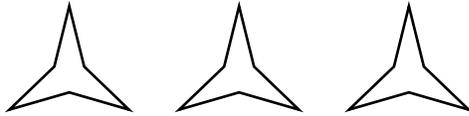


THE HEAP OF PRECIOUS JEWELS



a commentary on the revealed teachings of Guru Padmasmbhava
from the collection of Dakini Teachings by Nyang Ral Nyima Ozer

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INTRODUCTION

We are together here tonight for a special occasion: to practice the dharma. With joyful effort, we are going to dedicate our time and concentration toward the development of inner peace and wisdom for everyone.

To begin, we should have the right motivation. This is known as bodhicitta, an attitude of love and compassion for all sentient beings, including oneself. We can understand the value of bodhicitta in a very practical way, through direct perception and our own experience, without having to use deduction or inference. In both worldly life and dharma practice, it is very important to develop an attitude of love and compassion. It brings joy and happiness to everyone. As Mahayana practitioners and followers of the Buddha, we should meditate on bodhicitta all the time. This is our principle practice no matter what other disciplines we perform. All activities must be based on this attitude.

Having aroused bodhicitta within our hearts and minds, we should listen to the teachings. Shakyamuni Buddha offered many different levels of instruction in order to help all sentient beings realize enlightenment. Tonight's teaching is the condensed essence of the Buddhadharma which was revealed by Guru Padmasambhava.

Guru Padmasambhava was born about eight years after the Buddha's mahaparinirvana. Over a thousand years later, in the eighth century, he came to Tibet and performed many miraculous activities for the sake of awakening sentient beings. He didn't follow conventional rules and regulations but went beyond egoic habit patterns altogether. His activities were an expression of transcendental wisdom and he helped guide many sentient beings toward buddhahood.

Guru Padmasambhava predicted that in the future, there would be people who did not believe that he was real or that anyone could do such miraculous things. As a testimony, he left hand prints in the rocks around four different lakes in Tibet which can still be seen. He said, "I have definitely come to Tibet. These are my monuments." Guru Rinpoche also left four footprints in the four directions, two in Tibet and two elsewhere, south of Tibet. He even left his body print in the mountains of Bhutan, near the Tibetan border. This is not just a story or a myth. You can still go there on pilgrimage and see his whole body impression in solid rock. These are reminders that Guru Padmasambhava actually came into this world and shared his wisdom.

There are 1,900 different versions of the life story of Guru Padmasambhava. The most popular one in this country is known as *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*. It contains about 110 different activities which can be condensed into eleven principal aspects, including accounts of the eight emanations of Guru Padmasambhava.

Guru Padmasambhava is a totally enlightened being. He is the supreme embodiment of all buddhas. On the highest level of the dharmakaya, Guru Padmasambhava is known as Samantabhadra or Vajradhara. The sambhogakaya Guru Padmasambhava is known as Vajrasattva, and in nirmanakaya form he is known as Buddha Shakyamuni or Guru Padmasambhava himself. Guru Padmasambhava proclaimed that he is no other than the Trikaya Buddha. He is also known as the Buddha of the degenerate era. His guidance, protection, loving-kindness and wisdom activities are something special to all Tibetans.

All his miraculous powers can be condensed into five different groups, those of:

- 1) the body
- 2) the speech

- 3) the mind
- 4) qualities and
- 5) activities

Guru Padmasambhava's miraculous bodily aspect was first demonstrated by his manner of coming into the world. He appeared spontaneously in the center of a lotus. Abiding in a rainbow-body, replete with transcendental wisdom, Guru Padmasambhava is also free from aging, sickness and death. These are some of his primary bodily attainments.

Guru Padmasambhava's power of speech was made evident through his discourses on the Vajrayana and inner tantric teachings. This is really his specialty, because he is the Buddha of the degenerate era and the guru for high level practitioners. He is also known as the Buddha of tantra. His speech is very powerful. Merely by hearing his words, even mighty demons are completely subdued. Their minds and attitudes transform into the bodhicitta state of love and compassion.

The supreme activity of Guru Padmasambhava's mind is the realization of transcendental wisdom. He sees everything perfectly in one moment without mixing anything up. Whether an event is in the past, present or future, he is always clear in relation to the phenomena of the three times. All his predictions from the eighth century continue to be amazingly accurate even to the present day, for the world in general, and particularly for the situation in Tibet. This is an example of his wisdom mind.

One special quality of his transcendental activity is that Guru Padmasambhava does not just manifest as one buddha. He may seem like that, but he can appear in various ways at once, without being limited to a single embodiment. For example, he manifested as an ordained monk, a yogi and a lay practitioner, all at the same time. Outside of the Nyingma lineage, in the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, there are many masters who have had visions of Guru Padmasambhava and received teachings which greatly improved their realizations. He appears in many different forms in order to benefit all sentient beings throughout the three times and ten directions.

By meditating on Guru Padmasambhava, practitioners remove obscurations, heal disease and sicknesses, pacify mental unrest, resolve psychological and emotional problems, and augment their realization of peace and happiness. Regular practice of guru-yoga overpowers and tames all kinds of wild conceptions and dualistic habit-patterns. It subdues ego-clinging, ignorance, attachment and anger. By practicing on Guru Padmasambhava, we accomplish all four of the enlightened activities.

The text for this teaching was originally taught by Guru Padmasambhava. It is a combination of both Sutra and Vajrayana teachings. It is known as the "*Lam-rim Rinchen Ph'ung-pa.*" Lam-rim indicates that this is a graduated path teaching aimed at a progressive movement toward enlightenment. Rinchen Ph'ung-pa means "Heap of Precious Jewels." It starts with Sutra topics and explains how to develop to attain the highest realization of Dzogchen.

Guru Padmasambhava begins by paying homage to Dorje-sem-pa or the Buddha Vajrasattva. Dorje-sem-pa has two aspects: external and internal. We have all seen beautiful portrayals of the external Vajrasattva in thangkas. These depict the relative appearance of Vajrasattva as a sambhogakaya buddha. The inner way of understanding is indicated through looking closely at the terms; *dorje* in Tibetan and *vajra* in Sanskrit refer to indestructible wisdom. *Sem-pa* or *sattva* denote compassion. The union of compassion and wisdom is the absolute Vajrasattva and this is none other than one's own primordial nature of mind.

The term “homage” has many different meanings. A realized being is known as an object of homage. Esoterically, paying homage means being in mystical union with the primordial nature. You connect directly with what you are in truth. By invoking and revering that transcendental reality, you merge with it and unite without any separation. This is known as absolute homage.

After paying homage to Vajrasattva, Guru Padmasambhava reveals his reasons for giving these particular teachings in one shloka or verse of four lines. I will give you a rough translation. He says that we should observe and think carefully about all forms of knowledge and not restrict ourselves, but to keep our minds open to every aspect of existence. This is an admonition to be impartially aware of everything which surrounds us. When you do that, you will understand how situations develop and learn to recognize how mind and perception coordinate and create our experience of the world. You will discover something mystical about what is happening here. Is your experience really the way it seems? Why is it that way? When you really inquire, you will find amazing answers.

One’s mind is the source of everything that is going on. All this motion is known as samsara, and is only within the mind. There is no samsara to be found other than the one within the domain of conceptual and dualistic consciousness. Enlightenment or nirvana is beyond conception, mundane ideas and habit patterns.

After a while, we become tired of samsara. We’ve been through so many changes while clinging to this mind and its karmas that eventually we might be moved to begin approaching what is beyond the confines of egoity and conception: primordial wisdom. Guru Padmasambhava has given us “A Heap of Precious Jewels” to awaken this wisdom, so as to bring about a clearer understanding of all samsaric phenomena and samsaric attitudes, to penetrate habit patterns and completely reveal our primordial nature.

THE OUTER, INNER AND SECRET TEACHINGS

The main body of the teaching is divided into three groups; the outer, inner and secret.

- 1) Outer refers to the general understanding associated with common perception in the everyday world. This does not go beyond our normal situation; the realm of sensory phenomena and how we deal with it, including the full range of experiences which happen from the common point of view.
- 2) Inner means we are inquiring beyond conventional assumptions. This relates to mind. Inner refers to what is deeper than the outer view. It is not widely recognized and may not be seen clearly by everybody. By looking carefully, almost anybody can derive some meaning on this level, but it is not a common experience.
- 3) The secret level is primordial wisdom itself, the real Dzogchen. This precious, secret teaching points directly to primordial wisdom; this is the freshness of Dzogchen.

THE OUTER TEACHING

The outer part of this teaching, begins by telling people who really want to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, the importance of contacting a qualified master. Not every teacher is qualified. The perfect master must have the following six qualities:

- 1) He has received uninterrupted lineage teachings without any kind of mix-up. These were originally transmitted from the Buddha Samantabhadra through Buddha Shakyamuni until now.
- 2) the ability to initiate others and transmit these teachings,
- 3) great compassion and wisdom,
- 4) a good conceptual and experiential understanding of all Buddha's teachings,
- 5) adept at meditation, the master holds the right view,
- 6) the ability to both teach and practice the teaching himself.

Those who have these six qualities are qualified to teach. If you are fortunate enough to find such a master, you should approach him or her with respect. Never view the teacher as if he were selling the teaching like so much merchandise and you are a customer looking to bargain for it. This is a poor attitude and must be given up. Rather, see yourself as a person with a disease which can be cured by the removal of the five poisons and view the master as if he were a competent doctor who can remedy these troubles. Consider the teaching as a healing nectar, like special medicine that is a potent antidote to the poisons. By continuing to practice, we are drinking this nectar. We should have supreme confidence that this will completely remove the suffering associated with all five poisons. With this understanding, we have cause for great joy and happiness which becomes the basis for a very close, warm feeling toward the teacher. This is the kind of attitude we must have in relation to a qualified master.

When receiving the teachings, listen very carefully to every word. Your ears must be really open to hear clearly. Let the meaning penetrate your heart center. Keep the teaching there within the heart space. Don't release it carelessly or neglect to meditate upon it. Keep every word in your heart.

If you don't open your ears, you are like an upside down pot. No matter how much tea you pour, it won't go in. If you open your ears, but don't keep the teaching in your heart with mindfulness, you are like a pot which has holes in the bottom. So even if the tea goes in, it won't stay very long. It quickly leaks away.

When you receive teachings, do not mix up the profound meaning with your own reactive emotions such as anger, jealousy, desire or ignorance. This is like mixing delicious food with poison. It completely spoils it. To receive teachings, keep your mind very clear. Concentrate on understanding the meaning of what is said so as to not adulterate the teaching with negative emotions.

Beyond all this, you must perceive a qualified master in five ways:

- 1) as a manifestation of the buddhas
- 2) as one who has realized the vajra nature of primordial wisdom
- 3) as an embodiment of the three jewels
- 4) as a wish-fulfilling jewel or the wish-granting tree which gives us the true

method to realize buddhahood
5) as kinder than the Buddha

To truly comprehend these five points, you must sharpen your perception and approach the master with devotion.

Tantric practitioners should feel great joy and happiness for their situation. Among the six classes of beings, humans are the most fortunate because in this realm we can realize enlightenment. This is very special and meaningful, especially since we already have direct contact with the dharma and a spiritual path. So practitioners should appreciate and value this opportunity. Do not just focus on the external world in a mundane way, but try to look a little deeper than the normal person does. Wisdom is a step beyond the conventional mind and common attitudes.

Traditionally, there are a list of eighteen factors which qualify the precious human existence. I'm not going to list them here, but we definitely enjoy very special conditions and a unique opportunity. We can go higher and deeper than ordinary beings, so we should be very happy, as if we had found a wish-fulfilling jewel.

Consider how rare and hard to come by these present conditions are. Clearly recognize how precious your situation is. This will cause you to be more mindful. If you really know what you have, then naturally you won't want to waste it. With this attitude, you will be more appreciative and careful to pay close attention.

Even though you are fortunately endowed with a human body, it will not last forever. The causes and conditions which have brought it about are not always going to stay the same. Nobody can be sure when things will change: it could be any time. We have no way of knowing what may happen next, so we must use this occasion as the cause to generate good conditions for the future. It would be a terrible waste if we were to leave here empty-handed without accomplishing meaningful results. Do not ignore this precious opportunity. Resolve to do something which will create a better future for yourselves as well as for all sentient beings.

The causes and conditions which have brought about this situation are impermanent. Impermanence is always with us, whether we pay attention to it or not. It is the nature of the world. We should think about this. In general, there are five kinds of impermanence:

- 1) The seasons: spring, summer, winter, and fall. These transitions are part of a natural process which is always changing as the earth orbits around the sun.
- 2) The alternation of day and night which continually follow each other as our planet spins on its axis.
- 3) All compounded things exist within the realm of impermanence. Whatever we see in this world takes birth, endures for awhile, then declines and dissolves or dies. This pattern is true of all phenomena. Everything, from matter to mental states, is moving and changing in this way. This is the nature of all that appears. Do not unconsciously submerge yourselves in situations and remain in ignorance. Be keenly aware of impermanence in the practical, everyday world as well as in the greater universe.
- 4) All sentient beings who are born will die. There is nothing that can prevent this transition. Death is going to come sooner or later and we cannot escape it. This is a very practical thing to consider.

- 5) Those who have consciousness are not sure where their consciousness will be reborn. Nobody has perfect knowledge about these matters. When people are about to die, there is generally a feeling of weakness and they just have to go, even though they are distressed and uncertain about it.

This is a consideration of five aspects of impermanence. Now is the time to really think about this and develop indestructible vajra courage. Understand the true nature of the mind and abide in that openness. This will awaken an heroic bravery grounded in the primordial nature which empowers us to do anything. We will be able to work with any situation which arises.

When we have a perfect understanding of the nature of impermanence, it will expand our mind and increase our ability to perform beneficial activities. Vajra courage will help us develop good relations with the master and the practice. The mind will be rooted in spiritual energy. There will be less attachment to worldly distractions and more involvement with dharma. Our joy in meditation practice and other positive activities will increase continuously. All of this creates even more opportunities to understand the nature of the mind. These are only a few of the many good reasons to gain a true insight into the meaning of impermanence.

Once we have a good understanding of the nature of impermanence, we have to work with our ego-clinging. Ego-clinging is the main obstacle to enlightenment. Basically, people have three different ways of holding onto their egos:

- 1) Clinging which develops in relation to objects. People cling to their property or possessions. This is very common. Sentient beings develop strong attachments to certain external objects.
- 2) The second kind of ego-clinging is related to the body. This is also very common. Certain religions even encourage attachment to the body as part of their doctrine.
- 3) The inner, most secret clinging, is to the mind. Clinging to the mind is very subtle. Everybody is clinging to the mind. Since it is the source from which everything arises, it is imagined to be something which truly exists in a solid way.

These are the primary ways of ego-clinging, the main obstacle to enlightenment. From the beginning, ego-clinging is present in the mind-stream, influencing the mental attitude. We grasp and try to hold on, but things don't exist in the form that we attach to. Views based in ego-clinging have no real existence. In reality, there is no ego. The tendency to cling to the illusion of an ego is quite strong. If we look carefully and develop true logic and good reasoning, clinging disappears. It completely vanishes into the blue because in truth, the ego does not really exist.

This is why Guru Padmasambhava admonishes us to break the bonds of ego-clinging and realize the egoless state. Once you understand the nature of impermanent phenomena, it is important to apply this insight toward the realization of egolessness. Cease clinging and you naturally develop more love for all others. Boundless joy and happiness arise as you effortlessly share the bodhicitta with every sentient being without exception.

When you cling there are consequences. A single attachment is a cause of suffering. Two attachments is equal to two causes of suffering. The more attachments you have and the tighter you grasp on to them, to that extent suffering grows.

Nagarjuna said that the naga kings sometimes have nine or ten heads. Each head has a special jewel ornament or a wish-fulfilling crown. A naga with nine heads has nine wish-fulfilling jewels. This makes them very rich and special. On the other hand, they also have nine different causes of suffering because they have to protect each head. They are always a little worried, having to think about who might attack them for their ornaments. Although they have more wealth and glory than others, they are also subject to more suffering.

To the degree that we cling, our suffering increases. But a practitioner should not immediately try to reject all suffering. Accept whatever comes. Have the courage to carefully observe and clearly recognize what suffering is. Closely analyze how the experience of suffering arises.

In this world we suffer in many different ways, but all can be summarized into ten different categories. The three root sufferings are:

- 1) Suffering itself. As long as there is ego-clinging there will be suffering. The nature of clinging is identical with suffering, so that there is an all-pervading, common, invisible, unpleasant feeling about the way things are.
- 2) The suffering of change. Although we have a nice situation now, due to ego-clinging we have created karma. Even subtle changes can bring about unpleasant experiences. And of course, change is always with us.
- 3) The suffering of suffering. You can already be suffering a lot when more unexpected hardships come up. Suffering which follows upon suffering is known as the suffering of suffering.

There are seven more types which branch off from these three roots:

- 1) birth
- 2) getting old
- 3) sickness
- 4) death
- 5) not achieving what you want
- 6) events happening to you which you do not want
- 7) to be separated from what you want

Although we experience many variations and combinations, these are the eleven basic types of suffering. Ego-clinging generates many different emotional patterns. There is always something a little unpleasant about our life. We are even uncomfortable about what might happen. Our moods are continually moving up and down, creating the patterns of samsara, the shape of this world.

Do not be shocked and ignore this situation or react by trying to deny it. As long as we are ego-clinging, we will have this kind of separative experience, but we should not be afraid of it. We should look thoroughly at all aspects of our condition to see exactly how it arises. The root of all eleven types of suffering is ego-clinging, and this is an activity which arises in the mind.

Since the cause of suffering is in the mind, we must look closely to see what the mind is. If you look into it carefully, you will find that there is no solidly existing mind in itself. Mind is totally based upon the great emptiness of the primordial nature. Emptiness reveals that mind and suffering do not really exist. This means that suffering is based in illusion, like a mirage or the reflection of the moon in the water. We should not try to run from it, but thoroughly analyze and dissolve it into itself.

Although most suffering is mind-created, many people don't know this. They ignore the source and habitually look outward, as if suffering could be stopped by making external changes, but this does not work. One thing after another continues to arise. In looking outward, they get caught up in more suffering and spoil a life based in beautiful causes and conditions.

Do not try to run from suffering. If suffering seems to be due to externals, look carefully within to analyze the situation and dissolve your emotions in primordial emptiness. If you are able to keep the mind in its natural state, it will manifest extraordinary qualities. Joyful effort and an attitude of great tolerance will arise so that you can continue to perform beneficial activities for all sentient beings.

If we believe suffering is external to ourselves, we are like the frightened rabbits in a story told to us by the Buddha.

In ancient times, many millions of years ago, animals were very good friends with each other. They shared a common language. A certain group of rabbits were nibbling grass on the banks of a river. There was also a burpa tree nearby, with branches hanging over the stream. When a ripe fruit dropped and splashed into the water, the rabbits were so frightened that they ran away as fast as they could.

They came upon a fox who asked, "Uncles, why are you running so fast?"

And the rabbits said, "Nephew, there is something after us!" So the fox ran with the rabbits.

They met a wolf, and the wolf asked, "Uncles, why are you running so fast?"

And they said, "Nephew, the enemy is coming after us!" Without any further questions, the wolf began running along with them.

The same thing happened when they met a hyena, a tiger, a bobcat, and a leopard. The whole crowd was running now, worried about the news that they'd heard from the rabbits. All the animals in the jungle, even the lions, began running. There was only one among them, a great lion with longer hair, who did not. He heard the commotion and asked, "Where are all you guys running to?" Notice that he doesn't say "uncle", he just asks, "Where are you going?"

"Sir, a monster is coming after us, so we're running to get away!"

And he thought, "What monster? I'm king of the jungle!" He was a little bit annoyed at even having to think about this. "I suppose I must look into this. Who could this intruder be? I'm lord of all the animals. Is there really an enemy I don't know about yet? Where is it from? I must challenge it. I will confront this monster."

So the king of the lions asked the other lions "Who told you this?" And the lions said, "I think it was the tiger who told us sir."

When he asked the tiger, the tiger said, "The leopard told me sir." And in this way, he traced it all the way back to the rabbits.

"So what do you fellows know about the monster?"

The rabbits exclaimed, "Sir, we actually saw it with our own eyes!"

So the lion king says, "Then I will confront the enemy. Come, we can all go

together.” He went ahead and the terrified rabbits followed close behind him.

When they came near the river, the rabbits said, “Sir, go only a little further and you will see where the thing is.”

The lion walked over to the water’s edge. He looked up and down the river but there was no monster. Just then a burpa fruit fell in the water; *splash!* So the great lion laughed and said, “Hey guys, it is nothing. It’s just fruit falling in the river. There is no reason to be afraid.”

In Tibet it is said, “Don’t be like the rabbits who ran away from the splash monster.” Rather than run from suffering, we should take a close look into its source and so dissolve it. This removes the effect as well as the cause of suffering.

All causes have effects. All phenomena arise based in causes and conditions. Suffering must also have causes and conditions. The suffering we experience is a result of specific causes which are usually similar to the results. Insofar as suffering is unpleasant, the causes and conditions which support its arising must also be somewhat unpleasant.

Our experience of pleasure has causes and supporting conditions as well. The causes and conditions giving rise to joyful states are basically positive and good. Positive actions yield good fruits and negative actions bring negative results. A mixture of positive and negative causes creates karma which combines both pleasant and unpleasant effects. This is how karma works in relation to the qualities of experience. The causes and conditions always correspond to the pattern of the result. The mind and its mental events reveal the same principle.

Therefore, cultivate virtuous qualities such as love, compassion and the beneficial activities of bodhicitta. This will bring good results into your life as well as being of great value to others. Learn to appreciate the truth of this and energetically apply yourselves to following the path.

In the course of practice, it may get difficult at times and seem hard to share your love. It may look like you’re making great sacrifices and will come out losing energy. But in the long run, you do not lose anything. Every selfless action will bring a good result. Don’t lose your perspective by having too short-term a vision. Look further toward the horizon, continue to cultivate bodhicitta and perform beneficial activities.

Do not ignore even the smallest actions which will be of benefit to sentient beings. All bodhicitta activities, even those which are seemingly insignificant, must be valued and performed with great joy. Everything big starts small. Knowing the value of virtuous actions, practice accordingly. And it is equally important to discriminate about seemingly trivial negativity. You might think, “I don’t really care. This is probably okay,” but even very small things can have big consequences. Refrain from performing any unvirtuous activity, even if it seems unimportant and harmless. It only takes a small spark to burn down every tree on a mountain. It might even spread to engulf the whole countryside. We’ve all heard how releasing the energy bound up in tiny atoms can kill thousands of human beings. Pay close attention to even the smallest negative actions and try not to do those things. And even the smallest beneficial activities should be appreciated. Learn from the example of the waning moon; it starts out thin and small, yet soon becomes as big as the full moon.

Positive and negative are discriminations based in the mind. Mind is their source. By cultivating the positive, you will gain a better understanding of the world and the whole of samsara. Knowledge of samsara assists us on the path to nirvana, the state of

perfect enlightenment.

In terms of the three levels of meaning, this completes the external teaching, which is presented to help us understand the phenomena we experience in the common world. Understanding the interplay of factors which give rise to samsara is the first step toward enlightenment.

THE INNER TEACHING

Guru Padmasambhava now reveals the heart essence of the Mahayana. The external teaching corresponds to the Hinayana. There is no inner teaching without the outer teaching. The basis for understanding the inner meaning is fulfilled through the inner teaching.

Guru Padmasambhava begins with one shloka on the significance of taking refuge. He also introduces the three jewels or objects of refuge: the Buddha, dharma and sangha. The nature of the Buddha is a very big topic, but the essential meaning of buddha is one who has achieved benefits for himself as well as for other sentient beings.

Buddha nature has three different aspects:

- 1) it is uncompounded
- 2) it contains all natural qualities
- 3) it is beyond mundane understanding

In order to bring this realization about you must go beyond the surface, conceptual mind. The primordial nature is profound. If you realize what is uncompounded, replete with transcendental qualities and beyond conception, you will achieve benefits for yourself. To accomplish beneficial activities for others, the primordial nature manifests in three more ways:

- 1) wisdom
- 2) compassion
- 3) skillful means

Wisdom refers to the primordial wisdom which is reflected externally as full awareness. A clear understanding of every aspect of the past, present and future is a special characteristic of this supreme knowledge with which one is able to guide other sentient beings.

If you have knowledge but lack compassion you're going to be very limited in your ability to help others. Great compassion is not based in partiality or ego-clinging, or associated with any intention other than to benefit others. Limitless compassion is always ready to act in resonance with the wisdom of the three times.

In order to fulfill the aspiration to benefit others, you also need skillful means. The Buddha did not force his teachings on the world, but presented them in a way that many people could accept. If sentient beings can connect with what is good for them, this will gradually bring them to enlightenment.

The six qualities listed above describe the buddha nature. The first three aspects are designed to fulfill one's own purpose and the second three are designed to benefit others. The first three are known as dharmakaya qualities. The second three are qualities of the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. These latter two are combined in

what is sometimes known as the rupakaya, or the form body of the Buddha. This all refers to the ultimate understanding of the true nature, the absolute buddha.

Buddha is a Sanskrit word which means awakened from ignorance. In this sense, buddha does not refer to an external figure; buddha is absolute awakeness. On the inner level, whoever possesses the six attributes listed above in full measure, is a buddha.

The second object of refuge, the dharma, is the continuity of the path. It helps protect you from ordinariness, negativity and mundane views. It always leads in a positive direction. From the absolute point of view, dharma means cessation as well as the path which will lead you there. Path and cessation comprise the absolute dharma.

Cessation has three different qualities:

- 1) it is beyond conception
- 2) it is non-dual
- 3) it transcends all mental fabrications

The path or the application also has three characteristics:

- 1) purity
- 2) clarity
- 3) power

Taken together, application on the path and cessation constitute the absolute dharma. There are six qualities in all. Adding the title of each makes up the eight characteristics of absolute dharma.

Sangha means mind inseparable from the purity of the true nature. Mind cannot be separated from its origin. That union is the meaning of the word sangha. The absolute sangha matures through the stages with a clear understanding, leading to liberation. Clarity of understanding refers to gaining insight into three things:

- 1) the nature of the mind
- 2) the nature of phenomena, both internal and external
- 3) the perfect meaning of awareness

Liberation indicates freedom from three things:

- 1) from gross levels of attachment
- 2) from subtle attachments
- 3) from clinging to experiences arising in meditation or concentration

If you add these six qualities together with the two titles, they are called the eight qualities of the absolute sangha. All Buddhists accept the three objects of refuge. The Vajrayana has a slightly different version, which is known as the three roots:

- 1) the lama is an embodiment of the three jewels
- 2) the deity or yidam, is the realization of the teacher
- 3) the activities of the teacher are known as dakinis

Who takes refuge in the three jewels?

- 1) Hinayana practitioners such as sravakas and arhats
- 2) solitary realizers, also called pratyekabuddhas

3) bodhisattvas and Vajrayana practitioners

Śravakas, arhats and pratyekabuddhas take refuge to fulfill their own wishes and achieve realization for themselves. The bodhisattvas and tantrikas have a different motivation in taking refuge. According to the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, one takes refuge to achieve the two aims: benefits for oneself and benefits for other sentient beings. This is the external meaning of taking refuge.

All objects of refuge are complete within one's own natural state of mind. The practice of taking refuge reveals that one's own primordial nature is identical with the three jewels and the three roots. To realize this continuously and perform actions within this state is known as taking refuge from the higher viewpoint of the inner tantras.

Taking refuge is always the first step. Then, to attain the heart of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, we have to develop the bodhicitta motivation. Enlightenment is the awakening of non-dual wisdom and compassion which come together in bodhicitta.

There are two types of bodhicitta, absolute and relative. Relative bodhicitta has two aspects. The first is called aspirational and the second is termed actual. To be motivated by real compassion and loving-kindness is the aspirational form of bodhicitta. When you use this beautiful intention to move in a good direction by really doing something for sentient beings, it is known as the actual or working bodhicitta. The aspirational and actual forms comprise the relative bodhicitta, involving conception and activity.

The absolute bodhicitta is beyond wishing and acting. It is the uncompounded, primordial nature, beyond mundane conceptions and common understandings. It is the original truth of great emptiness.

The two relative bodhicittas and the one absolute bodhicitta are called the three kinds of bodhicitta. They all unite to make the perfect bodhicitta. Do not divide relative bodhicitta from absolute bodhicitta. To develop and practice both of these qualifies you as a Mahayana practitioner following the right path to remove obscurations and help other beings.

Having taken refuge and generated bodhicitta, be courageous and firm in your commitment. This attitude will strengthen faith in the three roots and mature the bodhicitta commitment. To this end, specific attitudes of the body, speech, and mind are to be cultivated.

In terms of the body, we should always be gentle and have a disposition of loving-kindness. Smile, and express yourself in positive ways. All sentient beings appreciate this. Learn to speak in a calm and peaceful manner without being harsh. Soothing speech is of great benefit to those already suffering in samsara. Even more important than the practices of the body and speech is the development of wisdom and compassion at the level of the mind.

Courageously commit yourself to continuous practice of bodhicitta at all three levels of body, speech, and mind, without clinging to any particular form of activity. You may have learned what to accept and what to reject, but even so, your mind tends to cling to extremes and this will hinder your practice. Learn to relax your mind and go beyond grasping. This is called abiding in the state of primordial nature. Avoid the three non-virtues of body, speech and mind and practice the three virtues while remaining in the condition of primordial awareness. In Buddhism, these disciplines correspond to the three levels of the Buddha's teaching:

- 1) To avoid the three non-virtues is primarily a Hinayana practice
- 2) To practice the three virtues is a Mahayana practice
- 3) To rest your mind in the natural state is the ultimate understanding of the Vajrayana teachings

The perfect practice is a matter of a profound self-recognition or self-recollection which allows one to remain in the primordial state continuously. Those who practice in this manner uphold the whole Buddhadharma, simultaneously accomplishing all three levels of the Buddha's teachings, simply by practicing one method.

The next shloka states how important it is to always train the mind in the following three attitudes:

- 1) loving-kindness
- 2) compassion
- 3) bodhicitta

Loving-kindness is very important. If you love, your mind is easily relaxed and peaceful. The instant that you feel loving-kindness, there is no longer any anger, jealousy, or negativity. Your mind naturally and gently rests in a very peaceful condition. The continuous practice of loving-kindness reveals the awesome beauty of life. Seeing this, how could you ever be angry or jealous?

We must also understand the need to train our mind in the ways of compassion. Compassion is a feeling, deep down in the core of your heart, of wanting to help other sentient beings. Upon seeing their difficulties, you are aroused to remove the causes and conditions which have brought about these painful consequences. You think, "How can I do something to free them from this situation?" Without any expectations or ego-based desire, you have a strong wish to liberate them.

The nature of compassion admits of no attachment or ego-clinging. There is a soft, easeful, flowing quality to true compassion which naturally dissolves attachment and increases joy. Happiness arises whether you are thinking about what to refrain from doing or considering what you might do.

Having trained the mind in the ways of love and compassion, we should go on to mature the realization of bodhicitta, the ultimate union of love, compassion and wisdom. By arousing awareness of bodhicitta, the confines of ignorance will dissipate. Bodhicitta is the supreme antidote to break down ego-clinging, territoriality and every kind of obscuration. The practice of bodhicitta allows you to mingle your mindstream with others and freely share with them. It opens the mind and expands your view on every level. Ignorance supports a very narrow and biased attitude. Bodhicitta dissolves samsaric stupidity by providing us with a panoramic awareness where ignorance has no place to hide.

At times you should cultivate loving-kindness, in other moments you must practice compassion, and of course there are many circumstances where it is best to arouse the bodhicitta directly. These three comprise the heart and mind of the Buddha. That means as soon as you arouse love, you are one with the Buddha. When you generate compassion or invoke bodhicitta wisdom, you are awakening the buddhamind. To continuously abide in that state, fully-engaged in self-transcending activities, is buddhahood.

Love, compassion and bodhicitta are extremely important. If we just spend a few moments contemplating them, we have truly spent our time well. There will even be

immediate results; a sense of peace and happiness will arise along with a certain clarity and brightness. Truly, there is no other dharma to practice. Guru Padmasambhava said that if you don't have compassion, loving-kindness and bodhicitta, it does not matter what profound discipline you are studying. Your effort is useless. For awhile you might even think you are growing, but practice without bodhicitta won't bring lasting results.

While training our mind to awaken these three qualities of the buddhamind, we should also learn three more things, which are sometimes known as the three trainings of enlightenment:

- 1) discipline or gentleness
- 2) concentration
- 3) wisdom

Discipline builds character and supports good conduct. The essential teaching in relation to discipline is really about being gentle, peaceful, truthful and easy-going. Gentleness is the practice of harmlessness in body, speech and mind. This means avoiding negativity, violence and anger. Renouncing these, we naturally become gentle and undisturbed. But peace and non-violence alone are not enough. To discipline oneself in these ways allows us to approach a subtler understanding of the mind. This comes about through concentration.

Concentration reduces the wild activities of the mind so that it is not always running around in circles. It provides stability and a measure of mindfulness which keeps the mind grounded and on track, so that it is very down to earth and realistic, calm and peaceful. Establishing the mind in its natural state is the purpose of concentration practice. Concentration must always be guided by wisdom and applied with skillful means to fulfill one's own purpose as well as yielding benefits for others.

Wisdom is freedom from ignorance. That means being aware in every situation. Observe the nature of your conduct and concentration. What is really happening? To continuously clarify your understanding and to develop a correct view of phenomena is wisdom. Practice bodhicitta and settle the mind in its true nature. Learn to apply what you understand. Go beyond acceptance and rejection. These are the activities of wisdom.

The three practices of discipline, concentration and wisdom are the essence of the Buddha's teachings. They are the fundamental subjects of the tripitaka or the three baskets of teachings: vinaya, sutra and abhidharma.

Vinaya means discipline. Sutra, another Sanskrit word, means "to bring together" or to summarize and concentrate all the essentials into one. And the abhidharma is the means to bring clarity into the state of direct perception. This is also the function of wisdom.

First, Guru Padmasambhava gave teachings on taking refuge, next he talked about bodhicitta, and then he gave instruction on the three trainings of love, compassion and bodhicitta. We can learn to practice all of the Buddha's teachings by combining them into one path. If you train your mind with love, compassion and bodhicitta, as well as cultivating discipline, concentration and wisdom, you are a true Mahayana practitioner. You will be practicing the Mahayana and Hinayana disciplines together.

As we mentioned earlier, Guru Padmasambhava's teachings are divided into three groups: the outer, the inner and the secret. This section completes the inner teachings.

THE SECRET TEACHINGS

From now on until the end of the text we will focus on the secret category. This consists of the esoteric teachings on Dzogchen, the Great Perfection. The esoteric teaching is divided in three ways:

- 1) the basic level, ground or view
- 2) the application level or path
- 3) the final result or fruit

The View

First, it is important to understand the ground. If we don't know the basic view, then it is very difficult to comprehend anything else. The original condition of all phenomena is a self-luminous, self-born state of clarity. It was not created by anybody. It arises in the self-born clear light of primordial wisdom. This transcendent luminosity is the source-condition of all phenomena. The self-born clear light does not exist anywhere externally. It is the foundation of our minds. Each and every one of us is grounded in that self-born clear light. It is radiant, formless and un-created. It is the self-nature, identical in everyone.

We think of ourselves in terms of subjects perceiving all these objects. But who is actually seeing? Who decides which part is the subject, and what constitutes an object? Besides your own mind, there is no one deciding where to draw the lines. Mind creates subject and object.

There is no real, permanent, solidly existing subject or object anywhere. Mind fabricates these things. According to the Dzogchen teachings, even the mind is devoid of real objective existence. As Guru Padmasambhava said, the mind is based in the timeless, luminous condition of the self-born clear light. That is the original nature. Nobody created it and nobody can change it. Great emptiness and the self-born luminosity of the clear light are identical and inherent within the nature of the mind of every being.

Abide in the natural, self-born luminosity of the clear light and observe the world from that viewpoint. The original brilliance of this ground is vast like open space, clear and profound, like the deep blue sky. When we are able to maintain this awareness, all phenomena are recognized as an illusion. You will begin to see how we are deluded and how the mind manifests appearances. From that point of view, there is no difference between male and female, high and low, pure and impure. All are just concept-created delusions.

The self-born luminosity of the clear light is naturally arising in great emptiness. Free of compounded and un-compounded objects, it is known as the basic, ground level of all phenomena, beyond birth and death. This primordial nature transcends the duality of existence and non-existence. If something is born it has to exist, but the ground is unborn, beyond becoming and annihilation.

We can observe many different ways whereby we perpetuate illusions. In the concept-created state of duality and common perception, birth and existence are universally accepted truths, but if we look carefully with transcendental logic and discriminating wisdom, we will find that birth is merely a notion, a conceptual creation. Ultimately, there is no way that we can indicate exactly what it is that is taking birth or how it comes about. There is no scientific way you can adequately explain how appearances arise. Do all these phenomena come about by means of oneself, through

others, by both or neither? How will you ever find the point where something arises from nothing? It is really like an hallucination.

Birth and form do not really exist in truth. The entire universe has never been born. It is not some thing which has been born or created. It is uncreated primordial suchness, beyond existence and non-existence, being and non-being. If it has not been born, it does not exist, and there is no way for it to be alive. Without life, there is no cessation. Therefore, the basic nature of the primordial state is free from birth, existence and cessation. This is known as great emptiness. According to the Dzogchen tradition, great emptiness is not outside of us; on the contrary, mind, awareness and all natures are within this state of self-born luminosity.

Now although the clear light is uncompounded, we cannot say it is a totally blank state, like a great black hole. The entire universe manifests in the primordial nature. Waves of energy arise in that luminosity even though it does not really exist in a solid sense. Nevertheless, it structures and informs all the mandalas of creation in their entirety, in very mystical ways. These mysterious energy fields are known as the nets of maya, the display of the great illusionist. Although the self-born luminosity of the clear light is uncompounded, wisdom energy unceasingly pervades appearances. Nothing can obstruct the creative dynamic of this natural movement which is inherent in all systems and processes.

The nature of the clear light is emptiness but at the same time, it is very bright and reflective. Therefore it is said in the Dzogchen teachings that the great emptiness of the primordial nature has transcendental qualities such as clarity and unceasing activity. It is beyond existence, eternalism and nihilism. It is free from all extremes. This is the nature of the ground or the basic view of the self-born clear light.

At this point in the text, Guru Padmasambhava asks, "If everybody has this clear light nature, then why don't they recognize it? Why are they presently deluded? Why do they manifest as sentient beings? Why is there ignorance?"

He goes on to explain that there is no singular event to begin with. But in our emotional reactivity to trifles, the experiential quality of the whole soon changes. Just one tiny u-turn supports this entire process. Besides that, there really isn't much of anything to account for samsara. You don't have to make any big mistakes. It is just that the small errors are compounded. Suppose you want to go to Nashville. One tiny mistake and you might end up in Chattanooga. This suggests that you don't have a clear understanding of the way yet. You missed something subtle in your understanding of the journey. All of this happens within the true nature. A small reaction leads you a little bit off course and gradually develops into deep delusion: samsara.

If you recognize your reactivity immediately, you can get back to center; if you react and hold onto it, that is the onset of delusion. It gets a little stronger each time you fail to notice or care. Grasping breeds more attachment and ego-clinging and the whole creation evolves on this basis. As soon as you cling, you solidify the notion of separate selves; you and I and all the rest. In the midst of this, we develop pride, feeling like we're more important than others. With that kind of attitude, the ego-illusion is established. By doing this again and again, you weave the cocoon which traps you. Nobody binds you from the outside; you start wrapping the silk threads around yourself. Of course even within the cocoon, you will continue to have many experiences, both good and bad, high and low. Embedded in your own habit patterns, you are heir to a legacy of karmic involvement. All of these threads have helped you weave a big, thick, heavy, solid cocoon.

This whole creation is based in error. Existence as a creation is the evolution of a small reaction or lack of awareness, rooted in ignorance. This unconsciousness actively develops into a deeper ignorance which brings about attachment, jealousy, anger and pride. Thus the five emotional poisons arise, becoming seeds for further karmic activities which can be categorized as positive, negative and neutral. Combinations of different karmas create the six realms or the three worlds.

Experience in the six realms is due to karmically-obscured vision and one's own ignorance. Things and beings do not really exist in the solid, objective way we are accustomed to believing in. From the deluded point of view, something seems to exist. Phenomena comprising the six realms is similar to a mirage. Many things appear in the context of personal perception, both beautiful and terrifying, even though they do not really exist in truth. Nobody can ignore the world and time as if they were not there, but according to Dzogchen, phenomena do not have a true objective existence; they are merely the effects of deluded perception.

The chain of twelve interdependent originations begins with ignorance. Karmic formations, consciousness, sense experience and the rest of the links, arise from this ignorance. The cycle ends temporarily in death before beginning again in ignorance. We've been deluded for a long time. Meanwhile, we continue turning on that wheel.

At first, the most important thing is to cultivate the view, to know the basic purity of the ground state, the natural luminosity of the clear light. Once you have some insight into the truth, it is important to understand how it happens that we are deluded. Dualistic notions will dissolve as we follow the path. Delusion is just not knowing. It is the basis of all selfish thinking. A series of small reactions based in ignorance engenders all these karmic processes and samsaric phenomena.

There is really not much else to point to. If we know this and stay on track, the practices will remove that germ of ignorance, and all egoic habit patterns will be destroyed. This is the path. When you have clear knowledge of the ground and see how delusion arises, you will understand the importance of assiduously applying the practices.

The basic luminosity of the clear light is free of all extremes such as existence and non-existence and all other conceptual dualities. Awakening to the truth and power of our basic nature, our practice will be replete with these same liberated qualities. On the path of returning to the source of self and world, the application of skillful means spontaneously arises as a brilliant reflection of the primordial state.

Manifestations of the relative truth appear unceasingly, externally and internally. It is an endless process of development and dissolution. Instead of grasping at these phenomena, see them as a display of primordial wisdom. Don't bother clinging or holding on, somehow trying to preserve impermanent forms and appearances. That only exhausts your energy, causing you to grow weak and discouraged.

Grasping breeds delusion. In the most practical sense, whatever you see, experience, analyze, describe or hold onto is your own mind. Whatever you hear is your hearing, whatever you see is your seeing, whatever you smell is your smelling, whatever you taste is your tasting, and whatever you feel is your feeling. It is nobody else's. You are not seeing or hearing the sense data of others. Conscious awareness is really a very private and individual thing. Sense data are processed into perceptions by your brain and represented to your mind. What you take in through your ears and eyes does not remain in the same form in which it was originally received, but is transformed by the primordial nature.

Form is radiating as it is being dissolved or liberated, transformed within its source. The only thing that is really obscuring this insight is your dualistic understanding. You are trying to hold on to something. This gesture is based in a primary delusion. If you just recognize this tendency in any moment of awareness and leave it go its own way, it is naturally released. Thought-forms or moments of awareness arise from the primordial nature of the mind, they appear to or are experienced by the mind and finally, they are liberated or transmuted back into the primordial condition.

When we look to the ocean, where do tides come from? Where is all the movement happening? Where do waves come from and where do they go when they subside? It all happens in the ocean and waves are nothing but the natural motion of the water itself. Every individual wave arises and dissolves within the ocean. Similarly, all phenomena are a display of primordial wisdom. Everything is dissolving, instantaneously transformed and self-liberated within the primordial nature. You try to hold on but what you cling to is constantly changing. It is only your residual attachments, this ego-clinging that seems to remain. You are grasping on, but reality transforms even this.

No matter how skillful you are, you cannot tie a knot in the sky or make a mark on the true nature. A famous Rinpoche once said that everything is liberated into its original nature except for your grasping. He gives the example of a small child who found a big hailstone and thought that it was the wish-fulfilling jewel. Grasping it tightly, his palm begins to hurt because ice is very cold. Quickly, it melts and when the child opens his hand he discovers that there is nothing left. Instead of the *cintamani*, all he got was a cold pain in his hand!

This describes the approach to action which holds us in delusion. However, even your grasping is unceasingly transformed. It is just that you keep regenerating it, trying to hold on to something from moment to moment. Your ego-clinging generates illusions as quickly as they dissolve. There is really nothing there. It is always dissolving, transforming and self-liberated in the primordial luminosity.

From the Dzogchen point of view, it is of primary importance to release this grasping and ego-clinging. We should not wait or hold out thinking, "Oh I will do it tomorrow, I will do it the next day." We have to learn to do this instantly. It is really a very natural process. To help realize the truth of this process of dissolution and transformation, merge your intention with the supreme non-grasping, self-liberating attitude or perfect view. This view should be clearly realized so that it is always with us.

According to Dzogchen teachings, meditation is not something we have to separate from life. Don't assume that it only happens when you are sitting formally. Do the practice, discover the essence of it, but don't make a big deal about it. That is not really appropriate. Everything is to be recognized as the reflection or the manifestation of primordial wisdom. Meditation is just one part of the whole mandala. It is not especially remarkable. Everything and all activities are always already in that state. Meditation relaxes and settles the mind in the purity of that self-liberated energy.

As you continue in this way, you will realize the primordial nature of the clear light. You will feel and see more and more of that self-luminous light shining in its nakedness. As the unobstructed radiance of primordial luminosity is invoked more often, it mingles with the mind stream so that every moment, every movement and aspect of what we call conception and thought, is transformed into primordial wisdom and there is no more grasping or ego-clinging. The external and the internal are recognized as two aspects of one process. The display of primordial wisdom is realized to be all pervading, extending throughout time and space. It is completely relaxed and

open, the perfect union of clarity and emptiness; a self-illuminating awareness which is spontaneously present all the time, day and night. This is known as the clear light of bliss. Within that great bliss, there isn't even the notion of suffering or sadness. According to the Dzogchen tradition, meditation is simply the practice of relaxing into that realization.

The Path

The perfect view is free from grasping and externals. Meditation is awareness of this view. In the Dzogchen tradition it has been said that no meditation is the greatest meditation – simply being – keeping the mind in its natural state.

I'm not just using fancy words. If you understand the perfect view and realize the mind of clear light in each display, there is no need for any forceful meditation. You can just remain in the natural state and see every moment as a manifestation of liberated energy. All things are originally and unceasingly transformed. To maintain this awareness and to move along with it, is meditation.

There have been many great Dzogchen masters, both male and female. Everyone of them agree that all phenomena are an expression of transcendental wisdom. They don't discriminate between things. No matter what arises, they are ready to accept it. Liberated from ego-clinging, experience conveys the state of primordial wisdom. Everything conceptual is dissolved in that reality.

Since the whole world is a display of wisdom, what is the basis for distinctions such as good or bad? All dharmas are included in this great process. This is why Dzogchen practitioners are known as fearless yogis or yoginis. They are courageous because they understand that the original nature is quite unshakeable and that everything is incessantly being transformed. They are always happy, peaceful and joyous. They are relaxed all the time. Whatever arises dissolves like snow on a lake. As soon as it reaches the surface, the snowflake inseparably mingles with the water. That is meditation. Remain in that state all the time. In Dzogchen, there are four aspects:

- 1) view
- 2) meditation
- 3) conduct
- 4) the result

These are always interconnected. We have already considered some of Guru Padmasambhava's extensive teachings on the Dzogchen view and meditation. The view is to know the non-dual nature of the basic ground state that serves as the support for meditation. Meditation is to practice stabilizing in that view. First we have to intuit the ground and then we can train in that direction.

Now I'm going to focus on the conduct, or the activities, of Dzogchen practitioners. Buddha Shakyamuni used the eyes and feet as metaphors for the relation between meditation and view: when you can see clearly you can walk in the right direction; without seeing, you might fall or run into trouble. Like a blind person, you would not be certain where you were going.

If the view, meditation and conduct are perfectly joined together, there will be results. This is the meaning of the unification of the view, meditation, conduct and result. The self-born luminosity of the clear light is the basic nature of everyone. To maintain this pristine awareness continually without any particular effort or force is meditation. Conduct reflects the visions and experiences of one's mind. Conduct

merged with meditation matures the result.

In relation to conduct, Guru Padmasambhava taught that experience arises as an emanation of primordial wisdom. It is not that certain experiences are a display of primordial wisdom and other manifestations are not: everything is. There is nothing to be rejected and/or accepted. All types of experience, whether subtle or gross, are projections of the mind arising in the natural expanse of primordial wisdom. On the mundane level, we are born, we endure for awhile, and at some point, this body will die, but we should not simply cling to life and reject death. Realize all these visions and experiences as forms of wisdom.

Gross experiences and subtle visions are equal in this respect. The former refers to feelings of happiness and sadness characterizing the events in our lifetime. There are also many very subtle perceptions which arise momentarily. All these visions and experiences are expressions of primordial wisdom. Do not cling or hold on to any of them. The entire perceptual spectrum consists of forms of primordial wisdom. Therefore, we should refrain from cherishing attitudes of acceptance and rejection toward various appearances.

Always maintain the mind in a state of primordial equanimity while liberating or freeing each moment into its source and origin. This is known as perfect conduct. Refrain from clinging, attaching and reacting to the many different experiences which are nothing but reflections of this primordial wisdom.

When you have a bad experience, there may be a strong tendency to react, but do not be upset. Do not contract the mind or collapse emotionally. We only create more suffering by trying to reduce the primordial activity into such narrow straits. To grasp and cling to impermanent mind forms is a mistake. We should not be discouraged by any aspect of the play of primordial wisdom, nor should we develop pride or arrogance in relation to this magical display. Liberate each and every moment into its true nature and continue to maintain the mind in that primordial condition.

This transformation of experience is to be effected in the immediacy of its arising. Do not wait thinking that you can hold the experience for awhile and free it a few hours or days later. It is crucial to liberate appearances into their original condition the precise moment, the very instant that they arise. Don't depend on getting a second or third chance.

We should not be disturbed by this dualistic, conceptual movement. Just let things arise and dissolve in place, back into their own natural state. This is a self-liberating or self-transforming process. Do not be disturbed by your attachments or the distorted visions of ego-clinging. Be fearless and free from acceptance and rejection. That is the proper conduct for a Dzogchen practitioner.

To this end, Guru Padmasambhava encourages us to continually maintain awareness in the raw, naked state of primordial wisdom. This may be difficult for beginners, but mindfulness will help keep us on track. Observe what is happening and the details of your activity. This is really important, especially at the beginning. Inquire and inspect to see if you are keeping up with it. When you do that, mindfulness itself is an ornament of wisdom.

Mindfulness is not completely within the province of personal powers and possessions, as if individual egos could casually apply this quality to their practice. Mindfulness itself is an aspect of transcendental wisdom. If you have been introduced to the primordial truth, the moment mindfulness arises, it will tend to return you to that understanding. It is a process of reflection leading back to the original nature. Simply

continue to maintain the mind in that open state of the self-born clear light. This is the essence of Dzogchen meditation.

If you lose your way, mindfulness will return you to the path. The power of mindfulness transforms everything back into primordial wisdom. But it is not appropriate to cling or hold onto mindfulness either. Mindfulness emanates out of the ground-luminosity, the self-liberating domain of clear light and emptiness. Release your grasp and mindfulness will lead you back to that blissful, transcendental condition.

The nature of the mind is beyond conception. That which is free of conception is great emptiness. But this emptiness is not just a black hole or cessation. It is the source of all manifest conditions. All phenomena arise in great emptiness without constituting a duality. Appearances and emptiness must be realized as a unity. Don't accept one and reject the other. Both are merged in the true nature; clear light and great emptiness are in complete union. To continually maintain the mind in that state is to meditate on the true nature.

In the next line, Guru Padmasambhava qualifies the final determination in relation to this understanding, by saying we will have no second thought. In Tibet, this is called the technique of *threg-chöd*. This final determination applies to the ultimate realization of the true nature of everything, not to any conclusion regarding a certain object.

Normally, we perceive the world in terms of subject and object. The mind analyzes and divides everything into these categories. If there were no mind, we couldn't make these distinctions. Objects and knowledge are both creative discriminations of the mind.

Although in the state of common perception we see things in extension, the entire expanse is contained within a tiny bindu of consciousness. Everything arises in this minuscule point. Languages, concepts, technologies, religious and cultural traditions, are all artifacts created by the mind. Ultimately, even earth, water, fire, wind and space are reflections of our habit patterns.

Everything is arising within this tiny bindu, the mind, the source of everything. Understanding this and fully recognizing that everything is a reflection of the mind is known as making the "final determination." There is no second thought, no third thought to follow this determination; it just is. This is the final determination to be made in the process of approaching, understanding and maintaining awareness in that state. If you really understand this and can make the final determination, then you can relax. You don't have to be preoccupied with endless display of phenomena.

The mind is reducible to a bindu, or zero. It does not exist in a concrete, objective sense. It has no shape, form or color. It is uncompounded and non-existent. Now of course most of you think you definitely have a mind, but can you show me where it is? If somebody asks, you'll probably point to yourself. But where exactly is the mind? Many people say it exists in the brain, and others believe it exists in the heart, but where in the brain? What part of the heart? We cannot really locate the mind in a specific place. From the top of your head to the bottom of your shoes, there is nowhere you can point to and say "it is here." But neither can we say that it most definitely does not exist. After all, it is the mind which makes it possible for us to see, experience, communicate and analyze this mystery. All of this is already happening, so how can we deny that the mind exists?

This consideration leads to an understanding of the mind's non-existence as an entity in its own right. Mind is characterized by emptiness of true existence, being without thought and unceasing in its activity.

Buddha Shakyamuni often used the sky or space as a metaphor for the mind. In the Prajnaparamita Sutra he said, "There are people who say 'I see the sky, I see space.' But how can you see space? There is nothing to see in space. It is only openness." That's what you experience when you contemplate space. In this way it is very similar to the mind. But actually, there is no object, pattern or external example which will adequately serve to explain the mind. The spaciousness of the sky is probably the best analogy, but even then, the sky only represents one aspect of the mind. Truly, there is no adequate symbol for the mind.

Mind does not exist in the way we are accustomed to believe things exist, and we cannot pinpoint it. In this way, we can begin to understand how it is that all things are pure from the beginning. There is nowhere for impurity to develop. Having arisen as a display of primordial wisdom, everything is immaculate and pure, whether you realize it in this moment or not. Due to dualistic thinking, you may not see it this way, but everything is pure from the beginning because it originated in the infinite expanse of primordial wisdom. This is why so many great masters emphasize the return to a state of pure perception. We are not trying to make what is impure into something pure; we are revealing the original state and seeing the inherently pure nature of phenomena.

Besides being non-existent, without thought and unceasing, the mind has another quality which manifests as clarity or naturally inherent luminosity. We cannot separate the mind and its unceasing clarity.

To use an example, as soon as the sun rises, there is light. The sun is inseparable from its light; light is one of its inherent qualities. Similarly, fire and its heat are always together. The heat is not produced afterward. In the same way, the luminosity of the clear light refers to the transcendental qualities and activities of the mind of primordial wisdom. Loving-kindness, compassion and practical wisdom are all aspects of the mind's natural clarity.

These are all pure qualities inherent in the original, primordial nature of mind. Love, compassion and wisdom do not exist outside of the mind. A stone has no consciousness and therefore no one will say a stone has love, compassion or wisdom. No one says water has love or compassion. Such qualities are emanations of the primordial wisdom which is the ground of both the animate and the inanimate.

Everyone is based in the primordial truth and therefore, every single sentient being is capable of radiating love, compassion and wisdom according to their realization. Our capacities differ, but nonetheless, everyone demonstrates a certain degree of brightness in relation to these pure attributes. Since we all have these qualities, we can learn to do anything. A perfect realization of primordial wisdom can enlighten our inmost consciousness. And we can advocate and teach what we have learned so as to be of help to others. We can do many wonderful things in light of primordial wisdom.

Truth is the common ground for everyone. In Buddhism they use many different methods to help clarify and make this understandable. For example, the two truths and the four noble truths were taught in order to quicken realization. They are called truths in the common world because they are inherent in the primordial nature, which is beyond conception. These are not false statements or references to artificial or non-existent phenomena. These truths exist in a way that is beyond conception. Truth is very mystical and magical. Again, things do not exist in the mundane way we conceive of them.

All of these understandings lead to the possibility of making a final determination. Everything is merged and dissolved into the virtual singularity of primordial wisdom,

the source of everything. It is all perfect and pure, so we should not cling to preferences or attach to our analysis and discriminations. By maintaining open awareness without a second thought, we arrive at the final determination. In this way, results will follow. You will actualize the practice and realize the kayas and the wisdoms. The result is the perfection of this return to the source. This leads to the final determination.

According to Dzogchen, this practice is divided into two more subgroups. The first is called *threg-chöd*, a Tibetan word which means “cutting through” or freeing instantly. Many of the things I have been talking about here are really *threg-chöd* techniques. These methods instantly transform mind into its natural state. Without rejecting or accepting anything, everything is immediately returned to its primordial condition. Without a second thought, without waiting another moment, it instantly merges with primordial wisdom; this is the technique known as *threg-chöd*.

The second method involves transmutation to the degree where everything is clearly recognized as a display of wisdom. This is known as *thöd-gyal* and is a deliberate means of bringing understanding into the dimension of direct perception. *Thöd-gyal* is a Tibetan word which means “suddenly leaping over,” in the sense of leaping from samsara to enlightenment. It is like a high jump; a *very* high jump!

This is not at all like having rejected something and then going on vacation. Without changing anything, the way you already are, with all its particulars, is completely transformed. The very moment of your existence is instantly liberated without accepting or rejecting anything. The metaphor of leaping over doesn't mean that you reject certain things and end up somewhere else.

When you awaken from a nightmare, the dream dissolves and you don't see things in that way any longer. This is similar to the technique of *thöd-gyal*. It is the complete transmutation of delusive concepts into wisdom so that everything appears as it is in its original state.

By practicing *thöd-gyal*, you transmute the ordinary world into the pure land, and will receive teachings from the five dhyani-buddhas on the five wisdoms. Certain postures and gestures are considered especially helpful in effecting this transformation. Some Dzogchen practices involve concentration on various external lights to help awaken the inner light of primordial wisdom. These are all *thöd-gyal* practices. This transformation is the direct path to realize the transcendental wisdom body or dharmakaya.

The Result

The complete dissolution and transcendence of all dualistic thinking is the final result. Ego-clinging, karma, virtue, liberation, and all other concepts have no real existence and are no longer cause for concern. You are free of dualism and everything is transformed into the dharmakaya. The nature of transcendent wisdom cannot be explained in conventional speech.

Wisdom is of two kinds:

- 1) the wisdom which understands the absolute truth as it is, beyond aspects, discrimination and complexity
- 2) the wisdom which understands the relative truth of everything as it appears

This second wisdom continually guides beings to enlightenment and allows one to read their minds. It manifests wisdom bodies according to the needs of sentient beings. Such bodies are emanations of the Buddha's wisdom.

By continually applying oneself to the path, it is even possible for practitioners to attain enlightenment within this lifetime. Not everybody has to wait. Some individuals practice Dzogchen and attain instant realization. It is said that those of the highest capacity receive the teachings in the morning and get enlightened the same morning, those who receive teachings in the evening are enlightened that evening. The ultimate sign of attainment on this path is the realization of the rainbow body. Many practitioners, both male and female, have attained this. Their physical body transforms into a rainbow body while they are still alive. The rainbow body is a transcendental wisdom form which still has a subtle connection to the elements and is free from aging, sickness, and death. Guru Padmasambhava appeared in a rainbow body, as well as wisdom dakini Yeshe Ts'ogyal.

Guru Padmasambhava states in the text that at the time of death for one who has realized the rainbow body, there will either be mystical relics or the body will be completely transformed into the dharmakaya, leaving nothing at all behind. Either one or the other of these will happen, depending on conditions, but the realization or enlightenment is the same.

By continual practice of the Dzogchen teachings, this realization will come. It is the inseparable union of the bodies and the wisdom of the Buddha, beyond all conception and distinction, beyond any ideas of one and many. This is the fruit of the path.

DEDICATION

This completes the teaching in three sections; the outer, inner and secret categories. Guru Padmasambhava offers an aspirational prayer here for the dedication of merit. He states, "This profound teaching reveals the pristine state of the true nature. By the merit of this teaching, may every sentient being quickly realize the profound meaning and attain buddhahood." This applies to all sentient beings throughout the whole of infinite space.

Dedication prayers are always important to help us maintain the right motivation. Even if we don't have a high realization, aspirations based in pure love and compassion will definitely affect others. And if you enjoy any degree of realization, your dedication prayers will be even more powerful. Your merit will not decrease by dedicating it to all sentient beings. Such prayers actually increase one's accumulation of both merit and wisdom.

In Mahayana Buddhism, dedication prayers are integral to the bodhisattva practices and are one of the three noble activities constituting a formal session:

- 1) the refuge and bodhicitta
- 2) the main part of the practice
- 3) the dedication and aspirational prayers

These three encompass the entire Mahayana and Vajrayana practices. The last sentence in the text states that the graduated path or "Lam-Rim" teaching called "The Heap of Jewels," which elucidates the meaning of both Sutra and Tantra, is now completed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: To know something doesn't mean you necessarily have the experience. I may know it because you've told me or I've read it somewhere. I have heard you say that there is this great luminosity and that all this is a display, but I don't really know it because I have not experienced it. Isn't it true that I can't know it until I have experienced it?

A: Yes, that's true. This will happen in stages. In the Dzogchen texts, this type of theoretical knowing is called understanding. But understanding will eventually develop into experience as you continue to meditate and practice. You will begin to have glimpses of what is really true. When you can feel it, that is the experience. At some point, it will not just be a glimpse, but you will have really entered into that state one hundred percent. Then it is called realization.

Q: Why is it so hard to become enlightened? There are so many people not even close to it. The pure nature is the only real thing that exists, yet we don't perceive it that way. It is as if we have veils over our eyes. We see everything but the pure nature. Why is that?

A: Guru Padmasambhava has remarked that this primordial nature has been so close for so long, but we are still not aware of it. How strange! It is closer than anything else, but we don't recognize it. Isn't that a little odd? Why does this happen? As I said earlier, a series of small reactions build up over time, initiating the process of delusion. All types of habit patterns and obscurations give rise to one another until you have formed a hard shell. Then of course, you have to work to remove it.

In the Dzogchen teachings it is said that you are not going to break that shell from the outside. You are not going to escape with a chisel and hammer. Only by developing awareness and wisdom will we transform negative conditions. The solidity of the things we create will soften and be liberated by natural processes. You yourself will be released in the very same way as you approach buddhahood. Enlightenment is just discovering the primordial nature. It does not come from somewhere far away.

Q: You mentioned having the experience, or the realization. Is there an individual entity that has the experience? Who has the experience or realization?

A: The one who practices. It won't necessarily come in one day, It won't happen as in a college class where everybody gets a degree. It is not like that; but if you practice, realization comes according to your karma. It will come very soon to some and it will be slow for others.

Q: Who has the experience? I don't understand.

A: The individual who meditates. That practitioner will have experiences which lead to deeper understanding and ultimately, realization. If you are wondering about the absolute point of view as to who is going to experience it, let me remind you that from the absolute point of view there is nothing to be experienced, nothing to lose and nothing to gain. But on the level of relative truth and conventional thinking, we are labeling all of this in order to have better understanding of the situation. For that reason, Buddha indicated the higher level by saying that it is void of conception, beyond description and thought. If you continue to follow this path, new understandings will manifest. Guru Padmasambhava explained this as a natural process whereby we awaken to the natural state. By cultivating love, compassion and wisdom and then maintaining the mind in this way, you will reach Nashville.

Q: Understanding brings the experience. Experience brings...?

A: Realization!

Q: So experiences are like little steps and realization is like a jump?

A: Usually, understanding, experience and realization follow each other, but they don't necessarily have to come about in this way. It could all come at once. Normally, you understand something by receiving the teachings. You might see something, but that is based on what you've heard and understood. This deepens your meditation and practice. As you feel into things and become more comfortable with the view, you begin to discover direct evidence of the true nature. This is the meaning of experience. You see it exactly as it is. For example, if you want to go to Music City, listen carefully to the instructions so that you have a clear picture of how to go. That is understanding. Follow the directions correctly and you will arrive at your destination. This is experience. Having accomplished the trip, you will have a better understanding of the route and which signs to look for. When you finally arrive in Nashville, that is realization.

Q: What about staying in Nashville once you get there?

A: Go to all the vegetarian restaurants and eat lots of homemade cookies! Be happy that you finally made it and give a warm reception to newcomers.

Q: How does this teaching come to us? Is this a terma teaching?

A: It is really *kama*, the oral transmission, but it appeared as a terma also, so it is actually a combination. It is terma because it was first revealed by Nyang Ral Nyima Özer as "Dakini Teachings." Nyang Ral Nyima Özer was a very famous and highly revered master who was also a great tertön.

There are two different stories about the discovery. In one, Yeshe Ts'ogyal just handed the entire treasure to him. It is said that she came riding on a white mule and after unloading the mule in front of him, she left.

The second account relates how by following the predictions of Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Ts'ogyal, Nyang Ral Nyima Özer traveled to southern Tibet to a rocky mountain called, "Cannibal Lady Scratches." He went there as indicated and the rock opened naturally. He received the whole text then and there and didn't have to transcribe it at all. This teaching was brought forth from the rock exactly as it was later presented.

Q: Can you explain what is meant by discriminating awareness?

A: Discriminating awareness is one aspect of the Buddha's wisdom, the power of clear perception and precise analysis of the relative truth, as it is, without grasping or clinging. To see the past as the past, the present as the present, and the future as the future; to know that fire is hot and water is wet.

Q: When somebody attains the rainbow body do they go through the natural stages of death like other people or do they bypass it?

A: No they don't go the usual way. They don't need any life insurance!

Q: In the result part, you talked about two categories of wisdom.

A: Wisdom which realizes the true nature, the absolute truth as it is and the wisdom which clearly understands the relative truth of emanations, manifestations, and phenomena. One realizes the absolute nature of everything, the other understands relative movement and appearances.

Q: Can you be in the natural state and drive your car?

A: Yes, you definitely can, but in the beginning it may be a little difficult to maintain because you have to pay attention to road signs and traffic lights. Those things might be distracting at first, but eventually, you can learn to deal with all that too.

Q: So you can do any worldly thing and realize that state simultaneously?

A: Oh yes. Guru Padmasambhava teaches us to mingle this view with every aspect of our daily lives. To do this, we must maintain a disposition resonant with transcendental love, compassion and wisdom, and skillfully merge that view with our everyday activities. This is essential.

Q: Could you give an explanation of what happens to the body of a practitioner who attains the rainbow body?

A: The body has been transformed into a body of light. And it is not that the mind stays as it is while the body becomes luminous. The power of wisdom liberates the mind from duality so that the pristine state of the true nature is completely revealed. Of course, this effects the winds and channels, the nervous and circulatory systems, the muscles, bones, and everything else. Mind and body are closely linked. The whole psycho-physical structure is transformed into primordial wisdom. Altogether, these signs indicate that you have reached enlightenment.

Q: Has anybody in America achieved the rainbow body?

A: I haven't heard about it.

Q: In India?

A: I haven't heard anything.

Q: And would you hear?

A: Yes, I think we would have heard. In southern India, there are many colonies of Tibetan refugees, and a few years back a lay practitioner got sick. Not being well-known, he told his wife not to worry about inviting anyone to do a ceremony, but to just keep his body around for about a week. Soon after she received these instructions, he died. After three days she called on a Rinpoche to do some ceremonies. By then, her husband's body had shrunk to the size of a seven or eight year old child. They thought that if they left it for a week, it would probably dissolve. That is all we've heard in recent years.

Q: When Trungpa Rinpoche was cremated people said a rainbow circled the sun and rainbows played across the sky. Is this related to the rainbow body?

A: No. These are extraordinary signs but not a rainbow body. Rainbows don't count. There are many lamas whose deaths are accompanied by rainbows and various noises like music or thunder and sweet fragrances like flowers or incense. These indicate certain realizations but not a rainbow body.

Q: Did Guru Padmasambhava bring Dzogchen to Tibet?

A: Dzogchen is the highest teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha Shakyamuni didn't give these teachings in the regular way, but revealed them to wisdom dakinis who guarded them very closely. They kept them very, very secret. About fifty years after the Buddha's mahaparinirvana, the dakinis made these teachings available. Over time, one or two students received their transmission and attained the rainbow body. Historically, there are three masters who are considered responsible for bringing the Dzogchen teachings to Tibet. Guru Padmasambhava, who received these teachings from Sri Singha before he came to Tibet, Vimalamitra, and the famous Tibetan translator Vairochana, who was one of the twenty-five disciples of Guru Padmasambhava.

Q: I read another Dzogchen teacher who referred to the base, the path and the fruit. Is this the same as what you termed the ground, meditation, conduct and result?

A: There is really no difference. The view is the basis or ground. And according to Guru Padmasambhava, the path is divided into meditation and conduct. These are the activities. The fruit is the result.

Q: Would you say something about postures and gestures?

A: In the beginning, the most important thing is to establish the view or clear awareness of the ground. Practice and meditate to develop a good understanding of this. One of the first principles taught in Dzogchen is that when you meditate, don't try to change anything. Let everything be as it is. Don't even close your eyes. That is one of the Dzogchen techniques. The eye is just another organ. When you meditate you don't put something in your ear or plug your nose. Keep your eyes open, and don't roll them upward. Just look out into the space in front of you and allow the mind to merge with that spaciousness. To meditate with open eyes is one of the methods of Dzogchen. We can go into more detail about this some other time.

Q: If you do that with your eyes though, everything starts to disintegrate. Then what?

A: That's okay. When you meditate with open eyes, don't focus on any objects. This is not like concentration. Simply release your mind into that spaciousness. The nature of the mind is open and unobstructed. External space is also very spacious and you can merge with that expanse through the eye consciousness. Just stay in the open state. Did you say disintegrate?

Q: The image goes away.

A: When that happens, you should focus on awareness or *rigpa*. Maintain mind in the state of primordial wisdom. Don't concentrate on how things disintegrate or conjure any sense of loss. Just invoke inner wisdom and remain in that state. The image will return again if you concentrate too much on the eyeball and what you can see. Just keep the mind in the natural state and don't focus on externals. At the same time, do not totally shut them out. Alright?

I have a strong feeling of confidence in many of you students. We have known each other for some time now and since you have been doing the ngöndro practice and guru-yoga as they were given to you, I felt like I could share these teachings. I thought that you would be able to practice them as Guru Padmasambhava and the lineage masters have shown us. All the Buddhist practices and teachings are contained in this one Heap of Precious Jewels. Continue with the ngöndro, but also do a little Dzogchen

practice as we have been discussing here. This is a very special secret teaching from Guru Padmasambhava. Practice it this way for now and we will go further into it sometime in the future. Meanwhile, don't be jumping from one thing to another. Stay on the path. Steady application of the practices will reveal everything. I hope you all acquire a rainbow body.

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This teaching was generously given during a weekend retreat at Padma Gochen Ling, the first buddhist retreat center established in the hills of Tennessee in the early 1990's, to a small gathering of Nyingmapa householders. As this work was transcribed and edited by myself Padma Shugchang, any errors are completely my own. May any benefit that arises from this effort be dedicated to the Great Awakening of all sentient beings.