something similar with each of the other four precepts. See how it affects your mind and your perception.

To be a Buddhist is to be an “inner being” that derives happiness from transforming the internal conditions of the mind rather than trying to manipulate the external reality. It is about taking responsibility for your life, for your suffering and your happiness. Rather than looking outward and blaming others or blaming external circumstances, we put the blame on one thing alone: our ignorant and selfish way of seeing and being in the world. We look to our own mind and inquire, “What can I change about my mind that can make my view and action more peaceful and less disturbed?”

## *IS IT BUDDHIST?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

The Buddha does not liberate us by washing away our defilements with water. The Buddha does not eliminate our suffering with his hands, removing our defilements like taking a thorn out of the body. Also, Buddha does not liberate us by transplanting his realizations into our minds. The only way for Buddha to liberate us from suffering and the causes of suffering is by revealing the fundamental teaching of the Four Noble Truths. The very essential means to liberate us sentient beings is by revealing emptiness, the ultimate nature of the I, the ultimate nature of the mind and the aggregates.

Buddhism is not what appears outside, such as having a shaved head or wearing red and yellow robes. Real Buddhism is about taming the mind. In the Mahayana, the main practice is to destroy the ego, the self-centered mind that thinks only of seeking happiness for oneself.

Being Buddhist is not defined by reading Buddha's teachings. Even being a great scholar who can explain the entire library of the Buddha's teachings and their commentaries by heart doesn't make one a Buddhist. Even if you know all the teachings composed by the great scholars, can teach them well, and can remember everything; that alone doesn't mean that that person is practicing Buddhism. If a person doesn't have refuge in the mind or if they don't have renunciation, bodhichitta, or emptiness, but still are able to recite all the prayers by heart and do all the external rituals, that person is not necessarily practicing Buddhism.

The lam-rim teachings by Lama Atisha mention that in an-

cient times in India, there was an abbot of a monastery who was not Buddhist. He was an elder monk, sitting on a throne, looking down on all the others. He was at the very front of the receiving line, but it happened that he wasn't even Buddhist.

For an action to be Buddhist, first, you need refuge. Other religions have the practice of living in morality, but is this Buddhism or not? Their practice of morality is not done with refuge: having the fear of samsara and faith in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as having the ability to liberate us from samsara. Even if a person's action is correct morality, if they do not have this refuge, it is not Buddhism.

It is impossible with morality alone to achieve liberation from samsara. It is impossible to achieve liberation, the total cessation of suffering, without the teaching of the Four Noble Truths and the Four Great Seals. Especially without bodhichitta, one cannot achieve the five paths or the ten bhumis of the Mahayana, let alone the tantric path. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve enlightenment with morality alone.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*REFUGE*

Place yourself in a comfortable seated posture with a straight back. Take a few moments to settle the mind by watching the breath, and then set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on refuge.

Reflect on your reasons for exploring the Buddhist path. Then, review your understanding of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and how they can help you in your path to awakening.

Visualize Shakyamuni Buddha in the space before you and with a mind of entrustment and compassion, slowly chant the verse for refuge below. Imagine rays of light emanating from the Buddha and entering you – cleansing you of negativities and obstacles and bringing you blessings and insight.

Namo Gurubhyeh	(I take refuge in the Teacher)
Namo Buddhaya	(I take refuge in the Buddha)
Namo Dharmaya	(I take refuge in the Dharma)
Namo Sanghaya	(I take refuge in the Sangha)

When you have finished your recitation, imagine that Shakyamuni Buddha comes to the crown of your head, melts into golden light and descends into your heart, becoming inseparably mixed with your mind. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.



# *THE FUNDAMENTALS OF KARMA*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*Finding firm and definite conviction in this,  
Please bless me always to be careful  
To abandon even the slightest negativities  
And accomplish all virtuous deeds.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *WHAT IS KARMA?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

Karma is the action of the mind, the intention that moves us towards an object, and which in turn creates verbal or physical actions. There are three types of karma, virtuous, non-virtuous and changeable. Virtuous karma always brings happiness, whereas non-virtuous karma, any action done with greed or hatred and ignorance, brings suffering. We can quite easily see this if we remain conscious of all our actions and check why we do the things we do. Then, through meditation and investigation, we can develop our wisdom and learn to control and destroy the negative impulses that arise and control us. Without that awareness, there is no way we can be in control.

Karma relates closely to the law of cause and effect that we see operating all the time in the natural world. Everything in the external physical world is a product of cause and effect, so it is illogical to think that the internal environment of the mind is any different. Just as the plant comes from the seed, so every experience of happiness and suffering comes from the imprints left on the mind from some previous action. At every moment, external and internal factors are triggering reactions in the mind that is conditioned by karma, actualizing the different experiences that make up our universe. Because the mind and the emotions are involved, this internal evolution is much more extensive than the simpler cause-and-effect relationship there is in nature, but the essence is the same.

Before any act there must be an intention; otherwise there would be no energy for the mind to act. Even during the act there

is still some motivating energy. Both are karma. For example, before we meditate, the wish to meditate arises. While the action is actually happening, there still needs to be an accompanying motivation, otherwise the action would never be completed. These two motivations exist in every action. Therefore, we need to ensure that we not only have the best possible motivation before we do an action, but also while we are doing it, so that the action is as pure as possible.

Everything we say or do is determined by the intention behind the act, so everything comes from the mind, from the karmic seeds that are on our mindstreams. First of all there is the motivation, then the action of body, speech or mind follows from that. Therefore, whether that action is virtuous or non-virtuous depends on whether the motivation behind the action is virtuous or non-virtuous. We might perform an act of generosity with a pure heart but end up unintentionally killing a being. Although there might be some consequences from the accidental killing, the action is virtuous because the motivation is virtuous.

Every aspect of the environment we were reborn into, our body – from the head right down to the feet – and the mind with all its propensities and emotions, all of this is completely the result of karma. Motivated by a fundamental ignorance of the way things exist, we now have this body, this mind, these external conditions. This didn't happen because of God or because of the action of separate beings. Our body physically comes from our parents' sperm and egg, but we are the result of the ripening of our own previous karmic actions.

That karma comes from our own minds. It has nothing to do with anybody else. Whether we are male or female, whether we have two, three, or ten arms, whether we have a long face or a bald head, whether we are fat or skinny, we are totally responsible for it. It is all a result of karma. In the same way, every experience we have with this samsaric body, whether it is happiness or suffering, comes from our own karma, from our own previous motivation. Our present suffering is dependent on our previous karma, but

our future happiness is dependent on our present karma, the motivation we have for all the actions we are doing now. If we have a positive motivation, we can have future happiness, even liberation and enlightenment. Our present situation is still suffering, because it was motivated by ignorance, but mixed with that ignorance there must have been a huge amount of positive karma to give us the degree of happiness we are now experiencing. In that way, our lives are virtuous and positive.

Just believing an action is positive doesn't make it positive. Unless we understand karma and know the difference between positive and negative karma, we can unintentionally create the cause for terrible suffering. Positive actions only come from positive motivations. If the action was motivated by a selfish mind, it is negative; if it was motivated by a generous, beneficial mind, it is positive. Therefore, in Buddhism, the main emphasis is on taking care of the mind, observing the mind and keeping it pure. If we can always keep our minds pure, generous and beneficial, we will always be happy and get whatever we want. We will also make others happy and never give them any harm. Others will admire us and help us if we ever get into trouble. In fact, explaining the benefits of keeping the mind pure can never be finished! On the other hand, if mind is not kept pure, no matter how much we meditate, learn the highest techniques, or even have incredible healing powers, it will be impossible to receive the highest sublime happiness of enlightenment and lead other sentient beings to enlightenment.

How difficult or easy it is depends on how strictly we take care of our minds. Because suffering and samsara are creations of the mind, there is a possibility to avoid them, and because happiness and enlightenment are also a creation of the mind, there is a possibility to achieve them. Any living being who has a mind has this potential, and at this time, since we are born as human beings, we have an incredible chance to create good karma, the cause which definitely brings happiness and ultimately enlightenment.

## *UNDERSTANDING KARMA*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

When we teach karma, we often refer to the fact that karma has four characteristics, the first of which is that karma is definite. Karma means action, your energy, and when we say that karma is definite, that means that once you have set in motion a powerful train of energy, it will continue running until either it is interrupted or reaches its conclusion. The fact that karma is definite does not mean that once you have created a specific karma there is nothing you can do to stop it. That is a wrong view of karma.

New Dharma students also sometimes have great misconceptions about karma. They read and think about karma, accept its existence, but then become too sensitive about it. If they make a mistake in their actions, they get emotionally terrified and guilty. That is wrong, too.

The karmic energy of your body, speech and mind comes from your consciousness, from your mind. If you direct your conscious energy one way, one kind of result will come; if you direct it another way, a different kind of result arises. It is very simple, but you have to know from what source your actions come. Once you do, you will see that you are responsible for what you do; you can determine what you do and what happens to you. It is more up to you than to your circumstances, friends, society, or anything else outside of you.

If you don't know that it is possible to direct the energy of your body, speech and mind or how to direct it, if you have no idea of how cause and effect operates in every day life, then you have no chance of putting your energy into positive channels instead of

negative ones. Positive actions are those that bring positive reactions; negative actions are those that bring negative reactions, restlessness, and confusion. Actions are termed positive or negative according to the nature of their effects.

Usually we are unconscious when we act. We don't usually hurt our loved ones deliberately, but because we are unconscious in our actions. If we were aware that every action of body, speech, and mind constantly reacts internally and externally with others, we would be more sensitive and gentle in what we do, say, and think. Sometimes our actions are not at all gentle but like those of a wild animal. Next time you are acting like a wild animal, check up which channel your energy is in at that time and understand that you can change it; you have the power, the wisdom, and the potential to do so. You can redirect your energy from the negative into the positive channel.

Also, you have to accept that you are going to make mistakes. Mistakes are possible. You are not Buddha. When you do make an error, instead of freaking out, acknowledge it. Be happy: "Oh, I made a mistake. It is good that I noticed." Once you recognize a mistake, you can investigate it intensively. What is its background? What caused it? Mistakes don't just pop up without reason. Check in which channel your mind was running when that mistake happened. When you discover this, you can change your attitude.

In particular, you have to understand that negative actions come from you, so it is up to you to do something to prevent negative reactions from manifesting. It is your responsibility to act and not sit back, waiting for the inevitable suffering result to arise.



*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*KARMA*

Place yourself in a comfortable seated posture with a straight back. Take a few moments to settle the mind by watching the breath, and then set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on karma.

Consider one recent action of yours and its likely result, relating to each of the four laws of karma: that karma is definite, karma is expanding, you can't experience the result without creating the cause, and karma is never lost.

Then, identify one quality of life that you enjoy and the types of actions that result in that quality. Make a determination to cultivate that action in your life and avoid its opposite, and dedicate. As you go through your day, relate to your various experiences as results of specific karmic actions of the past, thinking "This is my karma." Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book

*The illness should be recognized, its cause removed,  
Health should be attained, the remedy should be applied.  
Like that, suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path  
Should be recognized, eliminated, attained, and practiced.*

*Maitreya Buddha  
The Sublime Continuum (Uttaratantra)*

*WHAT ARE THE FOUR  
NOBLE TRUTHS?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

## *THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

Generally, sickness comes from a cause, and the cure of the sickness comes from taking medicine. Similarly, true suffering arises from the true cause of suffering, and by following the true path, we attain the true cessation of suffering. When we are sick and the doctor explains our sickness to us, we recognize that the sickness exists and we develop an aversion to it. Then we check up on the cause of our sickness. By checking the cause of our sickness, we can realize that there is a cure; then we seek the method by which we can cure the cause of our sickness. Once we make the cause of sickness non-existent, we will experience peace, and therefore, we seek a method to receive that peace. In other words, we follow the treatment.

Just like this, when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, he taught true suffering before he taught the true cause of suffering. Why? Because without first seeing true suffering, we won't realize that we are suffering and we won't seek the cause of our suffering; we won't check up. If we don't check, we will not realize that by ending the cause of suffering, we will experience nirvana, perfect peace. If we don't realize that this peace is possible, we won't have the desire to attain it and we will always suffer in samsara.

Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha showed true suffering first, so that we will check up on the cause of our suffering. Once we eliminate the cause of our suffering, we will have complete freedom, complete and everlasting happiness. When we see that this everlasting happiness exists, we develop the desire to achieve it.

Having this desire to achieve everlasting happiness makes us seek the path or the method by which we can achieve it.

### *TRUE SUFFERING*

When we talk about suffering, we are talking about the mind. We might not think that we have suffering. We might think "I am very happy. Suffering does not exist for me, only for poor people who don't have possessions." We don't recognize the suffering because we have no understanding of Dharma. Later on, when we practice meditation and Dharma and we meditate on the sufferings of samsara, we find more and more suffering within our minds. This is a sign that our practice is going well, that our meditation is benefiting us.

In order to get rid of poison in the body, first we must recognize that the poison is there. Without recognizing the poison, you cannot get rid of it. Similarly, we use a telescope to see distant things more clearly. If the telescope doesn't have any power, we won't see those far away objects. It is the same with our Dharma practice or meditation; if we don't recognize our negative states of mind or the samsaric suffering, something is wrong.

The lam-rim contains teachings on the eight, six, and three types of suffering. Here we will consider the eight sufferings. Meditating on these is very useful. The reason we meditate on a certain number of sufferings is because this makes it very easy for us to understand, to see the entire thing. If there was no fixed number, our ignorant minds would find it difficult to see all suffering. The numbers make it simple for the mind.

### *THE EIGHT SUFFERINGS*

The first suffering is the suffering of rebirth. This alone is incredible. While the baby is in the mother's womb there is so much suffering. Even when the consciousness takes place in the mother's womb on the conjunction of the egg and sperm, there is extremely great suffering, like being in hot boiling water. We think that the baby is enjoying the mother's womb, but this is not

true. We think it is warm and comfortable, but we are judging with a limited mind, with our own view.

When the baby is being born, it also suffers. Just like when we press fruit to make juice, the baby suffers from such tight pressing when it is coming out. Because of this incredible suffering, it turns sort of blue, but the mother doesn't recognize the baby's suffering. This is the baby's own karmic vision.

Even when it is out of mother's womb, the baby suffers. A baby's body is very sensitive and the skin is very thin. Whatever touches the baby's body causes much suffering. If our skin is peeled off and something touches the red flesh, we experience suffering. We don't see it, but that is how the baby feels. I am not talking about how we see the baby, but about how the baby feels. We ordinary people do not have the mental power to read the baby's mind and therefore, we do not fully understand how he is feeling.

Rebirth is the foundation of suffering. Why? If we didn't have this suffering rebirth there would be no suffering of old age and no suffering of sickness. There wouldn't be the suffering of feeling cold and hot. We wouldn't have to put on thick clothes when we are cold and we wouldn't have to take off the clothes when we suffer from the heat. If we hadn't taken this suffering rebirth we wouldn't experience the suffering of feeling hungry and thirsty. We wouldn't be busy trying to earn a living; there would be no need to worry about food and clothes. Also, if we hadn't take this suffering rebirth, there would be no need to worry about this body, because there wouldn't be a suffering body. We also wouldn't have to go through medical treatment such as surgery and operations. If we hadn't taken the suffering rebirth there wouldn't be relationship problems. When we consider these many examples, it becomes easier to understand how rebirth is suffering. Rebirth is suffering because it is a basis of suffering. Old age, sickness, and uncontrolled death also occur due to taking the uncontrolled suffering rebirth.

As the body changes and ages, it loses its beauty and the power of the senses is not as strong as it was before. As people get older,

they also have more worries about life shortening. This is the suffering of old age. As we become older and older, the body becomes thin and bent, with more and more wrinkles. The body becomes more and more ugly, and people do not like us that much, as we were liked during our younger days; people are more detached. There is not much strength and it is very difficult to get up from a chair. And when we sit down there is no strength to sit down slowly. It is also difficult for us to walk far or to eat strong food. However much we desire to eat it, we have to eat something different from the young people. The people in our families don't like us much because we give them a lot of work. They wish we would die soon. This is the general situation of old age.

When we meditate on the suffering of sickness, we should put ourselves in the situation of people we have seen who have had terrible sicknesses. Also remember that even though we human beings have so many things – clothes, houses – to take care of our lives and keep ourselves healthy, eventually we will have problems with sickness. We should think of all the different sicknesses that exist in the world.

Next is the suffering of death. When the time of death comes, there is such incredible suffering and worry. At the time of death, the elements that make up our physical bodies absorb into each other, one after the other. Because of this, many changes appear to as feelings and visions. At this time, the person who has created much non-virtuous karma suffers disturbing hallucinations that are the result of his past negative actions. A very frightening physical situation occurs and fearful visions. Then, however much the person makes noise, opens his eyes in all directions and looks for a guide from suffering, nothing helps. It is too late, finished.

We always are busy trying to find material things, especially desirable objects that we see others have, such as beautiful clothes. We see these possessions and would like to have such beautiful objects ourselves, and therefore, we try to find them. When we don't find them, we worry. We experience the suffering of trying to obtain the desirable object, and then we find that we are not

able to obtain it. Even if we do obtain it, there is the suffering of separation from desirable objects. The desirable object does not last. Material things change and decay and then we don't see them as beautiful anymore, like we saw them in the beginning. That beautiful view doesn't last. When a possession decays, spontaneously we lose interest in that object. Gradually, the object becomes something we dislike because we see other, more beautiful objects. Then there is the problem of being separated from these material objects. For example, the object breaks or someone steals it. We worry about this happening and all these worries are suffering.

When we find the desirable object of a living being – a friend, husband or wife, children – there are also problems. There is the suffering of separation and always the worry that you will be separated. When the husband goes to another country, the wife worries. The husband also worries about being separated from his wife. Afterwards, the wife leaves the husband or the husband leaves the wife and they go after other people. Some people fight, even if it costs them their lives, because of the suffering of being separated from the desirable object, such as the husband or wife. They even kill other people.

Parents want to have children; they like children and the children are desirable objects. But when people have children, they cannot live together for a long time and soon there is separation; either the children separate from the parents or the parents separate from the children. Then there is the suffering of separation, not being together. When they leave home, there is the suffering of separation. When they die, there is the suffering of separation.

Even if we have not been separated yet from possessions and friends, we have the fear and worry that we may be separated. These are common, easy to understand problems.

Then there is the suffering of meeting disliked objects. People disturb us, cause us trouble and cause our negative minds to arise. This is also suffering – meeting any object that we dislike, such as relatives or other people. A person who is a friend in one moment becomes the enemy in the next and again there is suffering. Before,

there was no suffering of encountering the disliked, ugly object. Before, it was not a disliked, ugly object, but then it became a disliked, ugly object. It is the same object, but now it causes you to suffer.

When food gets old, there is suffering from meeting the disliked object. When possessions become old and torn, there is again the suffering of encountering the disliked object. When you hear ugly words, there is the suffering of encountering the disliked object. Also, when the climate changes, when there is much heat, there is the suffering of encountering the disliked object and when it is very cold, there is also the suffering of encountering the disliked object.

Then there is the suffering of not obtaining desirable objects, such as the suffering of not finding desirable jobs, possessions, money, or people. Some people go around the whole world to obtain desirable objects and still don't find them. Then, as I already mentioned, even if we obtain the desirable object, again there is the suffering of being separated from it. Even if we are not separated yet, we have the fear or worry that we will be.

The last one is the suffering of this body created by delusion and karma. We create many negative actions with the physical body. If there was no physical body there, we would not create negative actions with it. The negative karma we create makes the bodies of many of our future lives suffer the result. Those future physical sufferings are based on the continuity of this present suffering body. Billions and billions of times we will receive a body again, and all the future suffering bodies are based on the continuity of the present body.

Even in our current lives, we worry so much about clothes – wearing different clothes, finishing clothes, not finding desirable clothes to put on the body. If there was no body, there would be no reason for those sufferings and worries to arise. Also, we have to feed this body and we have to work our whole lives just to take care of this body. The poor person working as a porter in the train station and the rich person who works making big business are

the same: both are working to feed the body. No matter how much the person has a reputation, a place he is enjoying, a business, he is the same as the porter who makes one rupee a day. Both do it to feed the body. Also, there are hundreds and hundreds of different sicknesses that arise because of the physical body, such as coughing and suffering from a cold. Even these small, tiny things result from having this samsaric deluded body.

There are so many problems in the modern world – wars between countries, societies, classes, and races. Without the physical body, there wouldn't be any fighting each other, creating negative karma, killing others. Also, our fear of being killed or injured, our thirst, all our physical problems – these are problems of the samsaric, deluded body.

Thinking of these different ways of experiencing suffering causes us to feel tired; more and more bored of being in samsara. We no longer trust our attachment. Many people think not having attachment, not having greed, is suffering, but actually, not having attachment is happiness. I met some people who think that not having attachment to things is unhappiness, that it is necessary to have attachment and greed. They see attachment as a comfortable mind. They see it as a pleasure, and this is completely a wrong conception.

The more we meditate on suffering, the less attachment we will have and therefore, the more happiness we will have. As we discover the suffering of samsara, our desire to achieve liberation will become stronger. As we become more and more bored in samsara, we will want it to finish it quicker. Just like a person who is having surgery without a pain-killing injection, all we think about is how it can be ended. We need to feel this way about samsara in order to receive the fully renounced mind and nirvana.

Seeing things as suffering is a realization. Seeing sense pleasures as suffering is a realization. For example, we can see that dependence on drugs causes a lifestyle full of negative karma: killing, stealing, basically coming from desire. We are controlled by desire, and then engage in hundreds of different problems and

never get satisfaction. This is not like Dharma practice, where happiness always increases.

*TRUE CAUSE, TRUE CESSATION, AND TRUE PATH*

Most people in the world do not understand suffering and the cause of suffering. They practice in the opposite way to what they should practice and as a result, they receive only suffering, only dissatisfaction. Then from the foundation of dissatisfaction, people get into many problems.

We are born totally without control, under the power of karma and delusion. We performed actions in the past that were motivated by delusions, by the hallucinated mind, by anger, attachment, and ignorance. There are many types of ignorance, and this is the ignorance that doesn't know the very nature of the self, which is emptiness. This ignorance is the very root of suffering. It creates negative karmic actions that leave imprints on the consciousness.

Consciousness is like a basket. There are billions and billions of impressions, abilities, and seeds in the basket that cause us to take all kinds of samsaric lives. Each of these seeds that is collected in the consciousness is gradually experienced. Even in this life, with our ignorance, we are creating and incredible numbers of seeds. Just as you plant all kinds of different seeds in a big field and gradually they grow, already ignorance has made karmic formations in the consciousness for incredible numbers of suffering samsaric bodies, which we will experience gradually.

All the delusions are rooted in the ignorance holding the wrong conception, the concept of "I". This is why that the whole Buddhadharma emphasizes realizing one's nature as being of the utmost need in order to cut of samsara. Cutting samsara means cutting the ignorance from which all the rest of the delusions start. Like a powerful medicine that cures a fever right away, the remedy of this wrong conception of a self-existing "I" is the wisdom that realizes one's own absolute nature, the nature of the "I."

Ordinary beings always think of the "I" as a self-entity, an independent existence. This wrong conception causes attachment

to the "I" and there is also the wrong conception of "my possessions, my things, my body." The wrong conception thinking of the independently existent "I" causes attachment to arise for the "I" and then there is the wrong conception of the independent possessions and body, which causes attachment to arise for "my" possessions.

Thinking of the desirable object as independent brings attachment. When the person is attached to something, as long as the person follows the attachment, the attachment only expresses how good and beautiful the object is. The attachment never expresses that if the person follows it in that way, he will never discover the faults of the negative mind.

The "I" that we perceive doesn't exist anywhere, either in the body or outside of it. When we do checking meditation on the actual evolution of the "I" as it really exists, there is no longer that strong wrong view. The meditation is completely opposite to the view that the usual, old, wrong mind believes in. Why does this wrong view change? Because at the time of the meditation, checking the nature of the object, the absolute nature of the "I" is stronger than the wrong conception. Then the view of the "I" is different. With this true view, seeing the "I" as merely dependent, there is no place for the other negative minds of greed, pride, and jealousy to arise. Therefore, the actions of greed, actions of pride, and so forth do not arise.

We have to realize the absolute nature of the self, because we are the ones who suffer in samsara, who create our own suffering. The realization of the absolute nature of the self is like destroying the root, like burning the root by fire. Afterwards, there is nothing left from which the stem and leaves and branches can grow. When this wrong conception – the principal ignorance, the wrong conception of the self-existing "I" – is completely destroyed, all of the rest of the delusions are destroyed as well. This realization is powerful like fire and also very quick.

To realize the absolute nature of reality, you need the help of the mind fully renouncing samsara. Some people are so hung up

in checking emptiness without discovering the nature of samsara, of suffering. Without strong renunciation of samsara, however much we meditate on emptiness, our old thoughts and old actions will not change. In this way, there is no possibility of escaping from samsara. Changing the mind and cleaning the actions takes time.

The fully renounced mind with the realization of the absolute nature is necessary for release from samsara. This mind depends on fully understanding the nature of samsara. After we realize the suffering nature of samsara, we discover the cause of that suffering. Then, by following the path to cease suffering, we can achieve liberation and be free of suffering forever.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS*

Place yourself in a comfortable seated posture with a straight back. Take a few moments to settle the mind by watching the breath, and then set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the Four Noble Truths.

Take some time to reflect on each of the Four Noble Truths, one at a time, and see how they relate to your own life. Try to come up with examples where you recognized a suffering situation, determined its cause, concluded it did not have to be that way, and remedied the situation. Finally, make a determination to apply this knowledge to suffering whenever you encounter it.

Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

# *WHAT IS MEDITATION?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*"Buddhism is not at all a tactful religion, always trying to avoid giving offense. Buddhism addresses precisely what you are and what your mind is doing in the here and now. That's what makes it so interesting."*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

## *THE PURPOSE OF MEDITATION*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

Many people throughout the world, in the West as well as the East, are very interested in meditating. They are attracted to this practice and express great interest in it. Yet of all the many people who engage in meditation, only a few really understand its purpose.

The main problem we all have is the suffering of not achieving our various desires. These include the obvious physical necessities of food and clothing as well as such enjoyable things as a good reputation, the sound of pleasant and comforting words, and so forth. Some forms of suffering, such as the hunger of an extremely impoverished person, are more obvious than others, but in one way or another, we all hunger uncontrollably for things we do not possess.

Take the example of someone who was fortunate enough to be born into a wealthy family. During his lifetime, he might never experience material want. He can afford to buy anything that arouses his desire and is free to travel wherever he pleases. When he finally reaches the point where there is nothing left to possess, no place left to visit, and no pleasure left to experience, he still suffers from an acute feeling of dissatisfaction. In such a restless, dissatisfied state of mind, many people go insane, unable to cope with this intense and pervasive suffering. Therefore, even when there is no lack of material comfort, there is still suffering. In fact, it often happens that material wealth increases dissatisfaction, because it then becomes even more obvious that such possessions have no ability whatsoever to affect or cut through the root of suffering. There is still the continuity of dissatisfaction, confusion,

worry, and the rest. If an accumulation of external comforts really were able to cut through and eliminate suffering, then at some stage of physical well-being, the continuity of suffering would be severed and all dissatisfaction would cease. However, suffering continues.

For example, we wear shoes to protect our feet from rough ground and sharp thorns, but this does not really eliminate the problem. The shoes themselves often hurt. They can pinch our toes, produce sores, and generally cause discomfort. This is not the shoemaker's fault. If our feet weren't so long, wide, or sensitive in the first place, it would be possible to make totally comfortable shoes for them. Thus, if we look deeply, we see that the source of this discomfort is not external, but lies within our own physical and mental make-up.

This is merely one example of the suffering we experience because of our physical body. From the time we are born until the time we die, we expend a tremendous amount of energy trying to protect this body of ours from suffering. In fact, most people spend all their time caring for their body in precisely this fruitless, self-defeating manner. However, the purpose of meditation is not merely to take care of the physical body. We should not think of using meditation in this way. It should have a higher, more valuable purpose. To use meditation as just another external method to benefit our body is senseless. We would be wasting a technique of true, ultimate value on a vain attempt to gain relief that is temporary at best. Meditation would then be like the aspirin we take to get rid of a headache. The pain may go away, but that does not mean we are cured. After some time it will return, because the method of treatment was unrelated to the real cause. Since temporary pleasure and alleviation of pain are available through many external means, there is no need to use meditation or any other spiritual practice for such a purpose. We should not squander the power of meditation on such limited aims.

Meditation is primarily concerned with caring for the mind. Although the body and mind are intimately related and intercon-

nected, they are quite different types of phenomena. The body is an object that we can see with our eyes, but the mind is not. The members of a particular family share many physical traits, but each child instinctively has a different personality, mental attitude, set of interests, and so forth. Though they attend the same schools, their intelligence and learning differ not only from each other's, but from their parents' and grandparents' as well. Such differences of mind cannot be adequately explained in physical terms. The underlying reason for different mental aptitudes among members of the same family, and that certain children can remember previous lifetimes, is the fact that mind is beginningless. Past lives do exist. And just as our minds have continued from past lives into the present, they will pass on from the present into the future. The circumstances of this present life result from actions, both mental and physical, performed in these previous lives. Similarly, our present actions determine the circumstances of our future lives. Therefore, the responsibility for shaping the remainder of this life and those to come lies in our own hands. It is very important to recognize this if we want to find effective means for permanently cutting through both mental and physical suffering.

Each of us has been born as a human being. As human beings, we have the potential to give meaning and purpose to our lives. By utilizing this human rebirth properly and gaining control over our minds, we can sever the root of all suffering completely. Within the space of one or more lives, we can escape from the compulsive cycle of death and rebirth. As it is, we have to be reborn again and again without any choice or control, but this involuntary cycle can be broken. We can escape from all suffering and dissatisfaction permanently.

However, to escape from the circle of death and rebirth ourselves is not enough. We are not the only ones who experience suffering and dissatisfaction; all other living beings share in the same predicament and most other beings lack the wisdom to find the correct path to the cessation of their suffering. All creatures on earth, without exception, spend their whole lives, day and night,

searching for a way to overcome suffering and experience pleasure and happiness, but because their minds are clouded in ignorance, this search is in vain. Instead of leading to the intended goal, it brings them only further frustration and pain. They try to remove the cause of their suffering but instead, they only remove themselves further and further from the true cessation of suffering.

All living beings suffer and they all desire release in the same way we do. If we realize this, it becomes apparent that it is selfish to work solely towards our own liberation, our own experience of nirvana. Rather we must strive to free all others as well. However, in order to enlighten others, we ourselves must first become fully enlightened beings. In other words, we must have a complete experience of full enlightenment before we can discern the best paths in which all beings, with their varying mental aptitudes and temperaments, can be led to their own liberation from suffering.

Therefore, when we talk about the true purpose of meditation, we are talking about the attainment of enlightenment, which enables us to fulfill not only our own aims but also those of all others. This is the entire purpose of and the only reason for engaging in meditation. All the great yogis and meditation masters of the past have practiced the Dharma with this purpose in mind. Likewise, when we meditate – and in Buddha's teachings there are hundreds of different meditations to choose from – we should meditate with this same motivation.

We are not compelled to meditate by some outside agent, by other people, or by God. Rather, just as we are responsible for our own suffering, we are responsible for our own cure. We have created the situation in which we find ourselves and it is up to us to create the circumstances for our release. Therefore, since suffering permeates our life, we have to do something in addition to our regular daily routine. This “something” is spiritual practice or meditation. If we do not turn inwards and train our minds, but expend all our energy on arranging and rearranging the external aspects of our existence, then our suffering will continue. Our suffering has no beginning, and if we don't adopt an effective spiritual practice, there won't be an end.

Many people are sincerely searching for the higher meaning of human life, trying to transcend the everyday, animal concerns of their existence. In this respect I think it is very wise that people are trying to combine spiritual and practical ways of life into one that provides deep mental and physical comfort. For such people, life will certainly not be an empty promise.

Food prepared from many different ingredients can be truly delicious. In the same way, if we have a job or a similar daily activity and we also try to work as much as possible on perfecting a spiritual path, our lives can become very rich. The benefits we experience by combining these two approaches to life are far-reaching. There is a great difference between the mind, feelings and experiences of someone who adds an understanding of Dharma to his or her daily life and someone who does not. The first person meets with far less confusion and experiences far less suffering when he encounters difficulties in the material world. He has a controlled mind and a meaningful framework in which he can handle his problems skillfully. This applies not only to his everyday experiences but especially to those encountered when he dies.

The external appearance of our meditation is not important. Whether we sit with our arms folded this way and our legs crossed that way doesn't matter, but it is extremely important to check that the meditation we do is an actual remedy for our suffering. Does it effectively eliminate the delusions obscuring our minds? Does it combat our ignorance, hatred, and greed? If it does reduce these negativities of mind, then it is a perfect meditation, truly practical and greatly worthwhile. If on the other hand it merely serves to generate and increase our negativities, then it is only another cause of suffering. In that case, even though we may say we are meditating, we are not actually following a spiritual path or practicing Dharma at all.

Dharma is a guide away from suffering, away from problems. If our practice does not guide us in this direction, then something is wrong. In fact, the fundamental practice of all true yogis is to

discover which of their actions bring suffering and which bring happiness. They then work to avoid the former and follow the latter as much as possible. This is the essential practice of Dharma.

All of us who are beginning our practice of Dharma, starting to meditate and gain control of our minds, need to rely on proper sources of information. We should read books of good authority and, when doubts arise, we should consult teachers who have mastered their study and practice. This is very important. If we are guided by books written without a proper understanding, there is the great danger that our life will be spent following an incorrect path. Even more important is choosing the correct teacher. He or she must have correct realizations and must actually live the practice of the Dharma. However, our practice of meditation, of mental cultivation, should not be passive. We won't be able to break the bonds of suffering by blindly accepting what someone, even a great master, tells us to do. We should use our innate intelligence to check and see if a suggested course of action is effective. If we have good reason to believe that a teaching is valid and will be helpful, then by all means we should follow it. Once we have found medicine that can reasonably be expected to cure us, we should take it. Otherwise, if we swallow anything that happens to come into our hands, we run the great risk of aggravating rather than curing our illness.

This is my final suggestion for those beginners who have an interest in studying Dharma and meditating. Spiritual pursuits can be very worthwhile. Yet even if you cannot practice Dharma, a mere understanding of it can enrich your life and give it meaning.

## *THE ESSENCE OF MEDITATION*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Meditation is very simple. Actually, watching television, which we all do, is a bit like meditating. When you watch television, you watch what is happening on the screen, and when you meditate, you watch what is happening on the inner screen of your mind, where you can see all your good qualities, but all your inner garbage as well. That is why meditation is simple.

The difference, however, is that through meditation you learn about the nature of your mind rather than the sense world of desire and attachment. Why is this important? We think that worldly things are very useful, but the enjoyment they bring is minimal and transient. Meditation, on the other hand, has so much more to offer – joy, understanding, higher communication, and control. Control here does not mean that you are controlled by somebody else, but rather by your own understanding knowledge-wisdom, which is a totally peaceful and joyful experience.

If you exaggerate the value of external objects, thinking that they are the most important things in life, you ignore your inner beauty and internal joyful energy. If you look only outside of yourself, you neglect your most precious human qualities – your intellect and your potential to communicate in higher ways. Meditation clearly shows you which objects of attachment confuse you and what kinds of mind you use to relate to them. Furthermore, meditation is a very quick method of discovering the nature of reality. It is just like a computer. Computers can check many things extremely quickly, put them together and all of a sudden, pow! We are on the moon. Similarly, meditation can quickly make things

clean clear, but we don't have to go to the trouble of learning by trial and error through laboratory experiments. Many people seem to think that making mistakes is a very important part of learning. This is a misconception. To learn the reality of misery, you have to have miserable experiences? I say that this is not so. Through meditation we can learn things clearly, without having to experience them. Therefore, meditation does not mean the study of Buddhist philosophy and doctrine. It is learning about our own nature: what we are and how we exist.

Some books say that the purpose of meditation is to make us conscious, but despite the usual Western connotation, the terms "awareness" and "consciousness" are not necessarily positive. They can be selfish functions of the ego. Awareness and consciousness do not mean the fully awakened state of knowledge-wisdom. Awareness can be simply an ego-trip. Many times we are aware and conscious, but since we possess neither wisdom nor understanding; our minds are still polluted. We think that we are conscious, but our minds are foggy and unclear. Through meditation, awareness and consciousness must become knowledge-wisdom.

Another idea that many people have is that meditation is beautiful because it produces calm and relaxation. However, calm and relaxation are not necessarily the result of meditation. For example, when we are asleep and our minds have sunk into an unconscious level, we are relaxed. Of course, this is not the same relaxation that meditation brings.

Meditation releases us from the uncontrolled, polluted mind. Automatically, we become joyful and can see meaning in our lives. Then we can direct the energy of our body, speech, and mind in beneficial directions instead of wasting it through not knowing what we want. Most of the time, we try something, but then, "Oh, I don't want this." So we try something else, but again, "I don't want this either." Our life is constantly changing, changing, changing. Again and again, our energies are sublimated into one thing, then another, and we reach nowhere. We should make sure we understand our behavior. We put ourselves on so many differ-

ent trips and into so many life situations with no understanding of what direction is really worthwhile, and we waste enormous amounts of time. Meditation purifies and clarifies our view, enabling us to understand the different lifestyles and beliefs of basically every sentient being in the universe. We can see which are worthwhile and which are not. A human being, sitting at one place in meditation, can see all this. It is definitely possible.

When our minds are clean clear, we can choose a beneficial way of life.

## *HOW TO MEDITATE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

If we want to wake up from a Buddhist perspective, learning how to meditate is extremely beneficial. Some people think meditation is about being perfectly still and silent and contemplating nothing; just emptying the mind. Other people think it is about having elaborate visualizations and experiences of subtle energy running through the body. Meditation can be an overwhelming undertaking for some, while others are eager to try. There is no magic or mystery about how to meditate. We simply need to learn how to do it correctly and then practice it. However, in order to meditate properly, it is important to put yourself in the proper position to meditate.

### *THE SEVEN POINT POSTURE OF BUDDHA VAIROCHANA*

In our tradition, we teach a particular meditation posture known as the seven point posture of Buddha Vairochana. Centuries of accomplished meditators have found this posture to be extremely conducive for deep meditation. Vairochana is the Buddha of perfect form and it was in this posture that Shakyamuni Buddha engaged in his final meditation that led to his enlightenment.

We begin with the position of the legs. The ideal posture is to sit with the legs in what is called the full lotus or vajra position. In this position, each foot is placed on the thigh of the opposite leg, with the sole facing upward. It is a difficult position to achieve, but with proper training many people are able put the body in this position. Yoga can be very helpful for this as well.

The vajra position offers the best support to both body and

mind, but it is not absolutely essential and many of us can only dream of putting our legs in full lotus. Therefore, there are alternate positions, such as “half lotus” where one foot is on top of the opposite thigh and the other foot is on the floor under or next to the opposite leg. A third alternative is simply sitting in a cross-legged posture with both feet resting on the floor.

Place a cushion under the buttocks to raise it slightly higher than the knees to put your spine in the proper posture. Experiment with different types of cushions to see what helps you sit for longer periods of time without your feet or legs going numb. For some people, sitting on a cushion or on the floor is not possible. In that case, experiment with low meditation benches. You may also meditate while sitting in a chair.

If you have severe back problems or other physical issues, you can meditate lying down. However, most people tend to go to sleep when they lie down, and this isn't very effective for meditation. The most important thing is to find a suitable position in which you are able to be both comfortable and alert.

The second point involves the hands. Hold your hands loosely in your lap with the right hand resting in the palm of your left. The palms are facing upwards with the tips of the thumbs lightly touching so that the hands form the shape of a triangle. Your hands should rest on top of the feet, about two to three inches below the navel. If your feet are not in full or half lotus, you can rest your hands on a blanket rolled up in your lap.

The back is the most critical part of the posture. We know that the spine has some natural curve to it; however, the spine should be as extended as possible to keep a nice flow of energy moving through your nervous system. This means that the back appears to be straight. Hold the spine in a relaxed, fully upright position, as if your vertebrae were a stack of coins. Your energy will flow more freely this way, contributing to clarity and alertness in your meditation. The position of your legs and buttocks is critical to supporting your back in the proper position. Experiment to see what position best suits you.

The fourth point involves the teeth, lips, and tongue. The jaw and the mouth should be very relaxed with the teeth slightly apart, not clenched. The lips are touching lightly and the tongue should rest lightly on the upper palette just barely touching the area behind the teeth. This reduces the flow of saliva and the need to swallow.

The head should be slightly tipped forward so that your gaze is directed naturally downward. If the head is held too high, you might have problems with mental wandering and distraction. If your head is too far forward, you might experience dullness and sleepiness.

In the beginning it may be easier to concentrate with the eyes fully closed. However, as you gain experience with meditation, you may keep your eyes slightly open, admitting a bit of light. This helps the mind to be clear and bright in meditation. Closing your eyes can create a tendency toward drowsiness, daydreaming, or sleep. Direct your gaze downwards towards the tip of the nose or a spot on the floor, not focused on anything in particular.

Finally, make sure your shoulders are even and that your shoulders and arms are relaxed. Don't grip your arms tightly next to the body; meditation needs to come from a relaxed place. Also, leave a bit of space between your arms and torso to allow some air to circulate. This helps prevent drowsiness during meditation.

This posture is sometimes called the eight point posture of Vairochana, when concentration on the breath prior to meditation is added to the previous seven points. Meditation on the breath is a fundamental practice that calms the mind and helps one develop awareness. It can be your primary meditation or it can be used to calm the mind prior to engaging in other types of practice. Whether we are driving, working, laughing, etc., we can increase our awareness by being mindful of the breath. Whatever is happening, we can use this meditation to subdue anxiety, anger, or any other mental affliction, because we are always breathing.

To meditate on the breath, simply bring your awareness to your normal natural breath. You can focus on the sensation of air

moving in and out of your nostrils or you can focus on the rising and the falling of your abdomen; whichever is more comfortable. When the mind wanders off the object of the breath, just bring the mind back to the breath. Bring it back again and again. That is your meditation.

To help you focus your mind more clearly, you can count your breaths. One inhalation and one exhalation is one. See how far you can count before your mind wanders. When you become aware that your mind is wandering, bring it back to the breath and begin counting again at one.

### *TYPES OF MEDITATION*

There are various types of meditation. Some are focused on watching the breath or noting different sensations as they are happening in the body. Some involve placing your mind on a particular object, keeping it there in a single-pointed fashion. Others involve elaborate visualizations and mantra recitation. In analytical meditation, we go over a certain topic or philosophical point, again and again, using logic and reasoning to check it out. For example, you might take a single sentence from a scriptural source and consider it from many angles – those provided in scripture as well as examples from your own life – until you gain an intellectual understanding of that topic. After you have gained some intellectual insight, you continue to meditate until that understanding becomes your own direct experience. This changes your life in a fundamental way. Once you have seen the truth of something for yourself, you are no longer fooled by false appearances.

Many of us have great interest in contributing to the world in a positive way. There is an old saying: “Many of us would like to change the world for the better. Since you are part of the world, if you change yourself for the better, it changes the world for the better.” Because of this, even small changes we make to improve ourselves are significant. Some of us want to do things on a grandiose scale, but it is often the smaller, more subtle changes that have the greatest impact.

*SEVEN POINT POSTURE  
OF BUDDHA VAIROCHANA*

1. Sit with your legs in full or half vajra, or in a cross-legged position. If this is not possible, sit upright in a chair.
2. With your hands resting in your lap, place the top of your right hand on the palm of the left hand, with your thumbs touching.
3. Keep your spine straight.
4. Relax your jaw, with your tongue touching your palate.
5. Tip your head slightly forward by gently tucking in your chin.
6. Keep your eyes slightly open with a downward gaze.
7. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed, with a comfortable space between your arms and torso.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*MEDITATION ON THE BREATH*

Generate a sincere motivation, such as:

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the breath.

Place yourself in the seven-point posture of Vairochana or whatever posture is most comfortable for you. Then do a short meditation on the breath, as described on pages 86-87.

When you are finished, dedicate the merit of your efforts using a prayer such as the following:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*Once I have pacified distractions to wrong objects  
And correctly analyzed the meaning of reality,  
Please bless me to generate quickly within my mind-  
stream  
The unified path of calm abiding and special insight.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## CALM ABIDING

VENERABLE AMY MILLER

The full development of concentration is known as calm abiding or mental quiescence; it is called *shiné* in Tibetan, and *shamata* in Sanskrit. Without developing the mind of calm abiding you cannot see emptiness directly. Calm abiding is a kind of meditative stabilization in which you fix your mind on a particular object and keep it there single pointedly.

Calm abiding creates a heightened level of awareness, accompanied by an exceptional degree of mental and physical suppleness. This is similar to having great flexibility; the body and mind are extremely receptive and serviceable. Once you have attained the pliancy that comes with calm abiding, you can direct your minds towards any virtuous activity and accomplish it with ease.

To practice calm abiding meditation, first select an object of meditation. It is recommended to meditate on an uplifting image that leaves a virtuous imprint on the mind, such as Shakyamuni Buddha. We may first rely on a picture of the Buddha to acquaint ourselves with the specifics of the image; however when we do *shiné*, we meditate on a mental image of our object. For beginners, it is best to start with short sessions of perhaps three, five, or ten minute segments, resting the mind for short periods in between. As the mind becomes more skilled in concentration, the time for each session can be increased. If you begin with longer sessions but are distracted most of the time, it leaves a tendency towards distraction when you meditate, which is counterproductive.

At the beginning of a session, once your object of meditation is clear to your mind, set a firm determination to stay focused

on that object without distraction for whatever period you have determined. This preliminary determination is very important as it sets up a more concentrated focus.

In the early stages of calm abiding practice, the mind often wanders off or loses the object of meditation. In later stages, one can concentrate more deeply for longer periods of time, while still applying various antidotes to distraction. Finally, one needs only to place the mind upon its object and one is able to meditate without distraction for as long as one has determined to do so.

While doing calm abiding practice, we use different aspects of the mind to manage our concentration during a meditation session. This is similar to driving a car. Although you manage to keep your car on the road with one part of your consciousness, another part of your mind is able to think about something entirely different. With calm abiding, one part of the mind is holding concentration on the object firmly, while another part of the mind is sharpening the intensity on the object to build clarity. These are the two key factors of concentration we want to enforce: stability and clarity.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*CONCENTRATION*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this concentration meditation.

Using either your breath or a visualization of the Buddha as your object of concentration, bring your attention to that object so that it becomes clear in your mind. Then, with firm determination to hold the object single-pointedly in your awareness, remain in meditative equipoise. Whenever you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to your object. From time to time check the quality of your meditation to be sure that you are holding your object with stability and clarity. After a few minutes, rest the mind, and dedicate.

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*“Totality is within you. It is already with you from childhood, as soon as you are existent. There is no separation between the conventional you and the absolute truth. This fundamental union is already existent; it is just a matter of recognizing and comprehending it.”*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

# *UNDERSTANDING THE MIND*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

## *WHAT IS THE MIND?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

In Buddhism, the mind is the most important and most extensive field of study. One part of the mind creates all our problems; another part brings us all our happiness. If we have clear and complete knowledge of the mind, we will also understand how physical phenomena exist. As long as we don't understand the mind, our understanding of the conventional and ultimate nature of physical phenomena will also be limited. By understanding even the conventional nature of the mind, we can help other sentient beings more, and not only in the short term. This knowledge enables us to offer others long-term benefit.

Complete understanding of the mind comes only if you study the tantra of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism. If you understand tantra and actualize the tantric path, from your own experience you gain a complete and exact understanding of not only the gross mind but also the subtle minds. You then see clearly what the mind is and what you can do to offer great benefit to yourself and to all sentient beings. When you see the incredible potential that your mind has, you feel so much hope and joy.

What is the mind? Mind has no color, no shape, and no material substance. It is different from the body, which has color and shape and is substantial. The basic definition of mind is "that which is clear and able to perceive objects." In other words, mind is a formless phenomenon that knows things.

"Clear" doesn't necessarily mean that the way the mind sees an object accords with reality. It refers to both the hallucinated mind and the valid mind. Generally, the mind sees an object clearly,

whether that object is appearing rightly or wrongly, whether it is a false object or a true one. For example, from a distance somebody in a department store might see a mannequin as a real person, because the shape and posture of the body are like those of a normal person. They give the label "person" to the mannequin because it has the shape of a person, and they then believe in their label. The mannequin then appears to them as a real person, even though in reality there is no actual person there. It is simply a mannequin. First of all the person sees the base, the shape of a human body; because of that they label "person" and believe in that label. It then appears to them as a person. Even though that appearance is not true, it is a clear appearance to the mind.

Objects do not appear clearly to the body. "Clear" has to do with perception and perception has to do with the mind. Appearance is a production, or creation, of the mind. Rocks, trees, and other substantial things don't have perception, so nothing appears to them. It is only to the mind that things appear.

The mind is divided into six primary minds, or consciousnesses: the mental consciousness and the five sense consciousnesses (consciousness of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body). The mental consciousness mainly discriminates the meaning of objects, whereas the senses mainly discriminate the qualities of objects. After our senses have had contact with something, after we have heard, seen, smelled, tasted, or touched something and experienced some feeling from that contact, it is the mental consciousness that makes sense of the experience and remembers it. The mental consciousness allows us to reflect on what we did this morning, yesterday, last year, or since our birth. The mental consciousness continues from life to life, but the other five consciousnesses do not go from one life to another.

#### *THE CONTINUITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS*

There are many people, young and old, in the East and in the West, who can remember their past lives. For example, a few years ago in India, a seven-year-old girl took her present life parents to

see her past life family and showed them around the house. She could remember everything about her past life and actually felt closer to her past life parents, who are old and poor, than to her present parents, who are young and quite wealthy. I had a photograph of her standing with both her families, past and present. Such things happen quite often.

People with clear memories and few obscurations can remember being in their mother's womb and even remember their consciousness taking place on the fertilized egg. Trying to see back beyond that, some people can see, for example, that they were in a house in Tibet and what they were doing. Some people are also able to see past and future lives because they have developed their minds through meditation. When the mind is more advanced, with greater inner knowledge and a greater capacity to perceive phenomena, a person is able to see things that we do not see, such as past and future lives. Through inner development, they are able to perceive many phenomena that we are not aware of now. By meditating on the nine levels of calm abiding or on various tantric practices and attaining high levels of the path, they can develop clairvoyance and see many hundreds of their own past and future lives and those of others.

The fact that we can't remember past lives is not a logical proof that there is no beginningless mind, that the consciousness does not continue from past lives. If we believed that things don't exist for the simple reason that we don't remember them, we would have to say that everything in this life we do not remember doing – eating, speaking, traveling – did not happen. This is ridiculous! The other people who remember that you did these things would think you were crazy if you said these things did not happen simply because you do not remember them. There are many things from this life, even from today, that you don't remember. Sometimes you can't even remember things you did or said this morning. There are many places you have been, people you have seen, and things you have done in this life that you don't remember.

You don't remember coming out of your mother's womb. Why

do you say that a particular man is your father and a particular woman is your mother? It's not because you remember your consciousness taking place on the fertilized egg or coming out of your mother's womb. When you ask a child, "What makes you believe this is your father and this your mother?" the simple, clear answer is, "Because I was told they were." That is all. You believe these people to be your parents, not because you remember everything that happened but because you believed what you were told.

In the same way, even though we may not remember our past lives at the moment, there are other people with more advanced minds who can see them. Because they see past and future lives, your reasoning seems crazy to them. As with the example of the people who can remember what you did as a child even though you can't, those who can see past and future lives regard your reasoning as mistaken. To those with more advanced minds, our saying that there are no past or future lives is simply describing our own ignorance.

You cannot say with one hundred percent certainty that the consciousness does not continue to the next life. Even though people hold this philosophy, nobody in the world has realized that there is no consciousness before and after this life. However, numberless people have realized that there is consciousness before and after this life. To say that something doesn't exist because you don't see it is contradictory to reality; there are so many things that you don't know. You have to discover many things through meditation, through development of your own mind.

#### *THE TRUE NATURE OF THE MIND*

The nature of the mind is pure. The nature of the mind is clear light, not mixed with ignorance. Even though we have ignorance, our minds are not mixed with ignorance. Even though we have attachment and anger, our minds are not oneness with attachment and anger. Our problem is that we obscure the pure nature of the mind by following selfish attitudes and wrong conceptions. These pollute the mind, not allowing us to develop its full potential, in-

terfering in the awakening of the mind. Wrong conceptions stop us from developing the mental capacity to have continual temporary and ultimate happiness ourselves and, especially, to enable us to cause all sentient beings to have temporary and ultimate happiness.

The mind exists in dependence upon its base, that phenomenon that has the qualities of being non-substantial and clear and able to perceive objects, and in dependence on the thought that labels it “mind.” In dependence upon these two – the base and the thought – mind exists. This is the clear light nature of the mind.

This clear light nature of the mind gives us the potential to achieve any happiness that we wish. It gives us every hope. It gives us the opportunity to be completely liberated from all problems. This clear light nature of the mind allows us to achieve ultimate happiness, along with temporary peace and happiness in our daily life. It gives us the opportunity to end the entire suffering of samsara.

Besides achieving liberation, ultimate happiness for the self, we can completely cease even the subtle obscurations, the imprints left on our mental continuum by the ignorance and other disturbing thoughts. In this way the mind can become completely pure, without any faults. It can become omniscient mind, which can directly see all past, present, and future existence.

No matter how strong our ignorance, anger, desire, self-cherishing, and other delusions are and no matter how much heavy negative karma we have created, these things are not permanent; all these obscurations are temporary. Like fog in the sky, they will not always be there. They are dependent arisings. In dependence upon causes and conditions, fog is produced and obscures the sun or moon and the sky. Then, in dependence upon other causes and conditions such as the wind, the fog goes away.

It is the same with a dirty cloth. In dependence upon causes and conditions, the cloth becomes dirty, and then in dependence upon other causes and conditions, the cloth can become clean. In dependence upon soap and water, the dirt will go away.

In dependence upon causes and conditions, a mirror can be covered by dust so that it can't give a clear reflection. Even though the mirror has the potential to reflect, if we leave it to collect dust and do not clean it, the dust does not allow the mirror to reflect anything. Like this, wrong conceptions continuously obscure the mind. If we do not meditate on the right path, which can remove these mental stains, even though our minds are completely pure in nature and not oneness with the obscurations, our obscurations get thicker and thicker. It then becomes very difficult to develop the potential of the mind. However, in dependence upon other causes and conditions, the dirt can be removed so that the mirror can give a clear reflection. One small mirror can give a clear reflection of a whole city.

In a similar way, no matter how strong our delusions are or how much heavy negative karma we have created, like fog in the sky or dirt in a cloth or dust on a mirror, they are not permanent. Our minds are only temporarily obscured. No matter how black with dirt a cloth is, because the cloth is not one with the dirt, it can always be cleaned. No matter how thick the dust on a mirror is, the mirror can always be cleaned. Like this, no matter how strong our delusions are and how heavy the negative karma we have created, since our minds are not one with them, there is always the potential for the mind to be separated from these obscurations. Our minds can become completely pure, free from all these obscurations, all these causes of suffering.

Realizing the ultimate nature of the mind eradicates ignorance, which is the basis of anger, attachment, and all the other disturbing thoughts. It then ceases the negative karmas produced by these delusions, as well as all the sufferings that arise from these delusions and negative karmas. By developing compassion along with this wisdom realizing the nature of the mind, you are able to completely cease even the subtle mental obscurations. In this way your mind becomes completely free from all faults and perfected in all realizations. Such a mind is a fully enlightened mind, the mind of a buddha.

## *SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MIND*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Each human being has a mind and that mind has three divisions: gross, subtle, and most subtle. Similarly, we have a body and that too has three divisions: gross, subtle, and most subtle.

The gross consciousness comprises the five sensory consciousnesses that we use every day. The subtle consciousness can be things like intuitive ego and intuitive superstition. They are subtle in the sense that we can't see or understand them clearly. The gross mind is so busy that it obscures the subtle. When the gross mind is no longer flashing, or functioning, the subtle mind has a chance to arise. That is one of the functions of Tibetan Buddhist tantra: to eliminate the gross concepts and make space to allow the subtle mind to function.

The gross mind has no strength, no power. Even though it understands something, it is relatively weak. The subtle mind has much more power to penetrate and comprehend. Meditation cuts the gross, busy mind and allows the subtle consciousness to function.

As you know, Buddhism explains emptiness, the nature of universal reality. We experience emptiness when elimination of the gross, superficial, conventional mind allows it to manifest. The moment your gross, crowded concepts stop you feel some space, an emptiness. There is nothing you actually empty but because your concepts are so crowded, because your mind is so full, when all that content disappears you have an experience of emptiness.

Sometimes when Buddhist philosophers describe emptiness, "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," it sounds so complicated. And it's

true; Buddhist philosophy is very sophisticated. Ordinary people don't understand. But when we really bring it back down to earth, all we're saying is, when you cut your crowded superstitions, the experience of emptiness arises.

The mind is not a material substance; it has no shape or color. It is a kind of formless, colorless energy: the energy of thought or consciousness. Therefore, its nature is clean clear and it takes the reflection of phenomena inside. Even thoughts you consider to be heavy and negative still have their own essence, their own clarity, in order to perceive reality or reflect projections.

Also, mind is like space. The essence of space is its own nature, unmixed with pollution or clouds. The nature of clouds, the nature of pollution and the nature of space are different.

The reason why I am mentioning the negative mind is that we humans have a normal tendency to preconceptions such as, "I'm a bad person, my mind is bad, I'm too negative." We always criticize ourselves in a dualistic way. Buddhism says that that's wrong. The characteristic nature of space is not pollution; the nature of pollution is not space. Similarly, the nature of the consciousness is not negative. In fact, the Buddha himself said that buddha nature lies within each of us and that nature is pure, clean and clear.

A clean clear mind exists within us; the fundamental nature of our consciousness is pure. But while our mind has its own essence of clarity, it is covered by a contaminating heavy blanket of concepts. Nevertheless, its nature is still clean clear. Therefore we have to recognize, "My nature, the essence of my consciousness, is not totally negative. The pure, clean clear nature of my mind exists within me right now."

Christians might say that the human soul is pure, not negative. It is free of ego conflict, craving desire, hatred, and jealousy. Similarly, the relative human consciousness can go from whatever level it's currently at all the way up to enlightenment. That doesn't mean ego conflict goes all the way to enlightenment; the dissatisfied, emotionally restless mind never goes to enlightenment. That doesn't happen.

The essence of the human consciousness goes up, up and up. The negative blanket of superstition never goes up. Each time we clear our negativities they just disappear.

That is the relative. With respect to the absolute nature of the human consciousness, it is totally nondual. In the non-duality of the human mind, there is no mixed up confusion or emotional disturbance. Therefore, we should all understand that the nuclear essence of each of us is consciousness and that consciousness is not mixed with negativity.

Sometimes we liken the mind to the ocean, where ego conflicts are like waves upon the surface. Concepts arise like waves, shake things up a bit and then subside back into the ocean of consciousness. So the consciousness of each of us is clean clear in nature and our craving desire, hatred and ignorance are like waves upon the surface. That means we have the capacity not to shake our consciousness. We can hold it without shaking. To some extent we are capable of that. That's what meditation does.

Negative motivation is also like a wave. It creates all the confusion, dissatisfaction, pain and misery we experience. The root of all our human problems is that wrong place within our mind. It is most worthwhile to investigate this directly for yourself. Still, we should understand that our own nature is not totally hopeless. We should respect our own nature, our own purity, our own characteristics. If we do, we will then begin to respect others. If you interpret yourself as a big hassle, selfish, totally hopeless, and negative, you'll interpret others in the same way.

Your sense perception or sense consciousness does not meditate. People sometimes get confused as to this because they are so used to the sense world being their only reality. The sense consciousness is foolish. It does not have the intelligence to discriminate between right and wrong. That is why as soon as we open our eyes we are distracted by sense objects and the flashing of dualistic concepts. You can see why. Your mind always wants to see beautiful things; it has already decided. Say you're planning to go to the market. Before you leave home you start visualizing, "Pears are

beautiful this time of year. Apples would be good too.” So when you get to the market and see the pears and apples, they appear beautiful because of your preconceptions.

Sense perception is like the population; consciousness is like the government. The government decides, “These people are good; those are bad.” The decision is made. The consciousness is like that. Our pre-conceptions decide ahead of time what objects are good or bad, so when the sense consciousness contacts those objects it sees them as good or bad. That is why I say that sense perception is foolish – it doesn’t have its own strength and discrimination.

Also, sense perception sees only the gross reality. It has no way of understanding totality. Modern science tries to understand things by looking at them with ever more powerful microscopes, but they can never penetrate their essence that way. Buddhism knows well that you can never understand emptiness in that way.

In meditation you learn control and how to eliminate the uncontrolled mind. What is it that makes you uncontrolled? It is your mind making conversation: “He’s like this; she’s like that. He says this; I don’t like it. She says that; I like it.” The mind is constantly reacting.

The way I look at it, an obsessed mind has two objects: the beautiful object of craving desire or the repulsive object of aversion. And the mind obsessed with either of these objects cannot move away from it. That means you are not free, not flexible. An obsessed mind is disturbed. Meditation teaches us to avoid the habit of reacting when an object of obsession appears.

Now, you may ask, what really is the benefit of awareness of your own consciousness as opposed to, say, awareness of a flower? Or your girlfriend or boyfriend? There is benefit in being aware of the nature of your consciousness because, unlike girlfriends, boyfriends, and flowers, consciousness itself has no notion of concrete self-existence. Therefore, the beauty of being aware of your own consciousness is that it leads to the breakdown of your heavy superstitious concepts and to the experience of great emptiness.

In order to solve our problems we need some experience. Intellectual “blah, blah” understanding is not enough. To break down concepts we need a way of gaining experience with our own minds. When we have had an experience we know we are really capable of solving our own problems and this encourages us: “I can do anything I want. I can really solve my problems.” From the Buddhist point of view, that is the start of human liberation.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*CONTINUITY OF MIND*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the breath.

Slowly bring awareness to your mind and the continual stream of thoughts that goes through it. Now, focus on the flow of memories stretching back over the last day, week, month, year, back into childhood. Feel the flow of mind like a continuous stream stretching back and back. Does it feel like there is a beginning? An end? Or does the mind seem to be a boundless stream of energy?. Just rest in this awareness of the continuity of mind. To end, bring your attention to the present and the sense of your body sitting on the cushion; the mind meditating. Make a determination to maintain awareness of the continuity of mind and dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.



*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*NATURE OF MIND*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the breath.

Slowly shift your attention from the breath to the mind itself. Let go of whatever thoughts are stirring in the mind and pay attention to the space between the thoughts. Notice that the thoughts come and go in the space of the mind, like clouds in the sky. Allow yourself to rest in that luminous spacious awareness. To end, bring your awareness back to the feeling of the body sitting on the cushion. Make a determination to release disturbing thoughts into spacious awareness and dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*Some people will look at these two teachings and conclude that Lord Buddha contradicted himself. One vehicle says no; the other says yes. There is no contradiction; it depends on the individual's mind. That is what's important. The consideration of individual need is a salient feature of Lord Buddha's teaching.*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

# *UNDERSTANDING THE TEACHINGS*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

## *HINAYANA, MAHAYANA AND THE MEANING OF YANA*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

The entire Buddhist path to enlightenment can be divided into two *yanas*, the Hinayana and the Mahayana. Sometimes people refer to three *yanas*. They're not wrong, but generally we start with the two – Hinayana and Mahayana – and then subdivide the Mahayana into Paramitayana and Tantrayana. Therefore, the Mahayana comprises two vehicles.

What is a *yana*? It is a vehicle – something that carries you from where you are to where you want to go, that leads you somewhere. Boats and airplanes are vehicles, but they are external vehicles. A *yana* is an internal vehicle, a mental attitude. For example, if you want to go to New York, the desire to be there is your vehicle; that is what leads you to New York. Similarly, a *yana* is that which leads you to your spiritual destination.

Actually, *yana* is easy to understand. We have been following some kind of vehicle since we were born. The desire to drink your mother's milk to preserve your body is a vehicle. This kind of desire allows your life to develop in an organic way. Getting an education, for example, is also a function of your vehicle.

When you follow the Hinayana, you are mainly concerned with solving your own problems. You want to liberate yourself from your own confusion, and understanding the root cause of your suffering, you enter this path of self-realization. We call this kind of attitude Hinayana.

Some people interpret Hinayana as some kind of second-rate philosophy. You will often find books putting down the Hinayana as a philosophical doctrine. That is a mistaken attitude. Look at us Tibetan Buddhists. We are always talking about Mahayana and bodhichitta, but if we were to check our minds closely, we would find so much self-cherishing and “me, me, me, me, me” that – forget about calling ourselves Mahayanists – we wouldn’t even qualify as Hinayanists.

Hinayana and Mahayana are not philosophies or doctrines. Of course, you can give philosophical interpretations of these paths, but their real meaning is psychological; they have to do with states of mind. Realization is not philosophy. Yana is not to be found in a book; yana is mental attitude. If you have tremendous concern for your own problems and an intense desire to free yourself from them completely and attain individual liberation, or nirvana, your attitude is Hinayana.

Things may not be as simple as we think. We believe we are following a spiritual path. We think we are meditators, but if we really check carefully, we will see that following the path to liberation is not an easy job. First and foremost, we have to understand what the root of samsara is.

Even in this life we do so many things to be happy, but nearly always end up miserable. We go to the East seeking religion and end up miserable. We go to a center of this religion hoping to find relief and again end up miserable; we go to a center of that religion hoping it will solve our problems and end up miserable yet again. We run from one spiritual trip to another and always end up miserable. Then we get fed up with religion and decide to be free, just like normal people are. We party, we go out drinking and dancing, we have this girlfriend, that boyfriend, one partner after another, but all we get is more and more confusion. This is samsara, the circle of endlessly substituting one sense object for another, never finding satisfaction; changing, changing, changing, but it's basically always the same thing.

Actually, we are like children. Children run from one thing to another, easily losing interest, easily distracted. We think children are, well, childish. But if we stop for a moment and cast a penetrating eye at our own trips, we will see how childish we ourselves are. Forget about past and future lives; even in this life, how many trips have we been on? How many vehicles have we taken since we were born up until now? I can guarantee it is thousands upon thousands. And if you check honestly, you will find that practically all of them have ended in disillusionment, with no satisfactory conclusion. What do I mean by satisfactory conclusion? I mean a clean clear conviction, an indestructible determination that, "Yes, this is right for me."

To enter the Hinayana vehicle, the least you should have is a realization of renunciation of samsara. That is actually an incredible accomplishment. It is very rare to find someone who has that realization. That is why when I explain the Hinayana path you should not think I am putting it down. Reaching the level where you have entered the Hinayana path is a very high achievement.

Certain Hinayana schools, like those in Thailand and Sri Lanka, require the monks to adhere to a very strict code of discipline. Monks cannot look women in the face and they certainly can't touch them, not even to shake hands. If a monk touches a woman he has automatically broken a rule. In many ways, it is a good rule, but from the Mahayana point of view, it actually depends on the mind; it depends on the attitude with which you touch the woman. If you touch her with a mind of grasping attachment, the only result of which is more conflict in your minds, that is wrong. But if you touch her out of compassion, to benefit her in some way, we believe that is not only acceptable but necessary.

Some people will look at these two teachings and conclude that Lord Buddha contradicted himself. One vehicle says no; the other says yes. There is no contradiction; it depends on the individual's mind. That is what is important. The consideration of individual need is a salient feature of Lord Buddha's teaching; that is why Buddhism accepts the validity of all other religions. We

have no problem with Christians, Jews, Hindus, or Muslims. We respect them all. Different philosophies and doctrines are needed so that the widest possible variety of individuals can develop on the spiritual path. Different people have different levels of mind. One path isn't going to suit everybody.



## *TURNING THE WHEEL OF DHARMA*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

The Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma three times. “Turning of the wheel” refers to relaying specific sets of teachings that gave rise to realized disciples, who then taught their own disciples, and so on in a continuous stream until the present day. These three turnings of the wheel are the three main groups of teachings that Buddha gave over the course of his life.

This Buddha first turned of the wheel of Dharma in Sarnath, India, when he taught the Four Noble Truths. At this time, the Buddha taught dependent-arising, the profound view of reality that all phenomena arise from their respective causes and conditions. The first turning of the wheel also asserted that, while things exist in dependence on causes and conditions, there is some inherent nature to reality. Buddha gave this teaching to suit the disposition of those disciples who might be in danger of falling into the extreme of nihilism: believing that if things exist dependently with no real essence to them, then nothing exists and therefore, all action is meaningless. This teaching formed the basis of what are referred to as the Hinayana schools of Buddhism.

Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma the second time at Vulture’s Peak in Rajgir, India. Here Lord Buddha taught the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, the Prajñāparamita. They give the definitive presentation of the nature of reality as emptiness according to the Madhyamaka Prasāngika School of Buddhism, to which Tibetan Buddhism primarily ascribes. From this second turning of the wheel, a vast number of teachings arose establishing the Mahayana path and view, in particular the teachings of the Middle

Way schools that assert that phenomena do not exist inherently.

Needless to say, there were many questions that arose after the second turning. What did the Buddha really mean: do things exist or not? In order to clarify these questions, the Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma a third time at Vaishali. Here he gave the teachings recorded in the Sutra Unraveling the Thought (*Samdhinirmochana Sutra*), explaining that some things truly exist and some things do not. He explained that one needs to examine his teachings carefully to determine what is meant to be taken literally and what is meant to be taken figuratively. From this turning of the wheel arose the Mind Only or Chittamatra School.

The Hinayana tradition of practice and philosophy was primarily embraced in countries such as Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka and is most commonly known as “Theravada Buddhism,” because of its reliance on the Buddhist scriptures as they were written down in the Pali language. In Pali, *thera* meaning “old” and *veda* means “scripture.” The Mahayana tradition spread into Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Viet Nam, and Japan. It spread to Mongolia and even to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Buddhism was adapted by each culture in its own way. Of course, some aspects of Buddhist philosophy and practice were emphasized more than others depending on the dispositions of each culture, and not all aspects of Buddhist teachings spread to all cultures, but the essence of the teaching was never lost.

### *THE THREE BASKETS OF TEACHINGS*

The Buddha's teachings are also categorized or grouped into three “baskets,” known as the Tripitaka: the basket of Vinaya, the basket of Sutra, and the basket of the teachings on Abhidharma. Teachings on Vinaya are related to morality and the specific codes of conduct for different levels of vows, the higher training in conduct. The Sutra basket includes those discourses of the Buddha which relate to the higher training of concentration. Finally, Abhidharma includes those teachings related to metaphysics and the higher training of wisdom. It is said that the Buddha gave 84,000

different teachings, according to the varied dispositions of his many disciples; there is something suitable for everyone.

### *TIBETAN BUDDHIST LINEAGES*

Every tradition of Buddhism has its unique lineage – the line of teachers and disciples that stretch in an unbroken sequence back to the source, Shakyamuni Buddha. Buddhism initially came to Tibet through a special saint named Padmasambhava – commonly known as Guru Rinpoche – who was invited by the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen to come to Tibet from India around the eighth century. Over the years, a number of practice lineages developed in Tibet. There are now considered to be four main sects of Tibetan Buddhism, each with its own lineage of teachers. These four sects are known as the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug traditions.

All of the Tibetan traditions are Mahayana; they all teach that the motivation for practice is to become fully enlightened for the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings. They differ slightly in their practices and in the way in which they present their teachings and philosophy, but they have many areas where they overlap and complement one another. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is of the Gelug tradition; however, he takes teachings from lineage holders of all four Tibetan traditions and always stresses a Rimé approach – one that focuses on finding common ground and appreciating the unique qualities of each tradition – rather than on the differences between them.

*Faith alone never stops problems; understanding knowledge-wisdom always does. Lord Buddha himself said that belief in Buddha was dangerous; that instead of just believing in something, people should use their minds to try to discover their own true nature.*

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

## *THE STRUCTURE AND QUALITIES OF THE LAM-RIM*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

The teaching on the lam-rim, or the graduated path, is set up as a graduated practice for one person to achieve enlightenment. The lam-rim contains all the 84,000 teachings shown by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. It is a teaching that was expounded by the great propagators Nagarjuna and Asanga. It is very profound advice, the essence of the incomparable Lama Atisha and also Lama Tsongkhapa – as if the essence of their understanding had been taken out.

In the lam-rim teaching, in order to show reverence of Dharma, the qualities of the authors are explained, particularly those of Lama Atisha. Lama Atisha wrote the first lam-rim text, *Lamp on the Path of Enlightenment*. It doesn't mean that there was some teaching missing until Lama Atisha came to Tibet. There were complete teachings, but there wasn't such a teaching as the lam-rim, which shows how a person can practice the three vehicles – the teaching on the lesser vehicle path, the paramita path and the path of secret mantra – without confusion, in order to achieve enlightenment.

Lama Atisha wrote *Lamp on the Path of Enlightenment*, which contains all the teachings of the three vehicles revealed by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, because of the confusion happening in Tibet at that time: those who practiced sutra thought that they could not practice tantra and they criticized it, and those who practiced tantra criticized sutra. They found it contradictory. The

king, Lha Lama Yeshe Ö, felt these problems were unbearable, so he went to find gold to make offerings to Lama Atisha and invite him to Tibet. He was caught and put in prison by an irreligious king, who confiscated all the gold that he had found. The king gave up his life to invite Lama Atisha to revive the Buddhadharma in Tibet. He passed away in prison. He asked his nephew to take the gold and invite Lama Atisha.

The nephew didn't ask Lama Atisha to give tantra teachings; he didn't request teachings on how to fly or to make miracles. He requested Lama Atisha to give teachings on refuge and karma – basic things, the root of happiness. He requested the essence of the Dharma. He explained what was happening in Tibet to Lama Atisha, and in response, Lama Atisha wrote the *Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment*.

Any lam-rim teaching that is set up on the basis of the *Lamp* on the Path is extremely effective to pacify the mind, which is under the control of delusions. Even though we may become interested in other extensive philosophical teachings, we need to actually know the shortcomings of our delusions and to have fear of creating negative karma. We need to receive actual advice that is easy to understand about how to control the mind.

When we recognize delusions and their shortcomings, when we realize the difficulty of attaining a perfect human rebirth and when we realize impermanence and death, we see that we have an opportunity, and we feel encouraged to practice pacifying the disturbing thoughts.

The principal lam-rim text in our tradition, the Gelug, was written by Lama Tsongkhapa, the crown jewel of the learned, highly realized yogis of Tibet. Tsongkhapa practiced complete, extensive listening and perfect meditation on the whole teaching of Buddha, both sutra and tantra. He found infallible realizations of the whole graduated path to enlightenment and performed extensive works for the teachings and for uncountable numbers of sentient beings. Like when the sun rises and gives much happiness to the human beings by dispelling the darkness, the teaching of Tsong-

khapa is like the rising sun dispelling the ignorance of uncountable numbers of sentient beings. It dispelled numberless sentient beings' ignorance of the path to liberation and guided them to temporary and ultimate happiness. Even though we present day meditators and practitioners cannot see and receive teachings from Lama Tsongkhapa, by listening to, studying, reflecting, and meditating on them, we are able to have correct understanding of the path, to practice correctly and gain correct realization.

The lam-rim explains how to live everyday life in order to make the actions of body, speech, and mind meaningful, to benefit ourselves and other sentient beings. It is so incredibly beneficial for gaining immediate peace, especially when there are problems and sufferings in everyday life. For those who have received many teachings and who know the meditation techniques, there is no question that as long as we put the lam-rim into action, it does stop problems, especially in circumstances where problems are nearly arising or when we are already caught in the problems.

The lam-rim begins by explaining the qualities of the authors and the lineage lamas. When we understand this, we see that they are pure holy beings. Also, by knowing their biographies, we know how to practice Dharma. When I asked His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche how to practice Dharma, Rinpoche gave a very simple answer: you just follow what those lamas practiced. It is very simple. This is a very effective answer. It contains the whole path to enlightenment, because those lineage lamas of the lam-rim have generated the whole path, from beginning to end. Their actual experience of the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment gives us great inspiration, because they give us examples of others who have practiced and have achievement.

Next comes qualities of the lam-rim teaching itself and then advice on the correct way of explaining the teaching and the way of listening to it. In this way, the teaching becomes extremely beneficial for the disciples; the teaching goes inside the heart. It benefits the disciple, just like medicine. By taking medicine as the doctor advises, the patient recovers from the disease. When

we practice in accordance with the lam-rim, we recover from the disease of the disturbing thoughts. In that way, we are able to approach liberation.

The actual advice of the lam-rim teaching starts with the root of the path, the way of relying on or devoting oneself to the virtuous friend, or teacher. Then come the graduated paths of the lower capable being, the middle capable being and the higher capable being.

The beginning of the practice is the graduated path of the lower capable being, the meditations on the perfect human rebirth – the freedoms and richnesses of the human body, how the human body is precious. Then, the beginning of the practice of holy Dharma is the meditation on karma.

By practicing the teachings of the middle capable being, one accomplishes the Eightfold Noble Path, which is contained in the three higher trainings: moral conduct, concentration, and great insight. To achieve the cessation of true suffering and the true cause of suffering, to achieve liberation for oneself, one should practice this path.

Wisdom is the wisdom realizing shunyata, or emptiness. That is the direct remedy for eliminating the root of suffering, the root of the confused mind – being ignorant of the meaning of the absolute nature of “I.” Although the way “I” exists is by being merely labeled on these aggregates, it appears that it exists from its own side. We perceive the “I” completely in the wrong way and then we cling or grasp onto that “I” that exists from its own side. Being ignorant means not perceiving the absolute nature of the “I”, which is empty of independence; not realizing that that which is dependent is in fact dependent. The wisdom realizing voidness is the direct remedy that cuts off the true suffering and the true cause of suffering.

Even in this middle capable being path, just having the wisdom realizing emptiness is not sufficient, even though that is the direct remedy to cut off ignorance, the root of all suffering. We have to develop this wisdom realizing emptiness together with method:

the thought of renouncing samsara. How do we renounce samsara? By realizing how these aggregates – the mind and body – are in the nature of suffering. Also, there is the method of moral conduct. You see, by practicing wisdom and method together, we are able to accomplish the cessation of suffering. This is liberation, or nirvana.

The higher capable being's path contains both the general Mahayana path and the particular path of secret mantra. We develop the three principles of the path to enlightenment in the mind. We practice renunciation, developing bodhichitta, and emptiness, and then practice the two stages of tantra.

Tantra starts with the generation stage. By practicing these stages with the wisdom of emptiness, this practice becomes the remedy to samsara. Then there is the second stage that can be explained in five divisions: seclusion from body, seclusion from speech, seclusion from mind, illusory body, actual clear light and union.

On the sutra path, the mind concentrates on emptiness with a gross wisdom. In tantra, the mind that concentrates on emptiness is the subtle mind. Through this seclusion from the gross impure mind, we achieve the illusory body. The illusory body has two types, the impure and the pure illusory body. It takes three countless great eons to accumulate the merit in the sutra path to attain enlightenment, but this practitioner of tantra who has the impure illusory body is able to finish accumulating all that merit in that life. Then he achieves the clear light.

The clear light has two stages: after the impure illusory body there is the clear light of meaning. Then, by training the mind in that, we achieve the pure illusory body. Then again we meditate on the clear light and achieve the unification; the clear light and the illusory body are unified. Then again we meditate on clear light, the vajra concentration, and we cut off the subtle dual view, which interferes with the achievement of omniscient mind. The absolute nature of the stream of consciousness at that time is completely pure, not even obscured by the subtle dual view. That is the actual enlightenment: the cessation of the obscurations. That

is called great liberation. The consciousness is able to see all the three times (past, present and future), is able to read every single thought of sentient beings all at the same time, and is able to see all their different personalities, different capabilities and levels of intelligence, and every single method that fits each sentient being. Therefore, the Buddha, that enlightened being, has perfect power to guide sentient beings. He does this effortlessly.

When the moon rises, even though there is only one moon, wherever there is water – oceans, streams and even dew drops on the grass – there are billions, uncountable numbers of reflections of that one moon appearing. Even though the moon does not have the motivation, “I will reflect in all the bodies of water,” all the reflections automatically happen. Similarly, the Buddha, without any effort, automatically completes the work for sentient beings by manifesting in various forms, hundreds of thousands of different forms, even to guide just one sentient being. With various means, he reveals the teachings as is fitting or gives material things in various ways. Whatever fits: being a butcher, being a king, being a minister, being a judge. He is not only a Dharma teacher. He can manifest as a crazy person, a prostitute, or even as a spirit. There are many ways to lead sentient beings to enlightenment.

We also can achieve all this by understanding emptiness. With the support of method and wisdom, we can achieve the dharma-kaya and the rupakaya. This is how we have the possibility to achieve enlightenment in a brief lifetime – within a few years.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*THE LAM-RIM*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the lam-rim.

Consider the three scopes of beings and their respective motivations for practice: a happy future life, personal freedom from all suffering, and full enlightenment for the benefit of others. Compare these with your own approach to life and your spiritual journey. What motivates you as you go about your everyday activities? Why have you embarked on a spiritual path? Finally, reflect on how the lam-rim contains essential instruction for every step on the path. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just by seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*The foundation of all good qualities is the kind  
and perfect, pure Guru;  
Correct devotion to him is the root of the path.  
By clearly seeing this and applying great effort,  
Please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

*THE IMPORTANCE OF A  
QUALIFIED TEACHER*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

## *RELYING ON A QUALIFIED TEACHER*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

Establishing a proper relationship with a teacher is a preliminary to the actual body of the lam-rim. A word often associated with “teacher” is the Sanskrit word *guru*. *Gu* is darkness and *Ru* means light, so the guru is one who illuminates knowledge by helping us overcome ignorance or darkness. The Tibetan word often used for “teacher” is *lama* or one who is heavy, meaning heavy with realizations and positive qualities. A spiritual teacher should be a heavyweight in matters of spirituality. They are realized beings who have had a direct experience of the nature of reality.

For people in Western countries, the word “guru” can be uncomfortable. It evokes images of people who blindly follow a charismatic leader, only to find themselves in trouble. Many of us have witnessed new age spiritualities with false teachers that have arisen and grown into cults. “False teachers” are those who are not part of a direct lineage passed down from a realized being, a lineage that has methods that have stood the test of time. Rather than leading people on a path to freedom from suffering, false teachers usually have some new technique for how to get what we want in this life. They often seem to be motivated by greed, pride, and power.

We have to be careful about who we take as a teacher when it comes to spiritual matters. For example, when deciding which university to attend, we thoroughly research the different universities, their teachers, types of students they attract, and their reputation. It is the same when it comes to finding a music teacher or a personal trainer; we check up and get some recommendations before we proceed.

We need teachers for many things. When looking for a spiritual teacher, it is of the utmost importance that we do our research. This is a being whose help you are enlisting for the most essential matters of life. If you decide to walk a spiritual path in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, finding a teacher and your relationship with your teacher is one of the most important parts of the path.

### *QUALITIES OF A TEACHER*

What are the qualities you want in a spiritual teacher? First of all, the teacher should know more than you do. They should also embody good ethical conduct, i.e. not harm others. They should care about others more than themselves; you can sense their natural love and compassion. In addition, a qualified teacher is not motivated by fame, wealth, or reputation.

In addition to this, a good spiritual teacher is enthusiastic to teach and is a talented, skillful speaker. They are extremely concerned about the welfare of their students and are tireless in their efforts to help others. They have skill in meditation. Also, if they have not had a direct perception of emptiness – which is rare to find and hard to discern – they should at least demonstrate a solid intellectual understanding of this topic.

### *RESPECT AND DEVOTION*

In Western society, our relationship with teachers is a bit complicated. Because of our cultural conditioning, many of us value the attitude of questioning authority. As a result, we often disrespect the figures of authority in our lives such as our parents or our teachers. We spend much more time looking for the faults in our teachers than valuing their qualities. However, if you recognize that someone has special ability to benefit you, to help develop your mind, you will naturally develop some respect for them. You want to learn what they have to teach. You are confident that their advice can benefit you, and so you want to put their advice into practice and experience the fruits of that effort. You also feel that you can share your struggles with them and that they will be able

to help. If you meet someone that gives you that kind of spiritual confidence, who seems able and willing to impart information to you that will help you uncover the goodness in your heart and reduce negative habits that keep you bound in suffering ways of experiencing life, you will naturally cherish that person and take care of that relationship.

If you think you have found a qualified teacher, go slowly. Ask a few questions and see if their responses resonate with you. Get to know some of their students, see if you like them and relate well to them. Then, consider asking the teacher for a type of practice to do. Do the practice and check: does it move your mind to a more compassionate, wise place? If so, this may be a relationship you wish to pursue.

What does it mean to devote ourselves to a spiritual teacher? For us, the word "devote" conjures up images of subservience. Buddhist teachings translate devotion into three main activities: making offerings, being of service, and following our teacher's advice.

Traditionally, Buddhist teachers are not paid for their service; they offer the teachings freely and their students show their appreciation by making offerings to them. In modern times, because this custom is not part of our culture, you will find variations on this theme. A deeper sign of appreciation is offering your time or skills to be of assistance to them in some way. The highest sign of devotion to your teacher is listening to their teachings or asking them for advice and putting it into practice. Once you have fulfilled the advice of your teacher, or at least tried, you then report back to your teacher about your experience. If you receive an instruction with which you take issue, you can politely explain that you do not feel able to put that instruction into practice and why.

Sometimes it is difficult to follow a particular advice, but the spiritual teacher's role is to benefit you, not make you comfortable. Some of the assignments I was given by my teachers seemed to be great challenges, but in my heart I knew they were exactly what I needed. After following the advice, often I experienced a very positive result and that deepened my faith and devotion.

Devoting oneself properly to a qualified guru is the quick path to enlightenment. All they care about is your well-being and getting you out of suffering as quickly as possible. Their only wish is to introduce you to a lasting happiness you have never known.

## *THE NEED FOR A QUALIFIED TEACHER*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

There are many people who say that you don't need a teacher to receive enlightenment. They say it is enough to buy a lot of books from the store and meditate as the books explain. However, even if you have the entire library of Buddhadharma texts, without depending on the teacher, you won't even develop the right intellectual understanding of the words. Even if a text is written correctly, it is possible to develop a wrong understanding. This is not the mistake of the book, but of your mind.

To receive the realizations of the gradual path to enlightenment, besides reading the texts and understanding them, you need explanation from a teacher. You have to receive the meditation techniques from a teacher with experience. The Buddha said, "The boat cannot cross without the person who holds the oars. No matter how much knowledge is completed, without the guru we cannot gain release from samsara." Here the Buddha is saying that even if you have all understanding of sutra and tantra, like having a library within your mind, this is like having a boat but not having an oarsman who knows how to cross the ocean and reach the other side. To receive enlightenment, you need to follow the perfect teacher who can show perfectly the whole gradual path to enlightenment, the gradual path of the lower, middle, and higher capable beings.

There are a certain number of qualifications for a teacher who gives Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings. His own mind must be subdued and he must have the fundamental realizations that prepare one to practice the Vajrayana path: the realization of bo-

dhichitta, the wisdom realizing the absolute true nature, and the mind renouncing samsara. Then, on the basis of having perfect understanding of the Vajrayana path, he needs to have perfect understanding of many Vajrayana practices.

For the Mahayana teacher, there are ten qualifications and they are all based on the mind being subdued. Even the teacher who shows the lesser vehicle path, the Hinayana, must have actions of body, speech, and mind that are subdued by living in the training of moral conduct. If his actions are not subdued, how can he subdue others? Not only that, but he must also have the experience of calm abiding meditation, having control over mental distractions. The qualified teacher must also have the right wisdom realizing emptiness. These are the fundamental qualifications.

If the teacher doesn't have right intellectual understanding of emptiness, he won't be able to turn the disciple away from the root of suffering and the disciple will not realize the absolute true nature of the self. The disciple won't be able to escape from the ignorance not knowing the true nature of the self. Therefore, in order to be free from suffering and to receive ultimate happiness, the teacher that you are seeking and trying to follow must have at least the perfect intellectual understanding of emptiness.

If a teacher only emphasizes one's own nirvana as the goal and does not emphasize that it is more important to work for the happiness of others, to take care of other sentient beings more than ourselves, then you will not enter into the Mahayana path and the Dharma that you practice will not become a cause of receiving enlightenment. It will only be the cause of receiving nirvana, the release from samsara. However, a teacher who doesn't have the understanding of the root of suffering and the absolute nature of the self can't even help you reach nirvana.

If a teacher emphasizes that to work for the happiness of this life is more important than the happiness of future lives, the disciple is misled. The disciple will never make preparation to have a better rebirth and therefore, the actions of the disciple do not become Dharma. The teacher makes the disciple create the cause

of suffering instead of happiness.

If you are going to make a block print, then the model has to be perfect. If the model itself is imperfect, the picture won't be perfect. This is why it is important to examine the teacher. He or she is a model, an example for your life. How much pure Dharma you can practice depends a lot on who you copy, the teacher. These are the fundamental things to know, in order to check up.

The teacher also has to check up before accepting the disciple. The disciple has to be open minded, intelligent, and willing to make effort. If the teacher is perfect and the disciple is a right receptacle, it is like putting tea in a clean cup with no holes; that disciple can attain enlightenment so easily.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*THE TEACHER*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the teacher.

Reflect on the various skills and wisdom you have acquired throughout your life and the teachers who made it possible.

Then reflect on the qualities you need in a spiritual teacher to help secure your happiness of future lives, freedom from all suffering, and full enlightenment. If you feel you have met such a teacher, rejoice. If you have not, make a sincere prayer to soon find him/her and to be able to devote yourself in the most beneficial way.

Finally, reflect on the necessary qualities of a disciple. Do you have these qualities? If not, consider how you might develop them. Imagine the powerful combination of a fully qualified disciple meeting a fully qualified spiritual teacher and devoting themselves properly to that teacher. Rest in the awareness of this powerful potential. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.



# *WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*Understanding that the precious freedom of this  
rebirth is found only once,  
Is greatly meaningful and is difficult to find again,  
Please bless me to generate the mind that unceasingly,  
Day and night, takes its essence*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *FULFILLING LIFE'S PURPOSE*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

How can we make best use of this perfect human rebirth, the precious human body that we have received? How can we make it most beneficial, not only for ourselves but for those other most precious, extremely important living beings? Just like us, numberless other living beings, each of whom is as equally precious as we feel ourselves to be, seek only happiness and dislike any suffering. How can we make our lives productive for their sake? This is the main thing we should be asking ourselves.

If we take care of others, work for their happiness, we are automatically taking care of ourselves. Trying to make others happy is the best way of loving ourselves. Similarly, if we harm others, we harm ourselves. Harming others does not bring us peace and happiness, only misery and grief now and in the future. Bringing happiness to others is the best way of bringing happiness to ourselves; it follows naturally. Things we do that bring happiness to others have a beneficial effect on our own minds.

Conversely, if we act toward others with negative motivation and give them harm, such actions leave negative imprints on our mental continuum. These imprints later manifest as undesirable appearances. When our senses come into contact with these, unpleasant feelings arise. This is the evolution of our life's problems; this is how they start. Their origin is in our own minds, with our negative thoughts. The end result is the suffering we experience, in this life or in future ones.

Healthy actions – positive actions, actions that benefit others, actions done with compassion, with sincerity, which bring happi-

ness to others – leave positive imprints on our mental continuum. These manifest as desirable appearances. When our senses contact these, pleasant feelings, comfort, success – all the enjoyable experiences we wish for and desire – result. This is the evolution of happiness, all the way up to enlightenment. Happy daily lives, pleasure and enjoyment – from now until enlightenment – result from positive thinking, positive intention, positive actions.

That is why the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, often says that cherishing others is the best way of cherishing ourselves. His Holiness calls this wise selfishness because by cherishing others and refraining from giving them harm, all our wishes for happiness, both now and in the future, will be fulfilled. Experience has proven that not only temporary happiness, but even enlightenment – the highest, complete attainment of peace and bliss – results from serving others. In fact, the more we dedicate ourselves to others, the quicker and easier our own happiness arises. This is the natural evolution of happiness.

This means living a life of compassion. Therefore, the way to make the best use of our life is by living with compassion and wisdom. Compassion alone is not enough. We also need to develop wisdom. How do we develop wisdom? Not from pills or a special diet or by transplanting somebody else's brain into our head. We can develop wisdom only through our own meditation practice. Wisdom comes from listening to the right teachings and reflecting and meditating on them.

Therefore, we need to receive unmistaken teachings, gain unmistaken understanding, perform unmistaken practice and thus attain unmistaken realizations. This is extremely important. In this way we do not waste our lives and can realize the potential of our lives, which is as limitless as the sky. All living beings wish only for happiness and complete freedom from suffering. The purpose of our lives is to benefit them all, as extensively as possible.

Furthermore, we must learn how to analyze and meditate. As simply reading a prescription cannot cure a disease – one needs to

take the medicine – mere intellectual understanding of the teachings is not enough. We have to practice.

In order to put an end to all our suffering – the cycle of old age, sickness, death and rebirth – we need to cure our sick minds. We need to make a complete recovery from the mental illness of the disturbing emotional thoughts, the delusions, which cause all these unwanted experiences. For our own ultimate peace, let alone that of others, we have to do this.

We have enjoyed temporary happiness numberless times. There is not a single new temporary happiness left for us to experience. What is new is the great peace that results from cessation of all suffering, death and rebirth; the ultimate happiness that arises through complete cessation of the true cause of suffering – ignorance, the disturbing thoughts, and the actions motivated by these unhealthy minds. We have never experienced this before.

Since beginningless time we have been forced to circle through the realms of death and rebirth again and again, repeatedly experiencing the whole samsaric package of life problems over and over again. We have never experienced the end of this: ultimate, everlasting happiness, the complete cessation of all problems.

And achieving this great result, which we attain by actualizing the steps of the path, is just a one-time job. Once we realize everlasting happiness, the cessation of all suffering, we can never suffer again, because the seed of life's problems, which we have planted in our mental continuum, has been completely purified. Therefore, there is no reason to ever suffer again. Once we have followed the path to its end, we won't ever have to do it again. Once we attain the goal, it lasts for ever. Consequently, dedicating your life to this is extremely important. It is the most worthwhile thing you can do with your life.

*WHY APPRECIATING OUR HUMAN  
LIFE IS SO ESSENTIAL*  
*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

Lending meaning to life entails cultivating wholesome self-esteem, an attribute often lacking in developed countries. While physical suffering is generally greater in poorer countries, mental suffering appears to be more intense in Western society. In developed countries, we seem to suffer a great deal from mental anxiety or mental discomfort. Mental disease manifests in many different ways as stress, because people work too hard and there's so much competition. People are stressed that they may lose their job. Because we live in a consumer society, perhaps we have over-extended ourselves with all of our purchases, our monthly bills, or our mortgages, and so we become slaves to our job in order to pay for all of the material things we want in life. However, no matter how many things we get, we seem to always need more. We feel we never have enough. Sometimes people get depressed, sensing they are caught in the treadmill of life, but they don't know how to stop it. They feel under constant pressure. So to drown out the mental disease, people further bury themselves in their work, or go on a shopping spree, further exacerbating the situation.

Much of this behavior contributes to a sense of low self-esteem wherein we do not feel good about ourselves. "What is wrong with me? Why am I not happy?" We run these tapes through our mind: "I'm not good enough. I don't deserve to have this great job. I don't deserve to have a healthy relationship. Nobody loves

me. I never do anything right.” Some of the most apparently confident, successful, and beautiful people you know play this same tape. Incredibly successful people suffer from low self-esteem. It's like the plague of Western civilization.

There was a conference awhile back with His Holiness the Dalai Lama that included a number of Western teachers and eminent psychologists, very successful people in the spiritual field. One of the teachers asked His Holiness a question about how to overcome low self-esteem. His Holiness had an interpreter and, suddenly, they began dialoguing back and forth in Tibetan. It seemed that the interpreter was trying to explain to His Holiness about this word, this condition of low self-esteem. At first, it appeared that His Holiness did not fully understand the term as there was no word for it in the Tibetan language. He couldn't understand how people could feel this way.

Finally, he understood what was being asked. He looked around and asked the questioner, who was a very famous American psychologist and author, “Do you feel this way?” The man replied, “Yes.” His Holiness' eyes widened and then he asked another teacher there if s/he also had this emotion, and that person also replied yes. He asked others if they suffered from this and they also responded yes. Everyone in the room agreed that each of them had experienced this feeling. His Holiness was a little shocked. Then he looked at them and exclaimed, “But why? You have buddha-nature!”

It's an interesting dilemma we face that we experience these feelings of not being good enough when we have buddha-nature, this potential of infinite goodness, wisdom, and loving-kindness. You can check it out for yourself. If you fall under the influence of low self-esteem, and these feelings arise in yourself, try an exercise: instead of giving in to the same old pattern, first recognize what is happening, then try to create a new pattern by saying to yourself over and over again, like a mantra: “I have buddha-nature, I am good enough.” Say it again and again letting the phrase wash over you, allowing yourself to believe it as much as you are able. A sec-

ond helpful method is to spend time reflecting and being happy, rejoicing at all the good that you do. There are many things you do that are helpful to others and yourself, but somehow, because of low self-esteem, we are conditioned to focus on what we haven't done or mistakes we have made. We tend to focus on what is wrong with us and give little air time to what we do right. With other beings, we have the wish to help them, to encourage and uplift them, so why not with ourselves? As a third helpful technique, when the negative story about yourself gets going, ask yourself, "Is this accurate?" Battling low self-esteem is one of our great challenges, which is why the topic of appreciating our human lives is so essential.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the precious human rebirth.

Using the points discussed above and your own experience, reflect on the incredible opportunity that your life affords you. Allow a deep appreciation for your life to arise and hold the mind in that awareness. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.



*DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*This life is as impermanent as a water bubble;  
Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.  
After death, just like a shadow follows the body,  
The results of black and white karma follow.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *FACING THE INEVITABLE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

Death and impermanence is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism. Many of the teachings contained in the lower and the middle scopes of the lam-rim deal with heavy topics such as death and suffering, and some people find it a bit depressing. I encourage you to keep in mind that there are four Noble Truths. Take heart that these sufferings do have a remedy.

Fully appreciating that we are going to die motivates us to live our lives more fully. You are missing a great opportunity if you do not think about death every day, or do not consider death at all in your life. You can end up wasting a lot of time. Initially, it seems morbid to think about death, but once you understand that death is the inevitable destination for our lives, it can deeply inspire your life. It puts things into perspective like nothing else can. By remembering death and reflecting on it daily, your practice is invigorated and you lead a more meaningful life. That is the point of delving into death.

Try this simple meditation as you wake up in the morning and are still lying in bed. As you begin to open your eyes, slowly become aware of your surroundings. At this point, reflect, "This is my last day; tonight at six o'clock, I am dead." Put a little note next to your bed to help you remember. Every morning remember that you are going to die today. You must feel it as much as possible.

I know this practice may seem shocking, but no one has died from doing this meditation every day. Think, "I get one more day. I am still alive, which is fantastic; and I have one more day to practice. I have one more day to make my life as meaningful as

possible." Now, what do you want to do? Many people will say, "I am not going to work." However, you do have to engage practically in your reality. That means going about all the business you would normally do on any given day. The real question is how do you want to go through the day: with a good attitude or a bad attitude? Those are your choices. Do you want to have a good day or a bad day today? It is up to you.

We have all heard stories of people who had near death experiences. The majority of them radically changed their lives when they recovered. They found meaningful livelihoods and often mention the importance of helping others and giving love to those around them. This is almost universal. If you truly thought your death were imminent, how would that affect your relationships? How bothered would you be by things that irritate you now?

When problems encroach into our lives, most of us get very involved and make a big deal of them. However, people who know they are dying are less concerned with the myriad trivial problems of daily life. Again, this does not mean you forego participation in life as needed or when it is beneficial, but if you are going to die today, do you need to waste time in hurtful gossip at your workplace? Will you drive like a jerk on your last day or will you realize "I have a chance to do something kind while driving, so why not let this person get in front of me? If this is one of the last things I will do with my car, what will it be?" How much television will you watch today, on your last day? Think of extending some kindness to the difficult coworker, because it could be the last time you will see him or her. While this might seem like a sweet superficial exercise, the truth is that one day will be your last day. You don't know which day will be your last; why not today?

One benefit of doing this practice every day is that when something does suddenly happen and you find yourself dying and on your way to another rebirth, it will be less shocking. You will have fewer regrets because you will know that you lived your life to the best of your capacity; taking every advantage of the opportunity of your precious human life, helping others and not getting upset about trivial things.

### *THE NINE-POINT DEATH MEDITATION*

A more traditional approach for gaining a realization about death is a meditation known as the nine-point death meditation. Tibetan Buddhist texts provide us with a meditation blueprint on death that includes three main headings, each with three subtopics. Most of us would agree that we are going to die; we have some intellectual understanding of this. However, we have no experience of it. By doing analytical meditation on these points, you bring your intellectual understanding to a deeper level until it becomes a realization, and then your life begins to change. You stop wasting time and you devote yourself to spiritual practice: to helping others, cleaning up your negative behavior patterns, enhancing your positive qualities, and developing your wisdom and compassion.

The three main headings are: first, death is certain; second, the time of death is uncertain; and third, the only thing that will benefit you at the death time is your spiritual practice.

### *DEATH IS CERTAIN*

Everybody dies; there is no way to avoid the death of this body. Think of all the powerful people in the world who have died. The richest people in the world could not buy their way out of death. Strong people could not resist death. There is nowhere to run and hide from death. Saints and holy people could not prevent death, even those who had miraculous powers. Even the Buddha died. If the Buddha could not prevent his own death, how are you going to avoid it? Within a hundred years, everyone you know in your life will be gone, including yourself.

Every moment you are alive, you draw closer to death. You cannot add a single second to your lifespan. Every breath we take is one breath closer to death. Therefore, the time we have left to practice Dharma is extremely limited. About a third of our life is spent sleeping. There is the time spent working, eating, shopping, traveling, watching television, surfing the Internet, engaging in our relationships. We put off practice when we are young; there

are better things to do and we think, "I'll have time to do it later." In the middle of life, we are engaged with our career, raising a family, etc. Then we are old, with failing energy and intellect, let alone the deterioration of our bodily health. By then it is usually too late to establish a productive practice. If we reflect deeply on the above, we will naturally develop a resolution that we must practice Dharma.

#### *THE TIME OF DEATH IS UNCERTAIN*

Our lifespan is not fixed; there is no guarantee we will live to any particular age. We can die at any time. Unborn babies die, children die, adolescents die, young adults die. The young die before the old. A healthy person can die before someone who is ill. Being healthy is no guarantee; being young is no guarantee; being successful is no guarantee; being a good person is no guarantee. We make all these future plans for holidays, our education, jobs, buying houses, etc. – things that may or may not happen. But we don't plan much for our death, which is the only certainty in life and can happen at any time.

If you think about it, there are numberless ways to die; but only good food and water, clean air, clothing, shelter, and the kindness of others keep us alive. There are external conditions for death such as various kinds of accidents, natural catastrophes, weather, bad food, a slippery surface, an unsafe stairway, etc. There are internal conditions for death such as our aging bodies and diseases. The possibility of death is everywhere.

The body is also extremely fragile. Something totally invisible to us – a parasite or a virus – can knock us dead before we knew what hit us. A fall, a hit on the head, a small blood clot in our brain; it takes very little to end a life. People are killed when hard things hit or impale their delicate, fragile bodies or when they breathe in the wrong air. Remembering this helps us to develop a sense of urgency about our practice. It is not just that we want to practice Dharma; we need to do it now.

*ONLY DHARMA CAN BENEFIT ME AT DEATH*

Money and possessions are of no help at the time of death. Often wealthy people die with unbelievable mental torment, grasping onto their possessions, and not wanting to let go. You can't take your position or your possessions with you. Friends and family also cannot help. They may be able to say prayers for you, but usually they are in great distress about losing you. This can generate extreme sadness and distress in your own mind, making it hard to die peacefully. Your dying experience will be yours alone; no one can go with you across that threshold. The only thing that accompanies you is the imprints of your past actions; that is it.

Even your own body cannot help you at the death time. No matter how much time, money, and effort you have spent taking care of your body – feeding it, pampering it, ornamenting it in clothes or jewels – in the end, it rejects you. Often, the body in which you invested so much becomes the very instrument by which you are tortured by pain, in illness and in death. Since nothing else can help, you find the resolve to devote yourself solely and fully to practicing Dharma. When this happens, you happily immerse yourself in a consistent, satisfying and rich Dharma practice.

## *THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATING ON IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

The teachings on impermanence and death are very useful. They are useful for those who don't practice Dharma because it makes them seek the Dharma out. They are also useful for those who do practice Dharma. We should always remember death. If we do, our minds will remain aware of the changes constantly happening within us, of how short the human life is, of how life is getting shorter every moment. This has great benefit.

Many great yogis got their start by meditating on the shortness of the human life, impermanence and death. Their enlightenment, their realizations, and their Dharma practice itself all came from this. Their strength and ability to live an ascetic life in extremely isolated places, to practice the vast and profound subjects no matter how long it took to receive realizations, and to generate the incredible energy required to persevere in their practice – all these things came from thinking about the shortness of the human life, impermanence and death. The fact that they received enlightenment in one lifetime was also due to this remembrance.

It takes a great deal of energy to reach enlightenment; the quicker you want to receive it, the more energy you have to expend. If you want to cover a long distance quickly by car, you need a good machine, good fuel, and the energy to drive. Similarly, it's not easy to attain enlightenment in your lifetime: you need great energy in order to overcome the difficulties of practicing

Dharma and following the path. Where does such energy come from? It comes from remembering death, the impermanence of life. Therefore, this meditation is extremely useful. .

Remembering impermanence and death helps you put an end to all 84,000 delusions. All the different negative minds can be terminated by the energy generated through remembering impermanence and death. This is the original cause of the cessation of all these delusions. Therefore, it is very powerful.

If you remember impermanence and death, you can also prevent the arising of temporary negative minds such as greed, ignorance, hatred, pride, jealousy, and so forth – minds that cause you discomfort, suffering, and confusion. Therefore, it is very useful in making your mind peaceful, even right now.

Not only is remembering impermanence and death useful at the beginning of the practice, when it persuades you to seek out the Dharma, to begin to meditate instead of following your negative mind and acting opposite to the Dharma, it is also beneficial once you are on the path. It makes you continue practicing. You keep from losing your realizations and continue on to the higher reaches of the path. Remembering impermanence and death is useful at the end of your practice, when it carries you through the difficult practices at the end of the path to full and complete enlightenment.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on impermanence and death.

Take a moment to reflect on your present life – your work, relationships, priorities, etc. Call to mind all those you know who have died and the circumstances of their death. Now, imagine that you have one year left to live. What might change for you?

Now, take yourself to the actual time of your death. Imagine it as best you can. Suspecting that your mind will continue but not knowing exactly how or in what form – what comes up? What matters? Since our future experience is determined by past actions, what can you do now to prepare for the future? Let your minds experience the power of this reflection deeply. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

# *WHAT IS RENUNCIATION?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering;  
They are uncertain and cannot be relied upon.  
Recognizing these shortcomings,  
Please bless me to generate the strong wish for the bliss  
of liberation.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *RENUNCIATION*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

All of us want to be free from ego mind and the bondage of samsara. What binds us to samsara and makes us unhappy is not having renunciation. What is renunciation? What makes us renounced?

The English word "renounce" is linguistically tricky. Renouncing sensory pleasure doesn't mean throwing nice things away. Even if you do, it doesn't mean you have renounced them. Renunciation is a totally inner experience. Renunciation of samsara does not mean you throw samsara away, because your body and your nose are samsara. How can you throw your nose away? Therefore, renunciation means less craving; it means being more reasonable instead of putting too much psychological pressure on yourself and acting crazy.

The reason we are unhappy is because we have extreme craving for sense objects and we grasp at them. We are seeking to solve our problems but we are not seeking in the right place. The right place is our own ego grasping. All we have to do is loosen that tightness. We need to have less grasping at sense pleasures, because most of the time our craving desire for worldly pleasure does not give us satisfaction. It leads to more dissatisfaction and to psychologically crazier reactions.

If you have the wisdom and method to handle objects of the five senses perfectly so that they do not bring negative reactions, it is all right for you to touch them. As human beings, we should be capable of judging for ourselves how far we can go into the experience of sense pleasure without getting mixed up and confused. We

should judge for ourselves. It's like French wine; some people cannot take it at all. Even though they would like to, their nervous systems don't allow it. Other people can take a little, others can take a bit more, and some can take a lot.

I want you to understand why Buddhist scriptures completely forbid monks and nuns from drinking wine. It is not because wine is bad or grapes are bad. Grapes and vines are beautiful; the color of red wine is fantastic. But because we are ordinary beginners on the path to liberation, we can easily get caught up in negative energy. That's the reason. It is not that wine itself is bad. This is a good example of renunciation.

Once, a great Indian saint went into a bar and drank and drank until the bartender finally asked him, "How are you going to pay?" The saint replied, "I'll pay when the sun sets." But the sun didn't set and the saint just kept on drinking. The bartender wanted his money but somehow the saint controlled the sunset. These kinds of esoteric higher realizations are beyond the comprehension of ordinary people like us, but this saint was able to control the sun and drank perhaps thirty gallons of wine. And he didn't even have to make pee-pee!

Renunciation of samsara is not only the business of monks and nuns. Whoever is seeking liberation or enlightenment needs renunciation of samsara. If you check your own daily experiences, you will see that you are caught up in small pleasures. We Buddhists consider such grasping to be a tremendous hang-up and not of much value. However, the Western way of thinking - "I should have the best; the biggest" - is similar to the Buddhist attitude that we should have the best, most lasting, perfect pleasure rather than spending our lives fighting for the pleasure of a glass of wine. Therefore, the grasping attitude and useless actions have to be abandoned and the things that make your life meaningful and liberated have to be actualized.

We are capable of comprehending what kind of mind brings everyday problems and is not worthwhile. This is the way that meditation allows us to correct our attitudes and actions. Don't

think, "My attitudes and actions come from my previous karma; therefore, I can't do anything." That's a misunderstanding of karma. Don't think, "I am powerless." Human beings do have power. We have the power to change our lifestyles, change our attitudes, and change our habits. We can call that capacity Buddha potential, God potential, or whatever you want to call it. That's why Buddhism is simple. It is a universal teaching that can be understood by all people.

The opposite of renunciation is the extreme mind that we have most of the time: the grasping, craving mind that gives us an overestimated projection of objects, which has nothing to with reality.

However, Buddhism is not saying that objects have no beauty whatsoever. They do have beauty. A flower has a certain beauty, but that beauty is only conventional. However, the craving mind projects something that has nothing to do with that object. That mind is hallucinating, deluded, and holding the wrong entity.

Without intensive observation or introspective wisdom, we cannot discover this. For that reason, Buddhist meditation includes checking. We call checking in this way analytical meditation. It involves logic and philosophy. Analytical meditation is a scientific way of analyzing our own experience.

### *UNDERSTANDING ATTACHMENT*

In our lives, from the time we were born until now, we have been dealing with attachment. All our problems – mental problems, external problems, internal problems, whatever we consider to be a problem – come from attachment. Understanding this fact is wisdom. It is the path to liberation, the vehicle that carries you to everlasting peaceful enlightenment. These are not merely dry words; they derive from life experiences. That is why Lord Buddha always emphasized understanding as the path to liberation. You can prove logically that attachment is the principal cause of all your problems.

These days in the West there are many books that talk about the magic and mystery of Tibet. Therefore, when people see that a Tibetan lama is coming to give a meditation course, they think, “Oh, maybe I can learn some magic” and attend with that expectation. But we don’t need to teach you magic. Your mind is already magic; the magic of attachment has been within you from the moment you were born. Magic is not the path to liberation. Instead, you need simply to understand what your life is, how complications arise, what makes you happy. Then you are not dreaming; you are down to earth and realistic about the way to develop your mind. With that attitude, you won’t be disappointed.

In reality, all false actions, misery, unhappiness and un-enjoyable energy comes from the self-cherishing thought of attachment. As long as we know that and prove it through our own experience, we can really change our actions and really put a stop to selfish thoughts. Otherwise, we learn all about this religion or that philosophy but don’t change our attitude or behavior; we can’t even stop drinking or smoking. Although we might say that drinking and smoking are not good, because we don’t change inside, our external actions don’t change either. If your actions don’t change, even though you might think or say, “Attachment is the cause of all my problems,” it is not really true for you; you haven’t realized it.

If we don’t understand the psychological root of problems, we can never rid ourselves of them. In order to overcome an enemy, we have to identify and know where to find him. Therefore, in order to destroy the root of our miserable energy, we have to know exactly where it is. If you think that the cause of problems is external, there is no way you will ever be able to stop them. In fact, that is why from the time of their evolution on this earth humans have never been able to put a complete end to problems. Without right understanding, it’s impossible.

Since we now realize that attachment is the cause of all our problems, we must determine for the rest of our lives not to allow the actions of our body, speech, and mind to follow after attachment. Why? Because acting under its influence causes us to create

false actions. Therefore, we have to change our mental attitude, our self-attachment to our ego, and transfer that energy to others. That means we should concern ourselves more with others' pleasure than always thinking only of I, I, I. We should make the determination, "Right now, for the rest of my life, I'm going to dedicate the energy of the actions of my body, speech, and mind to others and change my attitude, my self-cherishing thought of attachment."

To give you just a simple example, think about how Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ gave up their worldly lives and pleasures and totally dedicated their actions to the welfare of other sentient beings. They released their own attachment and reached the highest goal of enlightenment. On the other hand, we are concerned with nothing but I, I, I and we end up miserable. Psychologically, we suffer because of attachment. This attitude of attachment itself suffocates us and makes us uptight. Attachment makes us feel a kind of intensity at our heart, a tightness; no release, no relaxation.

Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ even gave their bodies for others. With our present attitude of self-cherishing attachment, we can't even give somebody a cup of tea with genuine pleasure; we can't give anything without expectation.

Perhaps you do give things to others, but check with what kind of mind you make charity. When you give others presents, you have some kind of expectation. If you do give without any expectation, completely for the benefit of others, with no thought of enhancing your reputation, with no ulterior motive such as "I have to give him a gift because he's my relative," or "If I don't give her a present she'll freak out," then it's okay. But we don't usually give like that. Mostly our giving has nothing to do with true charity; it is simply an ego trip.

All such giving is just a joke. Out of the whole universe, we choose one atom – one girlfriend or one boyfriend – and say, "I love you." We put an enormous amount of energy into this one concrete object and have so much attachment, so from the begin-

ning we automatically set ourselves up for conflict; we create within ourselves a psychological atomic bomb. Our internal energy is so dependent upon this external object – this girl, this boy, whatever it is – that when it moves, we shake. But this external object is impermanent by nature. It is constantly changing, changing, changing. Attachment doesn't want things to change; it wants things to stay as they are. When they do change, great worry and paranoia arise within us. Then when the time comes to separate from our object of attachment, we feel, "My life is over." Of course, that's not true. You can see how attachment exaggerates. Before, you have life; now suddenly you don't? Can you believe it? But that shows you that attachment is a totally overestimating, exaggerating mind. You can see how miserable feelings come from your building up certain conceptual philosophies on the basic concept of attachment and that is how you end up suffering.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*RENUNCIATION*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on renunciation.

Bring to mind a number of things which you label as “happiness” in your present life. Reflect on the teachings about samsara and determine whether or not your sources of happiness are true and reliable. Try to generate a determination to be free of living in a broken world and the wish to help others do so as well. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book



# *HOW TO SERVE OTHERS*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,  
So have all mother migratory beings.  
Please bless me to see this, train in supreme  
bodhichitta,  
And bear the responsibility of freeing all  
migratory beings.*

*Tsongkhapa  
Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *BODHICHITTA*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

To have loving-kindness towards others is absolutely essential. Loving-kindness is the essence of bodhichitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific, or psychological disagreement with this statement. With bodhichitta, there's no East-West conflict. It is one hundred percent uncomplicated, free of any danger of extremes. When you have bodhichitta, you become so precious – like gold. You become the most perfect object in the world. However, without bodhichitta, nothing works; your meditation doesn't work and realizations don't come. Why is bodhichitta necessary for success in meditation? Because if you have a good meditation but don't have bodhichitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss. "Me, me. I'm miserable. I want to be happy. Therefore, I'll meditate." It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results – peace, satisfaction, and bliss – just don't come.

You have to transform your attachment and your self-cherishing. If you haven't changed your mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke. Even if you try to practice tantric meditation, you won't succeed unless you have changed within. Dharma means a complete change of attitude, and that is what really brings you inner happiness. That is the true Dharma. Bodhichitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation. Bodhichitta meditation means you really want to

change your mind and transform your whole life.

We are all involved in human relationships. Why do we sometimes say, "I love you," and sometimes, "I hate you?" Where does this up-and-down mind come from? From the self-cherishing thought, a complete lack of bodhichitta. What we are saying is, "I hate you because I'm not getting any satisfaction from you. You hurt me. You don't give me pleasure. My ego is not getting satisfaction from you." All the difficulties in interpersonal relationships come from not having bodhichitta, from not having changed our minds.

The self-cherishing thought is the root of all human problems. It makes our lives difficult and miserable. The self-cherishing mind is worried about only me – the self-existent I. The solution is the mind of bodhichitta, which substitutes others for self. Then even if your dearest friend forgets to give you a Christmas present, you don't mind.

If you want to be really, really happy, it isn't enough just to space out in meditation. Many people who spent years alone in meditation have finished up the worse for it. Coming back into society, they freaked out. They weren't able to take contact with other people again, because the peaceful environment they created was an artificial condition. With bodhichitta, no matter where you go, you will never freak out. The more you are involved with people, the more pleasure you get. People become the resource of your pleasure. Thus bodhichitta is the most perfect way to practice Dharma, especially in our modern Western society. It is very, very worthwhile.

Bodhichitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech, and mind into a positive force and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. It is like atomic energy to transform your mind. This is absolutely, scientifically true – not something you have to believe with blind religious faith. And, as Je Tsongkhapa said, when you have bodhichitta, all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and pour down upon you like rain. At present, all we attract is misfortune because all we have is the self-cherishing thought, but with bodhi-

chitta, we attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow! His Holiness was saying that bodhichitta is like a huge selfish attitude, because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving-kindness, you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present, usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure and what we do have is easily lost.

The main point is that when you contact the Buddhadharma, you should conquer the mad elephant of your self-cherishing mind. If the Dharma you hear helps you diminish your self-cherishing even a little, it is worthwhile. But if the teachings you have taken have had no effect on your selfishness, then from the Mahayana point of view, even if you can talk intellectually about the entire lam-rim, they have not been useful at all.

People used to put Shantideva down, calling him Du-she-sum-pa, which means one who knows how to do only three things: eating, sleeping, and excreting. However, he had bodhichitta, so whatever he did, even ordinary things, was of greatest benefit to others. Lying down peacefully, he would meditate with great concern for the welfare of all living beings, and many times, out of compassion, he would cry for them. Westerners need that kind of practice. When we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left. Therefore, when you come home from work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhichitta. This is much better than rushing in, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space.

Bodhichitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment. It is not an easy thing, but there is no way you will become bored by practicing it. People need to be most intelligent to actualize bodhichitta; some, though, have no room for it. "Forget about yourself and have a little concern for others?" they ask.

"That's not my culture." It is very difficult to change the attitude of holding yourself dear into the attitude that holds others dear instead. It is the most difficult task you can undertake. However, it is most worthwhile and brings the greatest satisfaction.

## *THE GOOD HEART*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

There is not one living being who wants to receive harm – not even one. Because of this, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, trained his mind in compassion for all living beings. With himself as an example, out of his great compassion, Buddha then advised us to have compassion for all other living beings and not to harm them. On the basis of not harming others, we develop the capacity to benefit them. This is Buddha's essential advice to us, which he himself accomplished. From the 84,000 teachings of sutra and tantra, this is the essential practice. If we do not do this practice of abandoning harm to others, there is no spiritual practice in our life.

Starting with our families, the happiness of all beings is dependent upon us. Eliminating their problems, giving them happiness, is our responsibility. This is very important to understand and to feel in our everyday life.

I often use the example of a couple in which the wife practices good heart while the husband is selfish. Because the wife has more thought of cherishing her husband than herself, when he causes her some problem, she does not retaliate. By not retaliating, she not only has happiness in her life, but gives him fewer problems, which means more peace. If she retaliates when he gives her a hard time, his problems become greater. Because she does not retaliate, he does not have that additional problem, so there is more happiness for him. If there are twenty people in a family and one of them practices the good heart, nineteen people receive one problem fewer. They have that much more happiness. Their happiness came from this one person. We can see very clearly how

this one person is responsible for the happiness of the nineteen other people; their happiness depends on him.

It is the same with all the human beings and creatures on this earth, who all want happiness and do not want suffering. If one living being has a good heart and does not harm others, the harm received by all the rest of the living beings becomes that much less; they receive that much more happiness. We can see that this one person is responsible for the happiness of all living beings.

If we do not change our selfish attitudes, our actions will not change, nor will the harm we give to others. Starting from the small number of beings with whom we live, eat, and work, who want happiness and do not want suffering, to the numberless other living beings, the harm they receive from us will not stop.

There is a big difference when we change from the selfish mind to the good heart, which cherishes others with loving compassion. Starting from the family with which we live, all others receive happiness and benefit from us, and also receive fewer problems. If we do not change our selfish minds, all other beings receive harm from us. Whether others are happy or continue to receive harm is completely in our hands. It is up to us. Each of us is completely responsible for the happiness of every single sentient being.

For example, in our daily lives, if we show loving-kindness and compassion for everyone from morning until night, treating them with respect, they are happy. Showing respect for them with our body and speech makes them happy. Even smiling at them makes them happy. The happiness of others definitely depends on us, on how we act towards them. If we think of the experiences of our everyday life, it is very clear that we are responsible for the happiness of others.

To practice the good heart in everyday life is more important than anything else. When we wake up in the morning, as we open our eyes, we should think: "I am responsible for the happiness of all living beings and for the elimination of all their problems. This is the purpose of my life. This is why I have a human body." If you have dogs, cats, or birds in the house, think also of them: "The

reason I have this precious human body at this time is to eliminate the problems of other living beings, and obtain their happiness. This is the meaning of my life." Then think: "Cherishing myself is the greatest obstacle to my happiness and the fulfillment of my wishes. Self-cherishing is my greatest enemy. And there is no question that it is the greatest obstacle to fulfilling the wishes of all living beings and obtaining their happiness. There is no greater obstacle than this."

When you go to work, do not think, "I am going to work for my happiness, because I want money and comfort." Instead of this selfish attitude, even if you cannot think of all living beings, at least remember the kindness of the people who employ you. Think: "Because they have employed me, I can enjoy my life and I have the opportunity to practice the good heart and benefit myself and others. They are very kind to me." Even though you are paid to work, your attitude is to benefit your employers. At the beginning and from time to time while you are working, remember this motivation.

Think of all the time we spend in one day eating and drinking. To provide our enjoyments, other beings created much negative karma by doing unwholesome actions harmful to others, many of whom were killed. Since we receive our enjoyments from the suffering of so many other beings, it is very important to use them with the thought of benefiting others. To use these enjoyments with a selfish mind, for our own happiness, would be very cruel and very upsetting.

Whenever you eat or drink, remember the purpose of life. Be aware of your responsibility, which is to obtain happiness for all living beings and eliminate their sufferings. The purpose of your life is to offer service to others. For this reason you need to be healthy and have a long life; therefore, you take your food as medicine.

If you spend your whole day with the thought of benefiting others, all your activities – working in an office or at home, eating, dressing, putting on makeup, and so forth – become pure Dharma, because they are unstained by selfish mind. All your ac-

tions become pure virtue and the cause of happiness. This is the best, most reliable business. If you constantly do your work with this attitude, there is great happiness all the time and no space for depression. Instead of thinking that others are there for you to use for your happiness, think, "I am the servant of others; I am working to eliminate their problems and obtain their happiness." If you think that you are the servant of others, your problems stop. If you think that others are your servants, problems arise in your mind.

Many times we ask such questions as, "How can I make my life worthwhile? How can I benefit others?" The best way to benefit others is to reduce our own selfish minds. The more we reduce our selfish minds, the less harm others receive from us, and the more temporal and ultimate benefit. This is the best solution.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*BODHICHITTA*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on bodhicitta.

Review a few of your activities from the past few days. Reflect on the teachings about bodhicitta and determine whether or not your motivation is one of self-cherishing or truly the wish to benefit others. Generate a determination to always try to act for others' welfare and to attain the state of enlightenment in order to be of the greatest benefit to all other beings. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*Even if I develop only bodhichitta, but I don't  
practice the three types of morality  
I will not achieve enlightenment.  
With my clear recognition of this,  
Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows  
with great energy.*

*Tsongkhapa  
Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *THE LIFE OF A BODHISATTVA*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

The bodhisattva vows are specific vows that help us to develop bodhichitta by engaging in activities that overcome our selfish tendencies and help us act out of love and compassion. The vows are taken in a ritual ceremony with a qualified teacher.

There are three types of morality. These are to abandon negativity, practice virtue, and work for the benefit others. The morality to abandon negativity includes refraining from praising ourselves and criticizing others. The vows work directly to counter our prideful and judgmental tendencies, as well as any pattern we have of giving harm to others through our actions of body, speech, and mind. The morality of practicing virtue revolves around the practice of the six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom. The morality of working for others involves specific types of actions such as serving the sick, comforting those who are grieving, giving to those in need, and so forth.

The bodhisattva vows are a beautiful set of guidelines for being a better citizen of the world, regardless of one's spiritual tradition. They quickly develop our positive qualities and ability to make the world a better place. In practicing them, we are promoting a positive lifestyle that considers others before ourselves. This is something we have to work at again and again until altruistic acts become automatic. Initially, the thought arises, "I guess I should give up my seat on the bus because an elderly person just got on with a lot of packages and needs the seat more than I do." You practice to have the thought, say the words, or act in a certain

way until, eventually, that practice becomes a spontaneous, uncontrived experience. It is absolutely possible for this to happen; we just need training.

### *THE SIX PERFECTIONS*

One way that we continue to empower bodhichitta is through the practice of the six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom. In general, we are familiar with these terms and have some idea of how they might apply in our lives. However, it might help to know a few special applications of the perfections as they are practiced in Tibetan Buddhism. We know about generosity. People donate money to charities or take a friend out to dinner. Some people support monks and nuns. Others take care of children starving in Africa or the homeless in our cities. There are different ways for people to practice generosity. With regards to the perfection of generosity, there are four main categories: giving gifts or material assistance, giving Dharma, giving fearlessness, and giving love. In our busy society, one of the most generous things we can do is give freely of our time by offering service to others. It is taught that the greatest gift to others is the gift of Dharma because this gives others the tools they need to be free from suffering and secure lasting happiness. If you are not Buddhist, you can offer the gift of whatever your faith or practice is that would be of benefit to others.

The perfection of morality is the practice of ethical conduct and involves refraining from negative actions. However, the perfection of morality includes all three types of morality mentioned above: abandoning non-virtue, practicing virtue, and benefiting others. The most sweeping guideline for ethical conduct in Buddhism is not to give harm to any living being, and in addition to that to help others as much as possible.

Patience is not the ability to wait quietly for something to happen, like waiting for a bus or a plane. The perfection of patience is twofold. First, it is the ability not to react in anger when somebody pushes your buttons or attacks you, physically or verbally.

If somebody is attacking you, you can defend yourself, but you need do so without getting angry at that person. The second way to practice patience is to cultivate the ability to endure hardship with respect to your spiritual practice. Sometimes we are asked to do very challenging things while on a spiritual path. When things start to get tough, patience is the ability to hang in there even though you want to quit, because you know that the long term gain is worth the short term pain. Both these types of patience require a taming of the mind that is quite extraordinary.

The fourth perfection of joyous effort is being happy to do good things. This is specifically related to the practice of virtue and creating healthy behavior patterns. Joyous effort means you are eagerly excited to practice virtue and do so with great enthusiasm.

The fifth perfection, the perfection of concentration, is about developing meditative stabilization. We will cover this in greater detail below as well as the sixth perfection, the perfection of wisdom. Wisdom is first an intellectual pursuit. Then, as your level of concentration deepens, you are able to have a direct perception of the nature of reality. At that point, you have attained the perfection of wisdom on an experiential level.

What makes these practices perfections is your motivation and your understanding of wisdom while you are undertaking them. For example, it is said that the perfection of generosity is not achieved when you are finally able to give everyone everything they want every second that they need it. Rather, the perfection of generosity is having the wish to do so and being willing to give up every possession to fulfill the needs of others. The motivation is bodhichitta, wishing to help others so deeply that you must quickly attain the state of full enlightenment so that you are able to do so perfectly.

While motivation is important, what is most essential to make these six practices perfections is the perfection of wisdom. This understanding involves the interdependent relationship between the nature of reality and the truth of causality. It is the under-

standing that all things and events are dependent-arisings; they are empty of having any inherent nature of their own. What we see and experience is ultimately, a creation of our own mind; not something coming to us from out there. Because things are empty, our actions matter; they will produce results that will later translate into our experience of both ourselves and the world. With this understanding, we engage in the practice of the six perfections with our bodhichitta motivation, knowing that these practices will definitely result in buddhahood – in experiencing ourselves as perfect beings who can perfectly benefit others.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*PERFECTION*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on the breath.

Slowly take yourself through a typical day, from the moment you wake up until the moment you go to sleep and imagine how you could transform every activity into something done for the benefit of others. Be creative. Make a determination to put this meditation into practice for one full day. Then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.



# *WHAT IS EMPTINESS?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*Understanding your conventional mind and the way it projects your own self-image is the key to realizing shunyata."*

*Lama Thubten Yeshe*

## *EMPTINESS*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

From the Buddhist point of view, just having renunciation of samsara and loving-kindness bodhichitta is not enough to cut the root of the ego or the root of the dualistic mind. If you have boiling water and you put ice into it, the water calms down, but you have not totally extinguished the water's potential to boil. Similarly, by meditating on and practicing loving-kindness bodhichitta, you eliminate gross attachment and feelings of craving. However, the root of craving desire and attachment is ego and the dualistic mind. Therefore, without understanding emptiness, or non-duality, it is not possible to cut the root of human problems.

All of us have a certain degree of loving-kindness in our relationships, but many times our loving-kindness is a mixture. Many times we start with a motivation of loving-kindness but then slowly, it gets mixed up with attachment. Attachment is concern for our own pleasure. Compassion understands others' lack of pleasure and their suffering situation. It is the determination to release other sentient beings from their problems. But many times we mix our compassion with attachment. We begin with compassion but after some time attachment mixes in and it then becomes an attachment trip. This is due to a lack of wisdom, to not having the penetrative wisdom to go beyond our relative projections. That is why even religious motivations and actions become a mundane trip when you lack penetrative wisdom. That is why Buddhism does not have a good feeling towards fanatical or emotional love. Love has nothing to do with emotional expression. The emotional expression of love is so unrefined.

If your daily life is tremendously involved in emotions, you are completely driven by them and psychologically tired. You have to learn to sit back instead of being impelled by your emotions. Emotions are necessarily negative - they can be positive too - but in the Western environment, when we relate with each other we get tremendously emotional. In other words, our physical emotions get too involved and we don't understand the functioning of our six sense consciousnesses.

Buddhism has tremendous concern for the needs of both the object and the subject, and in this way, loving-kindness becomes an antidote to the selfish attitude. Western religions also place tremendous emphasis on love and compassion but they do not emphasize wisdom. Understanding wisdom is the path to liberation, so you have to gain it.

When I was in Spain with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we visited a monastery and met a Christian monk who had vowed to stay in an isolated place. His Holiness asked him, "How do you feel when you experience signs of happy or unhappy things coming to you?" The monk said, "Happy is not necessarily happy; bad is not necessarily bad; good is not necessarily good." I was astonished. To my small understanding, that was wisdom.

The person who has some understanding of emptiness will have exactly the same experiences as that monk. The person sees that bad and good are relative; they exist for only the conditioned mind and are not absolute qualities. The characteristic of ego is to project fantasy notions onto yourself and others, and this is the main root of problems. You then react emotionally and hold your pleasure and your pain as concrete.

You can observe right now how your self-image is simply a projection of your ego. It's a simple question: "How does my mind imagine myself?" Understanding your conventional mind and the way it projects your own self-image is the key to realizing emptiness. In this way you break down the gross concepts of ego and eradicate the self-pitying image of yourself. By eliminating the self-pitying imagination of ego, you go beyond fear. All fear and other

self-pitying emotions come from holding a self-pitying image of yourself. You can also see that you feel the self-pitying image of yourself that you had yesterday still exists today. That is wrong. Thinking, "I'm a very bad person today because I was angry yesterday. I was angry last year." is also wrong, because you are still holding today an angry, self-pitying image from the past.

The ego holds a permanent concept of our ordinary self all the time – this year, last year, the year before: "I'm a bad person; me, me, me, me, me, me." From the Buddhist point of view, if you hold that kind of concept throughout your lifetime, you will become a bad person because you interpret yourself as a bad person. Therefore, your ego's interpretation is unreasonable. It has nothing whatsoever to do with reality. And because your ego holds onto such a self-existent I, attachment begins.

From the Buddhist point of view, it is very difficult for a person to experience non-attachment. From the Buddhist philosophical point of view, attachment for something means that it is very difficult for us to separate from it. We have a very strong attachment, strong like iron, for the things we think of as being very good. We need to learn to be flexible.

Let's look at a flower. My attachment for the flower is a symptom. It shows that I overestimate the value of the flower. I wish to become one with the flower and never separate from it for the rest of my life. You understand how sick I am? It is so difficult for me to let go of it. This craziness is attachment. But non-attachment is flexible; it is a middle way, a reasonable way.

The psychology of attachment is over-estimation; it is an unrealistic attitude. That is why we are suffering; and for that reason Buddhism emphasizes suffering, suffering, suffering. Westerners can't understand why Buddhism talks about suffering so much. "I have enough money. I can eat. I have enough clothes. Why do you say I'm suffering? I'm not suffering. I don't need Buddhism." This is a misunderstanding of the term "suffering." Attachment itself is suffering.

Philosophically, you can research emptiness very deeply; you

can analyze the notion of the self-existent I a thousand ways. However, I am talking about what you can do practically, every day, right now. Don't think about Buddhist terminology; don't think about what the books say or anything like that. Just ask yourself simply, "How, at this moment, do I interpret myself?" That's all.

Each time you ask yourself that question you get a different answer. Then you can laugh at yourself: "What I'm thinking is incredible" But you shouldn't worry; just laugh. The way you question yourself should make you laugh. In that way, you get closer to emptiness. Because you know through your own experience that your own projection of yourself is a fantasy and, to some extent, you experience selflessness. You no longer trust your own ego and your concepts become less concrete.

This type of analytical meditation shouldn't make you sad or serious. When you really understand something, you can laugh at yourself. Of course, if you are alone, you shouldn't laugh out loud too much, otherwise people will think you're clinically sick! Milarepa is a good example. He stayed alone in the snowy mountains and laughed and sang to himself. He laughed because his life was rich and happy.

Your entire life is built by dualistic concepts. Actually, "dual" means two, but in Buddhism, our complaint is not that two phenomena exist. The problem is their contradictory, competitive nature. Is the competitive mind comfortable or not? Is the competitive life comfortable or not? Is competitive business comfortable or not? The mind is irritated. The mind in which there are two things always contradicting each other is what we call the dualistic mind. Simply put, when you get up in the morning after a good night's sleep, do you feel peaceful? Yes, you feel peaceful. Why? Because during sleep, the dualistic mind is at rest! As long as the dualistic mind is functioning in your life, you are always irritated; you have not attained the peace of ultimate reality.

## *INSIGHT INTO THE NATURE OF REALITY*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

Once we develop calm abiding, we apply that extraordinary level of meditative stabilization to meditation on emptiness. While calm abiding is a type of single-pointed concentration, emptiness is a type of analytical meditation. When engaging in meditation on emptiness, your ability to analyze the nature of phenomena is greatly advanced. This is why the unified path of calm abiding and special insight is so profound. When you can hold your mind single-pointedly on the analysis of how things exist, you can see the truth of emptiness and experience a direct perception of ultimate reality.

What does the term “emptiness” mean? According to Tibetan Buddhism, “emptiness” refers to an absence of inherent existence. What is inherent existence? Inherent existence is a quality we instinctively project onto ourselves and everything we experience. We see things as solidly, concretely, existing from their own side, in and of themselves, by way of their own nature, independent of causes and conditions, parts, or our own mind experiencing them. If we see a flower in a pot and somebody asks us if it is “real” or if it is “really” a flower, the type of image that appears to our minds is an image of inherent existence; we are looking for an inherently existent flower, a real one. Our projection of inherent existence is completely unconscious and very subtle. In fact, we don’t think it is a projection at all; we think that when we perceive an object, the object is presenting itself to us – not the other way around. Once

we understand what we are doing – what projecting an inherently existent object means, experientially – we are well on our way to understanding and realizing emptiness.

For example, imagine you are standing next to a car. You see a solid independent car out there. If you ask where the car is, or what exactly makes that thing a car, you might point to a spot on the car and say, “Here, this is where the car is.” However, you would have to consider well that particular spot on the car at which you are pointing. Maybe you are pointing to the side of the car. That is not really the car; it is only a part of the car.

Then, again, ask yourself, “Where is the car?” Is it in that part of the car to which you just pointed? Is it in the tires, the seats, the windshield, the engine? Is the car one of the parts? You can also consider, “When did it start to be a car? How many parts do you take away before it will no longer be a car?” These are some things to thoroughly investigate. If you do your investigation well, you will not find the car you initially thought was there.

The car is interdependent, changing moment by moment. Even though we understand this, intellectually, this is not what we see. If we did, we would not be upset or surprised when the car breaks down. The nature of changing phenomena is that they are subject to disintegration and, therefore, eventually fall apart. Why should we be surprised or upset if we knew that was going to happen?

Things and ourselves do not exist the way they appear; this is the source of all of our suffering. On some level, we thought the car was going to last, or our relationship, or our health, or any other object of our experience. When it doesn’t, we suffer. We have often heard the phrase, “Appearances can be deceiving.” This is certainly the case when it comes to both impermanence and emptiness. We believe what appears to us is existing exactly the way we see it, as solidly existing for all time, like that. Then, in the next moment, we over embellish or underestimate that appearance and experience either attachment or aversion to it. This is the way we view both ourselves and all other phenomena. Our

storytelling mind makes up various dramas and we suffer.

Let's take a look at ourselves. We are made up of a body and a mind. The body is a composition of flesh, muscle, blood, bones, organs, cells, etc. The mind is a continuum of thoughts, feelings, memories, experiences, and other mental activity. On top of the body and mind, we add a label such as "man," "woman," "American," "European," "Joe," "Mary." Then, out of ignorance, the mind invents and grasps onto a fantasized stabile, secure, inherent, independent, permanent self. That self is a complete hallucination.

All of our interactions are tainted by our trust in this hallucination. When someone or something enhances our false self-image, we are attracted to them. When someone or something harms that self-image, we feel aversion towards them. This is how attachment and aversion are born from ignorance, and how all of the other non-virtuous mental states arise such as jealousy, pride, depression, anxiety, and fear, to name a few. All of this comes from fundamental ignorance. Therefore, to have a more realistic approach to life, we must overcome our ignorance about who we are and how we exist. This will lend itself to lasting happiness, because we will no longer be fooled by appearances.

In order to understand emptiness correctly, it is important to understand that things do exist, just not in the way they appear to us. Let's return to the example of the car. The car does exist in a conventional way; it functions as a car. The car exists by depending on the specific causes and conditions that made it a car, such as the designers, investors, the rubber factory, the steel plant, plastic, shop mechanics, etc. This list of causes and conditions includes the inventor's initial vision of a car, as this is the cause that paved the way for a car to exist at all. The car also exists in dependence on its parts: the tires, body, engine, paint, etc. A third way in which the car exists is that it is labeled by the mind on the assembled parts of the car. The tires, the engine, the seats, the body – all of the parts of the car put together in a particular way become a base; not a car, but a particular conventional structure

that serves a particular function. When a human being sees that particular conventional structure, the mind labels it “car.” A label arises in the mind of any being, according to their karma and culture, for whatever base is appearing at any given time. Because the karma of the human realm is to experience that base as a car, as human beings our minds label it “car.”

After we have labeled the object as “car,” our ignorance merges the appearance of the base with the mental label and the object appears back to us as a solidly existing, independent car. We think that the car is coming from the base and we act accordingly, becoming attached to it and feeling very territorial about “my” car. If that existing-from-its-own-side car really existed, then all beings should see it as a car. However, for an insect, the car may appear as a “huge mountain,” a vast obstacle, or as something to fear. This proves that ultimately there is no car there. It is this not finding, this negation of a car coming from the side of the object, that is the emptiness of the car.

Everything we experience in our world is a dependent arising. Everything arises in dependence on causes and conditions, parts, and on a mental designation or imputation. It is a mistake to say that nothing exists. Things do exist, but they exist only in dependence on these factors. Emptiness of inherent existence means things exist as dependent arisings; and because things exist as dependent arisings, they are empty of inherent existence. People and things lack a concrete, independent existence because they exist in dependence on other things. This is a profound subtlety of Buddhist philosophy that is not always understood. It is where emptiness and karma meet. Because things are empty, our actions matter. It takes time to understand emptiness. However, the more we understand it, the more we loosen the grip of our projections and have greater space and choice to interact with those projections.

## *WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE CAN YOU BE FOUND?*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Our egos instinctively feel that there is an "I" somewhere around here. Where is Thubten Yeshe? My ego's instinctive interpretation is that I am here, somewhere in my body. Check for yourself. See what comes up in your mind when you think of your name. The huge mountain of your self will arise. Then check exactly where that mountain of "me" can be found. Where are you? Somewhere around your body. Are you in your chest, in your head?

You feel this instinctively. You don't have to study philosophy to learn it; you don't have to go to school; your parents didn't teach you. You have known this since before you were born. Buddhism describes this as the ego identity that is simultaneously born; the one that exists simply because you exist. It was born with you; it needs no outside influence for its existence. Like the smell that comes with a pine tree, they are one. The pine tree doesn't grow first and then the smell comes later. They come together. It's the same with the innate sense of ego.

This instinctive conception of ego is really convinced that around my body is where you will find Thubten Yeshe. Someone looks at me and asks, "Are you Thubten Yeshe?" "Yes," I reply, "I'm Thubten Yeshe." Where is Thubten Yeshe? Instinctively, I feel I am right here, but I am not the only one who feels like this. Check up for yourself. It's very interesting.

Until I was six years old, I was not Thubten Yeshe. That name was given to me when I became a monk at Sera Monastery. Before

that time, nobody knew me as Thubten Yeshe. They thought I was Dondrub Dorje. The names Thubten Yeshe and Dondrub Dorje are different; different superstitions give different kinds of name. I feel my name is me, but actually, it isn't. Neither the names Thubten Yeshe nor Dondrub Dorje are me, but the moment I was given the name Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Yeshe came into existence. Before I was given the name, he didn't exist; nobody looked at me and thought, "There's Thubten Yeshe." I didn't even think it myself. Thubten Yeshe did not exist.

But when one superstitious conception named this bubble Thubten Yeshe, my superstition took it: "Yes, Thubten Yeshe is me." It is an interdependent relationship. One superstition gives the name Thubten Yeshe to this bubble of relativity and my ego starts to feel that Thubten Yeshe really does exist somewhere in the area of my body.

The reality, however, is that Thubten Yeshe is merely the dry words applied to the bubble-like phenomenon of these five aggregates. The ego's instinctive feeling that Thubten Yeshe exists somewhere around here is very superficial.

You can see that the relative reality of Thubten Yeshe is simply the name that's been given to this bubble of energy. That's all Thubten Yeshe is. If I were to show up somewhere and suddenly announce, "You're all merely names," people would think I was crazy, but if you investigate in detail the manner in which we are all merely names, it becomes extremely clear. Nagarjuna explained that relative phenomena exist but that we should view them in a reasonable way. They come, they go; they grow; they die. They receive various names and in that way gain a degree of reality for the relative mind. But that mind does not see the deeper nature of phenomena; it does not perceive the totality of universal existence.

Phenomena have two natures: the relative and the ultimate. Both qualities exist simultaneously in each and every phenomenon. I have been talking about the way that bubbles of relativity exist conventionally. A relative phenomenon comes into existence

when, at any given time, the association of superstition and the conception of ego flavors an object in a particular way by giving it a name. That combination - the object, the superstition giving it a name, and the name itself - is all that is needed for a relative phenomenon to exist. When those things come together, there's your Thubten Yeshe. He's coming; he's going; he's talking. It's all a bubble of relativity.

If right now you can see that Thubten Yeshe is a bubble, that is excellent. And if you can see the heavy objects that shake your heart and make you crazy as relative bubbles, their vibration will not overwhelm you. Your heart will stop shaking and you will cool down and relax.

I believe very strongly that this is me because of the countless times from the time I was born up to now that my ego has imprinted the idea "this is me" on my consciousness. "Me. This is me. This bubble is me, me, me." But this bubble itself is not Thubten Yeshe. The parts of the body are not Thubten Yeshe. The skin is not Thubten Yeshe; the blood is not Thubten Yeshe; the bone is not Thubten Yeshe; the brain is not Thubten Yeshe. The ego is not Thubten Yeshe. Superstition is not Thubten Yeshe. The combination of all this is not Thubten Yeshe either; if it were, Thubten Yeshe would have existed before the name had been given. But before this combination was named Thubten Yeshe, nobody recognized it as Thubten Yeshe and I didn't recognize it as Thubten Yeshe myself. Therefore, the combination of all these parts is not Thubten Yeshe.

If we call a scarecrow Thubten Yeshe and then analyze it to see exactly where Thubten Yeshe can be found, we can't find Thubten Yeshe in any of the parts or on all the parts together. This is easy to understand. It's exactly the same thing with the bubble of my aggregates. Neither any single constituent part nor the whole combination is Thubten Yeshe. We also know that the name alone is not Thubten Yeshe. So what and where is Thubten Yeshe? Thubten Yeshe is simply the combination of superstition flavoring an object with the words, "Thubten Yeshe." That is all

that Thubten Yeshe is.

Beyond the name, there is no real Thubten Yeshe existing somewhere. However, the simultaneously born ego doesn't understand that Thubten Yeshe exists merely as an interdependent combination of parts. It believes without question that around here, somewhere, there exists a real, independent, concrete Thubten Yeshe. This is the nature of the simultaneously born ego.

The conception of ego is an extreme mind. It holds very concretely the idea that somewhere within this bubble of the combination body there exists a self-existent I. That is the misconception that we must release. If the ego mind assessed the situation reasonably and was comfortable and satisfied perceiving that superstition giving the name Thubten Yeshe to this interdependent bubble was enough for Thubten Yeshe to exist, that would be a different story. But it is not satisfied with that. It cannot leave that alone. It wants to be special. It wants Thubten Yeshe to be concrete. It is not satisfied with Thubten Yeshe being a mere name on a collection of parts. Therefore, it conceives an imaginary, unrealistic, exaggerated, concrete self-entity.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*EMPTINESS*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on emptiness.

Bring to mind a time of great fear or when you were unjustifiably blamed for something. Allow the sense of “I” to arise strongly. Now, while holding that awareness of “I” try to determine exactly how and where that I exists. Go through each part of your body and mind. If you feel that you have found the I, check carefully to see if that always holds true. If you reach a place of not-finding the “I,” rest in that awareness.

Finally, bring your awareness back to your body sitting on the cushion. Ask yourself, “How am I interpreting myself right now?” Make a determination to check up in this way throughout the day and dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.



# *INTRODUCING TANTRA*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

*Having become a pure vessel by training in the  
general path,  
Please bless me to enter  
The holy gateway of the fortunate ones:  
The supreme vajra vehicle.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *INTRODUCING TANTRA*

*LAMA THUBTEN YESHE*

Lord Shakyamuni discovered enlightenment after struggling for three countless great eons. When he came to earth he was a tenth stage bodhisattva, ready to become enlightened in just a second. And while he was in samadhi during the ascetic phase of his life, other buddhas awoke him, saying, "Hey, what are you doing? You're having a good meditation, but that's not enough for you to expand into totality." So they gave him the four great initiations and he became enlightened. Why did he show that aspect? The reason is that, from the tantric point of view, it is not possible to discover enlightenment without practicing tantra.

Anyone who has realized bodhichitta can follow one of two vehicles: the Paramitayana or the Tantrayana. The Paramitayana is the lam-rim - you understand karmic causation and recognize your own profound ability to solve completely all levels of ego problem, not just those on the human level. The Paramitayana takes you through the three principal paths to enlightenment and your job is to actualize the six perfections. Following the Paramitayana alone can take you to only the tenth bodhisattva level. Without practicing tantra, you can't fully open; your extremely subtle mind cannot function.

The enlightened experience that results from following both the Paramitayana and Tantrayana is the same. The Paramitayana path is slow. The Paramitayana practitioner cannot put two things together simultaneously and keep going. Tantrayana has the skillful wisdom by which you put totality together. The practitioner of Tantrayana has the skill and intelligence to see reality clean clear

in a penetrative way and simultaneously keep going in a unified way. There is a great difference between the two.

Tantrayana has the skillful methods whereby you can transform the energy of desire into the path to enlightenment. We call it taking desire as the path, but it is dangerous if you do not understand what these words mean. The person practicing Tantrayana needs the skill to transform daily pleasures into the path to enlightenment. Let's take the body as an example. Our bodies come from the functioning of desire. Desire made this body. Our grabbing ego made this body manifest. However, instead of looking at it negatively, we should regard it as precious. We know that the body is complicated, but from the Dharma point of view, instead of putting ourselves down with self-pity - "My body is a heavy burden; I wish it would disappear" - we should appreciate and take advantage of it. We should use it in a good way. Despite where the body comes from, despite the fact that it is not so easygoing, this body has great ability; it can do so much. With this body, not only can we take care of our food and clothing, but we have the opportunity to gain the eternal goals of liberation or enlightenment. That is why our human body is precious. We can use it in a good way, even though it is potentially poisonous in that it can create more complications, confusion, suffering, loneliness, dissatisfaction and samsaric rebirths. If we can change in a positive way, we can feel grateful for having this body.

It is similar with our sense pleasures. Normally, we react to pleasure by developing emotional confusion, hatred, anxiety, and so forth. What happens when you experience pleasure: do you become more ignorant or less? If whenever you experience worldly pleasure you become more mindful, concentrated, aware and in touch with reality, that's fine. However, it is more likely that you get further out of touch with reality, more spaced out, and enter an illusory, fantasy world of your own creation. In other words, whenever we experience pleasure, we lose control.

Paramitayana does not contain the skillful means for transforming worldly pleasure into the path to enlightenment. This is

the unique quality of tantra. That is why the wisdom of tantra is perfect.

Both Buddhist sutra and tantra say that the nature of the human mind is clean clear light; clean clear mind. The nature of our consciousness has always been clean clear; is clean clear; and will always be clean clear. You don't need to worry about it. Delusion is not the character of our consciousness. Fundamentally, we are wrong when we think, "I am delusion; I'm a bad person who always has bad thoughts, who always acts badly." You cannot put limitations on your own reality. Each of us has problems and difficulties, but we also have something similar to buddha and bodhisattva energy within us.

Many people put themselves down; that's their worst problem. You can see this everywhere in the world; people put limitations on themselves. This judgment of the neurotic ego is the human problem and tantra has the methods to eliminate this immediately. You become the deity, having the divine pride that you yourself are a buddha, fully complete, and in that way you eliminate the ordinary ego projection. In this way, tantra elevates the consciousness, or liberates the mind, from ordinary thought. We accomplish this transformation through the profound practice of deity yoga.

Each of us has a psychic or conscious body as well as a physical body. It is not this blood and bone body that we are radically transforming into the deity. However, the consciousness, or psyche, can transform. When we practice tantric yoga, we transform our consciousness into the transcendent, rainbow body of our meditation deity. Simultaneously, we recognize the unity of the rainbow body of the deity and its non-dual nature. Non-duality and the transformation - the transcendent experience of the clean clear, crystal rainbow body - are completely one. If you were to try to touch it, it would be like trying to touch a rainbow. Your hand can't feel it, yet there is some energy there. You can't say that a rainbow isn't real because you can't touch it. Our physical senses are really gross, and because a rainbow is relatively insubstantial, we tend to think it is nonexistent. But a rainbow is just as existent

as a concrete wall. We can't say that a wall is more existent than a rainbow just because it feels solid to the touch.

How does a rainbow exist? Through the coming together of various factors, such as water, light and so forth. It's an interdependent phenomenon that simply reflects the combined energies that make it up. That is all there is to what we call a rainbow. We know it is not solid, that it is simply a conglomeration of parts to which we give the name rainbow. The way in which the transformation - the transcendent experience of the divine deity body - exists is exactly the same as the way in which a rainbow exists. In reality it also exists, but in experiencing unification we recognize it as non-dual, non-self-existent, and insubstantial. There is nothing physical to touch; it is simply the reflection of a combination of parts in the mirror of wisdom. Although it is a clearly apparent vision, completely transparent, simultaneously it is absolutely non-dual in nature.

By developing this kind of awareness, we become more sensitive and our dull, animal attitude is eliminated. We become sensitive to the more subtle aspects of reality. Then even concrete walls can appear to us as insubstantial and as something we can perhaps pass through. We can have such powerful experiences.

In a way, tantra reflects life in modern society because it emphasizes the enjoyment of as much pleasure as possible and discourages neglect of the body. Tantra doesn't emphasize renunciation and a negative view of life. In fact, in tantra we vow not to look at life negatively or to criticize our body. Normally we complain about city life, but from the tantric point of view, big cities are beautiful; tantra sees all the men and women of the city as the deity. Tantra leaves city life as it is. Tantra says that everything, even worldly life, can be beautiful because it can all be experienced transcendently by the human consciousness, unified by great universal love and non-duality.

The practice of tantra is very well suited to our modern lives. Life today is full of pleasure, but we also have a tendency to be easily confused and dissatisfied. Therefore, we desperately need a

method whereby we can transform the energy of all our everyday life experiences into the path to enlightenment. That is what tantra offers us.

*HOW TO MEDITATE ON THIS SUBJECT*

*TANTRA*

Place yourself in the seven-point posture (p.88), do a short meditation on the breath, and set your motivation.

In order to help myself and others, I must achieve the state of a fully enlightened buddha. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on tantra.

First, reflect on each of the three principal paths of renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness. Using your best understanding and experience, try to generate a semblance of these realizations within your mind. Now, take some time to imagine what it will be like to attain the state of full enlightenment; to have perfected the qualities of wisdom, compassion, and the ability to help others. Rest in that sublime state, then dedicate:

By virtue of this effort, may I quickly generate all the realizations of the path to enlightenment and become a buddha for the benefit of all.

May any being just be seeing, hearing, touching, talking to, or remembering me be freed in that instant from all suffering, and abide in happiness forever.

You may expand your motivation and dedications using whatever moves your mind or by relying on the motivation and dedication sections of this book.

*ADVICE FOR BRINGING THESE  
TEACHINGS INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*



## *ADVICE*

If you are interested to carry the essence of the teachings from this book into your daily life, here is some advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche that you can put into practice. It starts with how to think when you wake up in the morning and continues with how to live each day.

### *MORNING MOTIVATION*

How extremely lucky I am that I have not died yet. I have a perfect human body, which is extremely rare. I have met the virtuous friend who reveals the unmistakable complete path to enlightenment, who is extremely difficult to meet; and I have met the Buddhadharma, which is also extremely difficult to meet.

The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from suffering and its causes, that is, negative karma and disturbing thoughts – and to lead them not only to the ultimate happiness of self liberation, but to the peerless happiness of enlightenment as well. This is my responsibility.

The ultimate purpose of my life is to work perfectly for others. In order to fulfill that purpose, it is necessary for me to achieve the state of full enlightenment, omniscient mind, and in order to do that, I must actualize the path to enlightenment. This becomes the best virtuous motivation for transforming all my actions from this moment on. It is the best cause of happiness and its result is highest enlightenment.

May all my actions become only causes for me to achieve enlightenment and to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment as quickly as possible.

In this way, make a conscious effort to set a good motivation for your day. Then, as much as you are able try to recall that motivation. Be mindful of it throughout your day, practicing kindness as much as possible. At the end of the day, have a little review time. How did it go today? Be sure to focus on the positive things you did, not only the negative. When you recall the positive things you did, take some time to rejoice in the good person you are and the good heart that you have.

For the negative actions, allow yourself to feel regret and then make a firm determination to do better tomorrow. Whatever mistakes you might have made, try to apply some sort of remedy to counter that negative vector of energy. If you want, there are particular purification practices you can do such as reciting the mantra of Vajrasattva or making prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas

As much as you can, try to practice the good heart. Try to continue some kind of meditation practice that will help you to develop greater mindfulness, happiness and peace. For example, you can work on the meditations in this book, going more deeply into them with each session.

*HOW TO DEDICATE  
YOUR VIRTUE*

*VENERABLE AMY MILLER*

*LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

*Like that, may the gurus who show the noble path  
And the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives.  
Please bless me to pacify completely  
All outer and inner hindrances.*

*In all my lives, never separated from perfect gurus,  
May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma.  
By completing the qualities of the stages and paths,  
May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.*

*Tsongkhapa  
The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

## *DEDICATION*

*VEN. AMY MILLER AND LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE*

Proper dedication of our virtue is necessary to bring about the swift fulfillment of our deepest longing, the state of divine union from which we can perfectly help others. Throughout this life and all future lives, from now until enlightenment, we need teachers who reveal the path and spiritual companions to accompany us. Having met with a perfect teacher, we need a healthy body and mind to practice, as well as external conditions free of obstacles. Not only do we need perfect teachers but we need them to teach us the complete and unmistakable path to buddhahood, the Dharma. Ultimately, what we wish to attain is the state of “Vajradhara,” meaning the one who abides in direct perception of emptiness while being active in the world to perfectly benefit others, which only a buddha can do. Vajradhara is the supreme manifestation of enlightenment that we aspire to achieve.

After all of the effort you have made making your way through this material, the most important thing you can do is to make a heartfelt dedication of all of this incredible positive energy. Below are some dedication prayers from Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhichitta – cherishing others, letting go of oneself, letting go of the I, which is the source of all the happiness and success of 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 bodhichitta which has already been generated increase.

Due to the merits of the three times 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; may all bodhisattvas' prayers succeed immediately; and may I be able to cause all this to happen by myself, alone.

Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Buddha of Compassion, and all other holy beings, all our virtuous friends, have stable lives and may all their holy wishes succeed immediately.

Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I be able to offer skies of benefit to all sentient beings as Lama Tsongkhapa does by having within me the same qualities that Lama Tsongkhapa has, from now on, in all my future lifetimes.

Due to the merits of the three times 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 non-existent 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 totally non-existent from their own side; to that enlightenment, which is totally non-existent from its own side, by myself alone, who is also totally non-existent from its own side.

May I be able to completely actualise Lama Tsongkhapa's teaching, which unifies sutra and tantra, within my mind and spread these teachings in the minds of all sentient beings. Thus, may Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings flourish forever.

Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and all sentient beings, may any sentient

being who hears me, touches me, remembers me, thinks about me, talks about me (whether praising or criticising), abuses me, treats me badly or makes any connection with me – simply by having made that connection – may they never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May those sentient beings immediately be liberated from all disease, spirit harms, negative karma and defilements, develop faith in refuge and karma, and quickly achieve enlightenment, by actualising the whole path, especially bodhichitta. By my hearing that someone is sick may it immediately cause that person to completely recover and have the most meaningful life by practicing the Mahayana path. By my hearing somebody has died may it cause that person to immediately be reborn in a pure land where they can get enlightened.

Due to the merits of the three times created by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, and all the rest of the sentient beings meet only perfectly qualified Mahayana gurus in all our future lifetimes. From our side may we see them only as enlightened beings. May we do only actions most pleasing to the holy minds of the virtuous friends. May we be able to fulfil all their holy wishes immediately.

Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may whatever I experience, good or bad, suffering or happiness, sickness or health, praise or blame, gain or loss, good reputation or bad reputation, long life or death, even being born in the hell realms, whatever I experience, may it only be of benefit to sentient beings – that which causes all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment by myself alone.

Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings wherever I am – whatever universe, world, country, area, or place – just by my being there –

may the sentient beings who are in that universe, world, country, area, or place never be reborn in the lower realms. May they immediately be liberated from all disease, spirit harm, negative karma and defilements and may they achieve enlightenment quickly by actualizing the whole path, especially bodhichitta. May wars, famine, sickness, and natural disasters immediately be stopped and may these things never be experienced again. May I also become wish-fulfilling for sentient beings, able to fulfill all their wishes according to Dharma.

*APPENDIX 1*  
*THE FOUNDATION OF ALL GOOD*  
*QUALITIES*

*LAMA TSONGKHAPA*

The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and perfect,  
pure Guru;  
Correct devotion to him is the root of the path.  
By clearly seeing this and applying great effort,  
Please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.

Understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is  
found only once,  
Is greatly meaningful, and is difficult to find again,  
Please bless me to generate the mind that unceasingly,  
Day and night, takes its essence.

This life is as impermanent as a water bubble;  
Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.  
After death, just like a shadow follows the body,  
The results of black and white karma follow.

Finding firm and definite conviction in this,  
Please bless me always to be careful  
To abandon even the slightest negativities  
And accomplish all virtuous deeds.

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering:  
They are uncertain and cannot be relied upon.  
Recognizing these shortcomings,  
Please bless me to generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

Led by this pure thought,  
Mindfulness, alertness, and great caution arise.  
The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha vows:  
Please bless me to accomplish this essential practice.

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,  
So have all mother migratory beings.  
Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhichitta,  
And bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

Even if I develop only bodhichitta, but I don't practice the  
three types of morality,  
I will not achieve enlightenment.  
With my clear recognition of this,  
Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

Once I have pacified distractions to wrong objects  
And correctly analyzed the meaning of reality,  
Please bless me to generate quickly within my mindstream  
The unified path of calm abiding and special insight.

Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path,  
Please bless me to enter  
The holy gateway of the fortunate ones:  
The supreme vajra vehicle.

At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments  
Is keeping pure vows and samaya.  
As I have become firmly convinced of this,  
Please bless me to protect these vows and pledges like my life.

Then, having realized the importance of the two stages,  
The essence of the Vajrayana,  
By practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions,  
Please bless me to realize the teachings of the holy guru.

Like that, may the gurus who show the noble path  
And the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives.  
Please bless me to pacify completely  
All outer and inner hindrances.

In all my lives, never separated from perfect gurus,  
May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma.  
By completing the qualities of the stages and paths,  
May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

*Colophon:*

The Foundation of All Good Qualities – From the Jor Chö booklet, translator, Jampāl Lhundrup, edited by Ven. Ailsa Cameron, Wisdom Pubs., 1988. Lightly edited by Ven. Constance Miller and Nick Ribush, April 1999.



## APPENDIX 2

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

All of the following items are available through the Foundation Store ([www.fpmt.org/shop](http://www.fpmt.org/shop)), unless otherwise indicated.

#### *LIFE OF THE BUDDHA*

*Old Path, White Clouds.* Thich Nhat Hanh. Parallax.

#### *THE NATURE OF MIND*

*The Mind and Its Function.* Geshe Rabten. Rabten Choeling

#### *GRADUATED PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT (LAM-RIM).*

*The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lam-rim Chenmo) Vol. 1-3.* Tsong-kha-pa (1347-1419). Detailed overview of the lam-rim. Snow Lion.

*Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Commentary on the Lam-rim Chenmo Vol. 1-5.* Geshe Sopa. Extremely detailed teachings on the lam-rim and how to apply them to daily life. Snow Lion.

*Practicing the Path.* Yangsi Rinpoche. Complete lam-rim teachings by a modern Tibetan teacher. Wisdom.

*Lam-rim Outlines, Extended Beginner's Meditation Guide.* Ven. Karin Valham.

*Way to Freedom.* His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Harper.

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand.* Pabongka Rinpoche.

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*The Principal Teachings of Buddhism.* Tsongkapa. Classics of Middle Asia.

*Path to Bliss.* His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Trans. Thubten Jinpa and Christine Cox. Snow Lion.

*Path to Enlightenment.* His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Snow Lion.

*Guided Meditations on the Stages of the Path.* Thubten Chodron. Teachings on the stages of the path accompanied by 14 hours of guided meditations on MP3 CD. Snow Lion.

***THE AWAKENING HEART (BODHICHITTA) AND MIND TRAINING. (LOJONG)***

*How to Generate Bodhicitta.* Ribur Rinpoche. Amitabha Buddhist Centre, Singapore.

*Achieving Bodhicitta.* Sermey Khensur Lobsang Tharchin. Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press

*Enlightened Courage: An Explanation of the Seven-Point Mind Training.* Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Snow Lion.

*Peacock in the Poison Grove: Introduction to Mental Training Practice.* Geshe Lhundup Sopa. Wisdom.

*Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness.* Sharon Salzberg. Shambhala.

***EMPTINESS***

*Echoes of Voidness.* Geshe Rabten. Trans. Stephen Batchelor. Wisdom.

*Emptiness Yoga: The Tibetan Middle Way.* Jeffrey Hopkins. Snow Lion.

***INTRODUCTION TO TIBETAN BUDDHISM***

*The World of Tibetan Buddhism.* His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Wisdom.

*Introduction to Tantra.* Lama Yeshe. Wisdom. (See any of His books).

*The Door to Satisfaction.* Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Wisdom. (See any of His books).

*The Four Noble Truths, The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Vol.1.* Geshe Tashi Tsering. Wisdom.

*Wisdom Energy.* Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Wisdom.

*Open Heart, Clear Mind.* Thubten Chodron. Snow Lion.

### *MEDITATION*

*How to Meditate: A Practical Guide.* Kathleen McDonald. Wisdom.

*Quiet Mind: A Beginner's Guide to Meditation.* Sharon Salzberg and others. Shambhala.

*Stages of Meditation.* His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Detailed instruction on how to develop deep states of meditation to actualize the path to enlightenment. Snow Lion.

### *OTHER*

*Mandala Magazine*, quarterly publication with various articles related to Buddhist views and practices, includes listing of all FPMT Centers & Service Projects worldwide.

### *PRACTICE TEXTS*

*Altar Set-up & Water Bowl Offerings*, practice text on how to set up an altar and make offerings with a fully engaged body and mind. Includes "Extensive Offering Practice." Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

*A Daily Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha*, daily practice based on devotion to Shakyamuni Buddha and meditation on the Lam-rim, created by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

*Refuge in the Three Jewels*, practice text includes short refuge practice and vows associated with taking refuge.

*Bodhisattva Vows*, short text elucidating details of vows for compassionate living that all can practice. Includes short commentary by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

*Heart Practices for Death & Dying*, compilation of practices to help oneself and others at the time of death.

*Essential Buddhist Prayers, Vol. 1*, compilation of the most common daily practices and prayers done within the FPMT.

*Preliminary Practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas*, detailed instructions and practice for how to do the practice of prostrations for purification.

*A Short Vajrasattva Meditation*, simple practice text outlining an easy way to incorporate the daily purification practice of Vajrasattva into your life. Downloadable PDF practice booklet.

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*The Complete Lam-Rim*. Audio CD of 17 meditations on the Lam-Rim, guided by Ven. Karin Valham.

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*Introduction to Tantra* DVD by Lama Thubten Yeshe.

*Three Principal Aspects of the Path* DVD. Lama Thubten Yeshe.

*This is the Teaching of the Buddha* DVD. Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

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*Foundation of Buddhist Thought*. Center-based and correspondence course of 2 years taught and guided by Geshe Tashi Tsering. In-depth study with an emphasis on applying the teachings to daily life.

## *ABOUT THE AUTHORS*

**Lama Thubten Yeshe** was born in Tibet in 1935. At the age of six, he entered the great Sera Monastic University, Lhasa, where he studied until 1959, when the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him into exile in India. Lama Yeshe continued to study and meditate in India until 1967, when, with his chief disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, he went to Nepal. Two years later he established Kopan Monastery, near Kathmandu, in order to teach Buddhism to Westerners.

In 1974, the Lamas began making annual teaching tours to the West, and as a result of these travels a worldwide network of Buddhist teaching and meditation centers—the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT)—began to develop.

In 1984, after an intense decade of imparting a wide variety of incredible teachings and establishing one FPMT activity after another, at the age of forty-nine, Lama Yeshe passed away. He was reborn as Ösel Hita Torres in Spain in 1985, recognized as the incarnation of Lama Yeshe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1986, and, as the monk Lama Tenzin Osel Rinpoche, began studying for his geshe degree in 1992 at the reconstituted Sera Monastery in South India. Lama's remarkable story is told in Vicki Mackenzie's book, *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama* (Wisdom Publications, 1996).

Thousands of pages of Lama's teachings have been made available as transcripts, books and audio by the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, [www.LamaYeshe.com](http://www.LamaYeshe.com), and most are freely available through the Archive's website. Other teachings have been published by Wisdom Books, including *Wisdom Energy*; *Introduction to Tantra*; *The Tantric Path of Purification (Becoming Vajrasattva)* and more, available at [www.wisdompubs.org](http://www.wisdompubs.org).

**Lama Zopa Rinpoche** was born in 1946 in Thami, in the Mount Everest region of Nepal, not far from the Lawudo cave where his predecessor had meditated for the last 20 years of his life. Rinpoche's own description of his early years may be found in his book, *The Door to Satisfaction* (Wisdom Publications). At the age of ten, Rinpoche went to Tibet and studied and meditated at Domo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery near Pagri, until the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 forced him to forsake Tibet for the safety of Bhutan.

Rinpoche then went to the Tibetan refugee camp at Buxa Duar, West Bengal, India, where he met Lama Yeshe, who became his closest teacher. The Lamas went to Nepal in 1967, and over the next few years built Kopan and Lawudo Monasteries. In 1971 Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave the first of his famous annual lam-rim retreat courses, which continue at Kopan to this day.

In 1974, with Lama Yeshe, Rinpoche began traveling the world to teach and establish centers of Dharma. When Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, Rinpoche took over as spiritual director of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), which has continued to flourish under his peerless leadership. More details of Rinpoche's life and work may be found on the FPMT Web site, [www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org).

Thousands of pages of Rinpoche's teachings have been made available as transcripts, books and audio by the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, [LamaYeshe.com](http://LamaYeshe.com), and most are freely available on the Archive's website. Rinpoche's other published teachings include *Wisdom Energy* (with Lama Yeshe), *Transforming Problems*, *Dear Lama Zopa*, *How to be Happy* and others available from Wisdom Publications, [www.wisdompubs.org](http://www.wisdompubs.org), and many prayer and practice materials are available from FPMT Education Services, [www.fpmt.org/shop](http://www.fpmt.org/shop).

**Amy Miller (Ven. Lobsang Chodren)** first encountered Tibetan Buddhism in the spring of 1987 during a course at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. Since then, she has spent a great deal of time engaged in meditation retreats, study, teaching, and Buddhist center management in India, Nepal, and the United States.

From 1992-1995 she managed Tse Chen Ling Center in San Francisco, California after which she served as director of Vajrapani Institute, also in California, from 1995-2004. From 1998-2002, she was also the manager of the Lawudo Retreat Fund, which supports the center in which the sacred cave of Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche is located in the Mt. Everest region of Nepal. In 2004, she completed a seven-month solitary retreat in California. For most of 2005 and 2006, she organized international teaching tours for and traveled with the esteemed Tibetan Buddhist master, Ven. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche. Amy has also had the good fortune to visit Tibet in 1987 and again in 2001 as a pilgrimage leader for the Institute of Noetic Science in the United States. She has also led pilgrimages in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim for the Liberation Prison Project.

In 2000, Amy was ordained as a Buddhist nun by the great Tibetan master, Ven. Choden Rinpoche, and has been teaching extensively since 1992. Her teaching style emphasizes a practical approach to integrating Buddhist philosophy into everyday life. She is happy to help people connect with meditation and mindfulness in an effort to gain a refreshing perspective on normally stressful living.

Presently, Amy continues to teach around the world and is the director of Milarepa Center, a beautiful retreat center in northern Vermont in the United States.

## GLOSSARY

**Abhidharma** One of the three baskets (tripitaka) of the Buddhist canon, the others being the Vinaya and the Sutra; the systematized philosophical and psychological analysis of existence that is the basis of the Buddhist systems of tenets and mind training.

**affliction** See *delusion*.

**aggregates** The five psycho-physical constituents that make up a sentient being: form, feeling, discriminative awareness, conditioning (compositional) factors and consciousness.

**arya** Literally, noble. One who has realized the wisdom of emptiness.

**Asanga, Arya** The Indian Buddhist philosopher who was born about nine hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha and founded the Cittamatra School of Buddhist philosophy.

**Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana (982-1054)** The great Indian master who first formulated the lam-rim teachings when he came to Tibet in 1042.

**bhumi** Ground, or level, as in the ten bodhisattva levels.

**bodhicitta** The altruistic intention, or determination, to reach enlightenment for the sole purpose of enlightening all sentient beings.

**bodhisattva** Someone whose spiritual practice is directed toward the achievement of enlightenment. One who possesses the compassionate motivation of bodhicitta.

**Buddha** A fully enlightened being. One who has removed all obscurations veiling the mind and has developed all good qualities to perfection. The first of the Three Jewels of Refuge. See also *enlightenment*.

**Buddhadharma** The teachings of the Buddha. See also *Dharma*.

**buddhahood** See *enlightenment*.

**buddha nature** The clear light nature of mind possessed by all sentient beings; the potential for all sentient beings to become enlightened by removing the two obscurations: to liberation and omniscience. See also *obscurations*.

**Buddhist** One who has taken refuge in the Three Jewels of Refuge: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and who accepts the philosophical world view of the “four seals”: that all composite phenomena are impermanent, all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering, all things and events are devoid of self-existence, and nirvana is true peace.

**calm abiding** See *shamatha*.

**compassion** The wish for all beings to be separated from their mental and physical suffering. A prerequisite for the development of bodhicitta. Compassion is symbolized by the meditational deity Avalokiteshvara and the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*.

**consciousness** See *mind*.

**cyclic existence** See *samsara*.

**defilement** See *delusion*.

**delusion** An obscuration covering the essentially pure nature of the mind, being thereby responsible for suffering and dissatisfaction; the main delusion is ignorance, out of which grow desirous attachment, hatred, jealousy, and all the other delusions.

**dependent origination** Also called dependent arising. In general, phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions and

are therefore empty of inherent existence; they are not self-existent because they are dependent arisings. See also *twelve links*.

**Dharma** Spiritual teachings, particularly those of Shakyamuni Buddha. Literally, that which protects us from suffering. The Tibetan term has the literal connotation of "changing," or "bringing about transformation." The second of the Three Jewels of Refuge.

**dharmakaya** One of the three (or four) bodies (kayas) of a buddha; this kaya is related to the omniscient mind of a buddha that pervades all phenomena and is also known as the truth body of a buddha.

**dualistic view** The ignorant view characteristic of the unenlightened mind in which all things are falsely conceived to have concrete self-existence. To such a view, the appearance of an object is mixed with the false image of its being independent or self-existent, thereby leading to further dualistic views concerning subject and object, self and other, this and that, etc.

**ego** The wrong conception of the self; the mistaken belief that "I am self-existent." The fundamental ignorance that has caused us to circle through cyclic existence since beginningless time.

**ego-grasping** The ignorant compulsion to regard one's self, or I, as permanent, self-existent, and independent of all other phenomena.

**empowerment** See *initiation*.

**emptiness** The absence of all false ideas about how things exist; specifically, the lack of the apparent independent, self-existence of phenomena. Sometimes translated as "voidness."

**enlightenment** Full awakening; buddhahood. The ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, attained when all limitations have been removed from the mind and one's positive potential has been completely and perfectly realized. It is a state characterized by infinite compassion, wisdom and skill.

**equanimity** Absence of the usual discrimination of sentient beings into friend, enemy and stranger, deriving from the realization that all sentient beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering and that since beginningless time, all beings have been all things to each other. An impartial mind that serves as the basis for the development of great love, great compassion and bodhicitta.

**five paths** The paths along which beings progress to liberation and enlightenment; the paths of accumulation, preparation (conjunction), seeing (insight), meditation and no more learning (beyond training).

**Four Noble Truths** The subject of Buddha's first turning of the wheel of Dharma. The truths of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering as seen by an arya.

**four seals of Buddhism** Four elements needed for a teaching to be considered Buddhist. (1) all compounded phenomena are impermanent (2) all contaminated things are dissatisfactory (3) all phenomena are selfless, and (4) nirvana is peace.

**Gelug** The Virtuous Order. The order of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Lama Tsong Khapa and his disciples in the early fifteenth century and the most recent of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Developed from the Kadam School founded by Atisha and Dromtönpa. See also *Nyingma*, *Kagyü* and *Sakya*.

**graduated path** See *lam-rim*.

**Great Vehicle** See *Mahayana*.

**guru** A spiritual guide or teacher. One who shows a disciple the path to liberation and enlightenment. Literally, heavy—heavy with knowledge of Dharma. In tantra, one's teacher is seen as inseparable from the meditational deity and the Three Jewels of refuge.

**Hinayana** Literally, Small, or Lesser, Vehicle. It is one of the two general divisions of Buddhism. Hinayana practitioners' motivation for following the Dharma path is principally their intense wish for personal liberation from conditioned existence, or *samsara*. Two types of Hinayana practitioner are identified: hearers and solitary realizers. See also *Mahayana* and *Theravada*.

**ignorance** Literally, "not seeing" that which exists, or the way in which things exist. There are basically two kinds, ignorance of karma and ignorance of ultimate truth. The fundamental delusion from which all others spring. The first of the twelve links of dependent origination.

**impermanence** The gross and subtle levels of the transience of phenomena. The moment things and events come into existence, their disintegration has already begun.

**inherent (or intrinsic) existence** What phenomena are empty of; the object of negation, or refutation. To ignorance, phenomena appear to exist independently, in and of themselves, to exist inherently. See also *emptiness*.

**initiation** Transmission received from a tantric master allowing a disciple to engage in the practices of a particular meditational deity. Also referred to as an *empowerment*.

**Kadam** The order of Tibetan Buddhism founded in the eleventh century by Atisha, Dromtönpa and their followers, the "Kadampa geshe"; the forerunner of the Gelug School.

**Kagyü** The order of Tibetan Buddhism founded in the eleventh century by Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, and their followers. One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. See also *Nyingma*, *Sakya*, and *Gelug*.

**karma** Action; the working of cause and effect, whereby positive (virtuous) actions produce happiness and negative (non-virtuous) actions produce suffering.

**kaya** Body; most commonly used in reference to an enlightened being, who has two, three, or four bodies, depending on how they are being referenced. Two: form body and truth body (rupakaya and dharmakaya). Three: emanation, enjoyment and truth body (nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, dharmakaya). Four: the previous three plus the body of the truth of the sphere of reality, the svabhavakaya, which represents the nature of the other three bodies and the unification of the truth body and the form body.

**lama** See *guru*.

**lam-rim** The graduated path. A presentation of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings in a form suitable for the step-by-step training of a disciple. See also *Atisha* and *three principal aspects of the path*.

**Lesser Vehicle** See *Hinayana*.

**liberation** The state of complete freedom from samsara; the goal of a practitioner seeking his or her own escape from suffering (see also *Hinayana*). "Lower nirvana" is used to refer to this state of self-liberation, while "higher nirvana" refers to the supreme attainment of the full enlightenment of buddhahood. Natural nirvana (Tib: rang-zhin nyang-dä) is the fundamentally pure nature of reality, where all things and events are devoid of any inherent, intrinsic or independent reality.

**Mahayana** Literally, Great Vehicle. It is one of the two general divisions of Buddhism. Mahayana practitioners' motivation for following the Dharma path is principally their intense wish for all mother sentient beings to be liberated from conditioned existence, or samsara, and to attain the full enlightenment of buddhahood. The Mahayana has two divisions, Paramitayana (Sutrayana) and Vajrayana (Tantrayana, Mantrayana). See also *Hinayana*.

**Maitreya** After Shakyamuni Buddha, the next (fifth) of the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon to descend to turn the wheel of

Dharma. Presently residing in the pure land of Tushita (Ganden). Recipient of the method lineage of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, which, in a mystical transmission, he passed on to Asanga.

mara See *obstructive forces*.

Mara Personification of the delusions that distract us from Dharma practice; what Buddhists might call the "devil"; what Shakyamuni Buddha overcame under the bodhi tree as he strove for enlightenment.

meditation Familiarization of the mind with a virtuous object. There are two types, placement (absorptive) and analytic (insight).

merit Positive imprints left on the mind by virtuous, or Dharma, actions. The principal cause of happiness.

middle way The view presented in Shakyamuni Buddha's *prajñāparamita* sutras and elucidated by Nagarjuna that all phenomena are dependent arisings, thereby avoiding the mistaken extremes of self-existence and non-existence, or eternalism and nihilism.

Milarepa (1040-1123) Tibet's great yogi, who achieved enlightenment in his lifetime under the tutelage of his guru, Marpa, who was a contemporary of Atisha. One of the founding fathers of the Kagyü School.

mind Synonymous with consciousness and sentience. Defined as that which is "clear and knowing"; a formless entity that has the ability to perceive objects. Mind is divided into six primary consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors.

Nagarjuna The Indian Buddhist philosopher who was born about four hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha, was said to have lived for six hundred years, and founded the Madhyamaka School of Buddhist philosophy.

nihilism The doctrine that nothing exists; that, for example, there's no cause and effect of actions or no past and future lives.

nirvana See *liberation*.

Nyingma The old translation school of Tibetan Buddhism, which traces its teachings back to the time of Padmasambhava, the eighth century Indian tantric master invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen to clear away hindrances to the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. The first of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. See also *Kagyü*, *Sakya*, and *Gelug*.

obscurations, obstructions Gross hindrances (see also *delusion*), which prevent liberation from samsara, and subtle hindrances, which prevent omniscience.

paramita See *six perfections*.

Paramitayana The Perfection Vehicle; the first of the two Mahayana paths. This is the gradual path to enlightenment traversed by bodhisattvas practicing the six perfections (charity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration, and wisdom) through the ten bodhisattva levels (bhumi) over countless eons of rebirth in samsara for the benefit of all sentient beings. Also called Sutrayana or Bodhisattvayana.

Prajñāparamita The perfection of wisdom. The Prajñāparamita sutras are the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha in which the wisdom of emptiness and the path of the bodhisattva are set forth. The basis of Nagarjuna's philosophy.

pratimoksha Vows of individual liberation; seven types.

precious human rebirth Being a human being with 18 specific qualities that render one's life most suitable for spiritual development.

purification The eradication from the mind of negative imprints left by past non-virtuous actions, which would otherwise ripen into suffering. The most effective methods of purification employ the four opponent powers of regret, reliance, virtuous activity and resolve.

**refuge** The door to the Dharma path. Fearing the sufferings of samsara, Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels with the faith that Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the power to lead them to happiness, liberation, or enlightenment.

**renunciation** A heartfelt feeling of complete disgust with cyclic existence such that day and night one yearns for liberation and engages in the practices that secure it. The first of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment. See also *bodhichitta* and *emptiness*.

**Rimé** A movement and tradition within Tibetan Buddhism that emphasizes an inclusive and non-sectarian approach, utilizing teachings and methods from all four sects of Tibetan Buddhism: Gelug, Kagyü, Sakya, and Nyingma.

**rinpoche** Literally, "precious one." Epithet for an incarnate lama, that is, one who has intentionally taken rebirth in a human form to benefit sentient beings on the path to enlightenment.

**rupakaya** Form body of a buddha. That aspect of a buddha's enlightenment that takes form to benefit others.

**Sakya** One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It was founded in the eleventh century in the south of the province of Tsang by Konchog Gyälpo. See also *Nyingma*, *Kagyü*, and *Gelug*.

**samadhi** See *single-pointed concentration*.

**samsara** The six realms of conditioned existence, three lower—hell, hungry ghost (Skt: *preta*), and animal—and three upper—human, demigod (Skt: *asura*), and god (Skt: *sura*). The beginningless, recurring cycle of death and rebirth under the control of delusion and karma, fraught with suffering. Also refers to the contaminated aggregates of a sentient being.

**Sangha** Spiritual community; the third of the Three Jewels of Refuge. Absolute Sangha are those who have directly realized emptiness; relative Sangha are ordained monks and nuns.

sentient being Any unenlightened being; any being whose mind is not completely free from gross and subtle ignorance.

Shakyamuni Buddha (563-483 BCE) Fourth of the one thousand founding buddhas of this present world age. Born a prince of the Shakya clan in north India, he taught the sutra and tantra paths to liberation and enlightenment; founder of what came to be known as Buddhism. (From the Skt: buddha—"fully awake.")

shamatha Calm abiding; stabilization arisen from meditation and conjoined with special pliancy.

Shantideva Eighth century Indian Buddhist philosopher and bodhisattva who propounded the Madhyamaka Prasangika view. Wrote the quintessential Mahayana text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Bodhicharyavatara).

shiné See *shamatha*.

shunyata See *emptiness*.

single-pointed concentration A state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration on the actual nature of things, free from discursive thought and dualistic conceptions.

six perfections Charity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom. See also *Paramitayana*.

stupa Buddhist reliquary objects ranging in size from huge to a few inches in height and representing the enlightened mind.

sutra A discourse of Shakyamuni Buddha; the pre-tantric division of Buddhist teachings stressing the cultivation of bodhicitta and the practice of the six perfections. See also *Paramitayana*.

tantra Literally, thread, or continuity. The texts of the secret mantra teachings of Buddhism; often used to refer to these teachings themselves.

Tantrayana See *Vajrayana*.

**Theravada** One of the eighteen schools into which the Hinayana split not long after Shakyamuni Buddha's death; the dominant Hinayana school today, prevalent in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma, and well represented in the West.

**three Baskets** The three divisions of the Dharma: vinaya, sutra, and abhidharma.

**three Higher Trainings** Morality (ethics), meditation (concentration) and wisdom (insight).

**three Jewels** The objects of refuge for a Buddhist: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

**three principal aspects of the path** The three main divisions of the lam-rim: renunciation, bodhicitta and the right view (of emptiness).

**Tripitaka** The three divisions of the Dharma: vinaya, sutra and abhidharma.

**Tsongkhapa, Lama Je (1357- 1417)** Founder of the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and revitalizer of many sutra and tantra lineages and the monastic tradition in Tibet.

**twelve links of dependent origination** The twelve steps in the evolution of cyclic existence: ignorance, karmic formation, consciousness, name and form, sensory fields, contact, feelings, attachment, grasping, becoming (existence), birth and aging and death. This is Shakyamuni Buddha's explanation of how delusion and karma bind sentient beings to samsara, causing them to be reborn into suffering again and again; depicted pictorially in the Tibetan "Wheel of Life."

**vajra posture** A meditative posture also known as full lotus, whereby one's legs are crossed with each foot resting on the opposite thigh.

**Vajrayana** The adamantine vehicle; the second of the two Mahayana paths. It is also called Tantrayana or Mantrayana. This is the quickest vehicle of Buddhism as it allows certain practitioners to attain enlightenment within a single lifetime. See also *tantra*.

**vinaya** The Buddha's teachings on ethical discipline (morality), monastic conduct and so forth; one of the three baskets.

**vows** Precepts taken on the basis of refuge at all levels of Buddhist practice. Pratimoksha precepts (vows of individual liberation) are the main vows in the Hinayana tradition and are taken by monks, nuns, and lay people; they are the basis of all other vows. Bodhisattva and tantric precepts are the main vows in the Mahayana tradition. See also *Vinaya*.

**wisdom** Different levels of insight into the nature of reality. There are, for example, the three wisdoms of hearing, contemplation and meditation. Ultimately, there is the wisdom realizing emptiness, which frees beings from cyclic existence and eventually brings them to enlightenment.

**yana** Literally, vehicle; a spiritual path that takes you from where you are to where you want to be. See also *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana*.

## *CARE OF DHARMA BOOKS*



Dharma books contain the teachings of the Buddha; they have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation. Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk – and not stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separate from more mundane materials. Other objects should not be placed on top of Dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered bad form as well as negative karma. If it is necessary to dispose of written Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash. When burning Dharma texts, it is first recite a prayer or mantra, such as OM, AH, HUM. Then, you can visualize the letters of the texts (to be burned) absorbing into the AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mindstream. After that, as you continue to recite OM, AH, HUM, you can burn the texts.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has recommended that photos or images of holy beings, deities, or other holy objects not be burned. Instead, they should be placed with respect in a stupa, tree, or other high, clean place. One may put them into a small structure like a bird house and then seal the house. In this way, the holy images do not end up on the ground.

# *Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition*



The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is a dynamic worldwide organization devoted to education and public service. Established by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, FPMT touches the lives of beings all over the world. In the early 1970s, young Westerners inspired by the intelligence and practicality of the Buddhist approach made contact with these lamas in Nepal and the organization was born. Now encompassing over 150 Dharma centers, projects, social services and publishing houses in thirty-three countries, we continue to bring the enlightened message of compassion, wisdom, and peace to the world.

We invite you to join us in our work to develop compassion around the world! Visit our website at [www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org) to find a center near you, a study program suited to your needs, practice materials, meditation supplies, sacred art, and online teachings. We offer a membership program with benefits such as Mandala magazine and discounts at the online Foundation Store. And check out some of the vast projects Lama Zopa Rinpoche has developed to preserve the Mahayana tradition and help end suffering in the world today. Lastly, never hesitate to contact us if we can be of service to you.

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