



SHENPEN ÖSEL

The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1

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The teachings of buddhadharma, which can enable the practitioner to discover the state of total enlightenment, still exist. They are still accessible. So we have a choice. We can choose to follow the path and to attain the state of enlightenment, or we can choose to wander about in confusion, which will lead one into various states of rebirth [replete with suffering].

Certainly we have this choice.

HIS HOLINESS KYABJE KALU RINPOCHE

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Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscriptions and donations are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.

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Introduction

In one of the very earliest Western books about Tibetan Buddhism, entitled *The Message of the Tibetans*, Arnaud Desjardin reported a conversation that he had had with Kalu Rinpoche. He had asked Rinpoche the age-old question, “What is Truth?”

Rinpoche replied, “You live in illusion and the appearance of things. There is a reality, and you are that reality, but you don’t know it. If you should ever wake up to that reality you would realize that you are nothing, and being nothing, you are everything. That is all.” In these very few words, Rinpoche evoked in the minds of Desjardin’s readers a variety of concepts about Eastern thought—like the “veil of Maya,” the oversoul, cosmic consciousness, etc.—of which they had only the fuzziest understanding. Even the terms that came to mind in those days, the late sixties and early seventies, were inadequate when employed to interpret what Rinpoche was talking about, because they were expressed in the kind of language Hinduism tended to use, not in the language of Buddhism. In those days the two tended to be all mixed together in the minds of Westerners.

It was not until 1982, during Rinpoche’s fourth visit to the West, that he began to explain in greater detail to Western audiences, from the point of view of the mahamudra tradition, the meaning of this very simple statement. The first two teachings in this edition of Shenpen Ösel were given by Rinpoche during that visit in Little Bridges Hall of Music at Pomona College. In them he describes the empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind—*tong, sal, magakpa*—as the true nature of all sentient beings, as well as four “layers” of confusion, four “veils,” that have obscured the minds of all unenlightened sentient beings in varying degrees since beginningless time: the veil of knowledge (*shes bya’i sgrib pa*), the veil of habitual tendency (*bag chags kyi sgrib pa*), the veil of emotional affliction (*nyön mongs pa’i sgrib pa*), the veil of karma (*las kyi sgrib pa*). It is these veils, he taught, that obscure one’s understanding of the true nature of mind and the true nature of reality and are the source of all of one’s suffering, frustration, anxiety, and mental and emotional affliction.

Rinpoche also explained—step by step, veil by veil—which practices in the Buddhist tradition are designed to purify these veils. Through the practice of ngöndro one eliminates the negative karma and push-button reactivity of the veil of karma. Through the practice of shamatha one pacifies the veil of emotional affliction. Through the practice of vipashyana one purifies the habitual tendency to cognize one’s experience dualistically, which tendency is the precondition, the *sine qua non*, of all emotional affliction. And through the practice of mahamudra one removes or dissolves the subtlest of all these veils, the veil of knowledge—which we sometimes call fundamental ignorance, the basic misperception of reality.

During these two teachings, Rinpoche also gave direct pointing-out instructions and led short guided meditations. Later, I asked Rinpoche what kind of mahamudra instructions he had given, and he replied that he had given ground and path mahamudra instructions. I also asked him what the difference is between teaching about mahamudra and actually giving pointing-out instructions. He replied that teaching about mahamudra entails simply describing the true nature of mind, whereas, when a lama actually gives mahamudra pointing-out instructions, he or she tells the student or students to look directly at their mind in such and such a way. I then asked Rinpoche whether we might transcribe and

distribute these teachings, and he said yes. And then I asked whether Rinpoche wanted us to include the pointing-out instructions, and he said it would be better not to.

Therefore, faithful to the injunction of the lama, we have omitted the actual pointing-out instructions in the publication of these teachings. The reason that these instructions are not generally published in the marketplace is that in giving these instructions the lama introduces the student very directly and experientially to the true nature of mind. This involves using the fruitional state of enlightened mind as the path, rather than simply seeing fruition as some kind of extremely distant goal. For this process to work, the student must be very open and devoted, and the lama must have authentic experience or realization. These instructions also must be received in the actual presence of the lama; it won't do to get them out of books or off tape recordings. If all of these elements are present, the pointing-out will be very effective, and will become the basis for the student's subsequent meditation practice. If any one of these elements is absent, then the instructions will not work for the student, as a result of which the student may very well lose faith in the teachings, not practice them, and thereby lose the tremendous opportunity to attain liberation and enlightenment that they afford. It is for this reason that students traditionally have been expected to finish ngöndro before receiving these instructions. However, from time to time some very highly realized lamas may give these instructions without requiring completion of ngöndro, and this happened to be one of those times.



We are also including in this issue a teaching on the twenty emptinesses by The Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, which is a continuation of the madhyamaka teachings that Rinpoche gave here in Seattle, the first section of which appeared in *Shenpen Ösel* Volume 2, Number 2. If one gets lost in this issue's teachings, one would do well to review those teachings.

In order to understand the function and relationship of the different types of teachings that have been presented in *Shenpen Ösel*, it is helpful to bear in mind the following words of Thrangu Rinpoche:

“To become free of delusion we have to realize the ultimate truth. We can accomplish this through meditation on the nature of mind. The direct realization of the emptiness and clarity of one's own mind is the swift path of the vajrayana. However, before we embark upon that path, we need to understand the difference between consciousness and wisdom. Therefore [one needs to understand] both the mahayana view on the empty nature of appearances and the vajrayana teaching on the nature of the mind, thus providing the view that can serve as the foundation for the graduated path of meditation.”

The teachings of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche that we have included in *Shenpen Ösel* thus far have all been concerned with the mahayana view on the empty nature of appearances, while the teachings of Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche presented in this issue are concerned with the ultimate truth, with wisdom, and with the vajrayana teachings on the nature of mind.

Finally, we wish to thank the directors and members of Karme Thekchen Chöling in Vancouver for their cooperation in the publishing of the teachings of Tenga Rinpoche that are included in this issue. 

—*Lama Tashi Namgyal*

Mind, Karma, Ego-formation, and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism

By His Holiness Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche



His Holiness Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche

On September 11, 1982, at the Blaisdale Institute for Advanced Study in World Cultures and Religions in Claremont, California, His Holiness Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche gave a teaching on mahamudra. The following is an edited transcript of that teaching, which Rinpoche gave in Tibetan and which was translated orally by Lama Chökyi Nyima.

Let me say that I am delighted to be able to come to this gathering today and to be with the sponsors of this event and those of you who have come to hear more about the teachings of the buddhadharma and to imbibe the nectar of the teachings and understand for yourselves more of what these teachings have to offer.

The kind of search that begins to take place when someone begins to understand or at least begins to think about the nature of their existence is an indication that there have been certain positive karmic actions and tendencies in previous lifetimes which have established and reinforced positive tendencies in this life which have caused that search to begin.

In this particular instance, when one begins to examine one's mind or one's experience, one begins to question: What is going on here? Who am I and why am I

here? This is the kind of questioning that begins to arise in this kind of positive search.

What this means is that one's latent potential emerges at a certain point in one's life due to circumstances in one's situation, or perhaps in relation to the world situation. Then one begins to question, one begins to use one's intelligence, and one begins to seek answers to such fundamental issues. The fact that this kind of questioning—this kind of very noble endeavor—can arise in the mind at all indicates a considerable consolidation of positive merit in previous existences. It is quite an incredible development, brought about through an accumulation of merit, of positive thought and action in the past. It points to a receptive part of our consciousness that something in us has risen beyond a mere animal state of existence or mentality. An animal mentality is only concerned with enough to eat, enough to drink, a place to sleep for the night, and so on—just a moment-to-moment existence.

Now comes a period of gestation, an attempt to formulate the questions: What is the relationship between me and the universe about me? Is there greater meaning behind what we are experiencing? What is it that I want this relationship between me and universe around me to be?

The very fact that this kind of search or questioning can arise in the mind at all—what is the nature of mind or what are the spiritual teachings, such as Buddhism, that can lead one to a correct understanding of the nature of mind—is not only amazing but very hopeful. This kind of thought arising in the mind is an indication of a very meritorious and positive tendency which is arising or emerging in this situation.

It is in response to that kind of noble motivation on the part of you all that I have been moved personally to return to the West, and to try to explain what I understand and experience of the teachings of Buddhism in order to help people in their search for deeper understanding. I am now seventy-eight years old, so this journey has posed some difficulty to me, but I refuse to let that daunt me, because I feel that there is real need for people

to have further information and further understanding. This is what has brought me on this present tour through the centers of Southeast Asia, beginning in Calcutta, and traveling on to North America. This is what brings me here for the fourth time to the United States. Particularly, I feel that to discuss these ideas in a country like

America—which is so wealthy and prosperous and which offers its people such a high degree of personal freedom, and which offers as well, such a high level of education—is very beneficial, because people here have the freedom and intelligence to meet

and to understand these kinds of concepts and to understand them to a great degree. So I feel that presenting the dharma here in America creates a great degree of benefit to the people who live here.

All of us have a vague or naive understanding of the mind. We all know that we have a mind, and we think in terms of “my mind.” We have the idea that “I have a mind” and so we say “my mind.” But how much do we understand about the nature of our minds and the nature of our experience? Actually there is a great deal of ignorance and a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion as to what exactly is going on. What exactly do we experience? What exactly do we mean when we use the word, “mind”? When we look at our mind, rather than finding control, precise understanding, and insight, we find that there is emotional confusion in the mind. There are all kinds of passions which arise in the mind, such as attachment, aversion, stupidity, anger, jealousy, pride, and so on. All of these things are continually boiling up in the mind as a result of this emotional confusion and thus we experience a great deal of frustration, suffering, and pain.

Understanding the nature of the mind is something that has a great calming and cooling effect on all of that boiling turmoil in the mind. It is as if we had a pot of boiling water and into it we threw a cup of cold water. The boiling ceases immediately. The activity immediately calms to a certain extent. Even mere intellectual understanding of the na-

All of us have a vague or naive understanding of the mind

ture of the mind can be very beneficial in helping one to sort out the emotional confusion and eliminate the suffering that it causes.

To begin with, let us take, for example, the eyes we see with. The eyes are situated in the face and with these eyes we can see anything in the outside world. That is the function of the eyes—to see clearly. But the one thing that the eye cannot see clearly is the face itself, even though it is so close to the face. It simply does not work that way. There is a fundamental lack of recognition, a fundamental inability of the eye to see the face in which it is situated. In the same way, what we, as sentient beings or unenlightened beings, now experience is this fundamental lack of recognition. The mind simply does not directly experience its own true nature. So this fundamental ignorance or this fundamental unknowing of the mind is the root of all problems—the mere fact that there is this lack of direct experience.

Perhaps we should define terms. What do we mean by mind? When we speak of mind we mean that which is aware. That which gives rise to thoughts, emotions, feelings, such as “I’m happy or I’m sad.” That which experiences all the thoughts, states, and emotions that arise is what we mean when we speak of the mind. Not the contents but that which experiences the contents.

The nature of mind itself is what we term “emptiness” in Buddhism. Mind itself has no color, form, shape, or size. Mind has no limiting characteristics that one can ascribe to it. So, in speaking about the mind, one is speaking about that which is intangible. Mind is completely empty or devoid of these kinds of limiting characteristics. We might use the example of open space, such as the space in this room, when talking about the nature of the mind. Because mind is as intangible as the space in this room, you cannot describe it. The space in this room has no color, shape, nor size. There is simply space in the room.

If the space in this room represents mind, then we need to take into account that in this particular space there is also a kind of illumination. This is not a dark room. We can see perfectly clearly. If all the sources of illumination were shut off or blocked at this point we would be in total darkness. We could not see a thing. There would be space, but no clarity. But the fact is that we have illumination from electric light and natural sources which makes the room very bright and clear and we can see everything perfectly clearly in the room.

Mind has its own kind of illumination, although not in a visual sense. It is not as though there were a kind of lighting up of the mind or that the mind would light up or that the kind of illumination we are speaking of is any kind of visual perception. But rather it is the inherent ability of the mind to experience. The fact is that mind can experience. Mind, being no thing in and of itself, nevertheless experiences everything. That potential to experience is the illuminating potential of mind—the illuminating nature of mind. So in speaking about the mind, we can make reference to the fundamental intangibility of the mind and the illuminating potential which it demonstrates.

On a practical level, this illuminating potential of mind, this ability to experience, is something we encounter when we sit quietly by ourselves and think of a place very far away like New York or San Francisco. We can call that place to mind immediately. There is the possibility of thinking of, remembering, or recalling that place. This is an example of this illuminating potential of mind.

The space in this room and the illumination in this room are not two things that we can separate. They are two different aspects of a unitary experience.

In the same way, when we refer to the intangible nature of mind, the essential emptiness, and the clarity or illuminating nature of the mind, we are not speaking of two separate things, but two aspects of one experience.

The mind simply does not directly experience its own true nature. This fundamental ignorance or this fundamental unknowing of the mind is the root of all problems

We have not yet completed our description of mind itself. We have space in this room which we use as an analogy for emptiness, and we have illumination. But we do not have an effective consciousness. We do not have anything other than empty and illuminated space. With mind we have something more. We have the actual awareness that can decide—“this is form,” “this is sound,” “this is such and such a shape.” We can make judgments and we are conscious of the particular details of a situation. That is the unimpeded manifestation of mind, which is also the dynamic intelligence or awareness of mind as well. So by describing mind in and of itself rather than the contents of mind, we are speaking of something which is essentially intangible. By this we also mean the illuminating potential and the dynamic unimpeded manifestation of awareness.

Perhaps at this point we could use a kind of approach to allow oneself to experience this fundamental nature of mind rather than the particular content of mind. We must consider that most of us have the idea that the mind is located in the brain or in the heart region or some other fixation of where the mind is. This is not particularly helpful at this point: Mind has no particular location; it is not in any particular part of the body. This state of bare awareness or fundamental awareness is prior to a state of any attachment to any particular state. It is not a particular place in the body nor a particular locality or object in the environment. It is simply intangible, clear, unimpeded nature of mind itself.

This fundamental nature of mind as intangible emptiness, illuminating clarity, and dynamic unimpeded awareness is what we term, in the Buddhist tradition, *tathagatagarba*, buddha nature, the seed or potential for enlightenment. It is that inherent nature of mind which emerges as the fully enlightened experience. It is that which

allows the fully enlightened experience to take place in the first place. This is something that is shared by each and every living being, human or otherwise. Anything that is sentient—anything

that has consciousness—inherently has this fundamental purity or nature of mind in its make-up.

We find in the Buddhist teachings that Buddha Shakyamuni said, “This *tathagatagarba*—this seed for potential enlightenment—pervades all forms of life. There is not a single being that does not have this as part of its make-up.” To give this experience a name for reference, or simply to label it for practical purposes, in the Buddhist tradition we refer to this fundamental nature of mind as *tathagatagarba*—the seed or essence of enlightenment. It is the potential for enlightenment.

Referring to the causal factor for enlightenment, we find reference in one of the tantric scriptures of Buddhism to the effect that all beings are born enlightened, but incidental obscurations are blocking the experience of enlightenment. Once those obscurations have been removed that experience simply emerges and becomes actualized and we can experience the original clarity of our minds. We might think of this *tathagatagarba* potential as a seed just like a living seed that can grow into a flower. If one takes a seed and nurtures it, cares for it, and goes about things the right way, one can produce a flower from that seed. In the same way, if we recognize the inherent nature of mind and its potential and learn how to cultivate it—learn how to cause it to emerge through spiritual practice—then we ourselves can actualize that experience. We can become a buddha. We can become completely enlightened.

Another label which we give to this state or this experience in Buddhism is *jnana* or transcending awareness, primordial awareness, to which we sometimes add the word *alaya*, which means

This fundamental nature of mind as intangible emptiness, illuminating clarity, and dynamic unimpeded awareness is what we term *tathagatagarba*, the seed or potential for enlightenment

fundamental or original awareness. We could perhaps think of this in terms of a practical example. If we think of clear, transparent, pure water before any pollutants or sediments have been added, we note that the water is pristine in its clarity and transparency. Or perhaps you might think of a sky totally free of any clouds and the sun shining brilliantly in the sky. There is again no obscuration and nothing in the way—nothing obscuring or limiting the experience at all. Now given that there is this naturally pure, positive nature of mind, then where has all this negative conditioning come from? Where have the negative aspects of confusion and suffering arisen from? How has the clear, pure, transparent water been polluted by sediment?

First and foremost there is the lack of direct experience that we mentioned previously—the fundamental ignorance or unknowing, which we call the *obscuration of knowledge*, the fact that the mind does not see itself, is not directly aware of its own nature. In Buddhism this is not something to which we ascribe an origin. We do not say that at a certain point it happened that mind could not see itself, that mind lost this direct experience; but rather, when we speak of the beginningless cycle of existence, we say that mind has always been obscured by this ignorance. It is co-emergent with or co-existent with consciousness itself.

Another example which is often used in the text is gold. Since there is gold there is tarnish forming on the surface of the gold. In the same way as long as there is unenlightened mind there is and always has been this fundamental ignorance. This fundamental lack of the direct experience and understanding of the nature of mind is the basis of all the other problems and levels of confusion and obscuration which we now experience. The technical term which we use for this basic level of ignorance or basic unknowing in Buddhism is *co-emergent ignorance*, which indicates that it is co-emergent or simultaneous with consciousness itself. As mind arises, so does this ignorance.

Practically speaking, it is impossible to speak of the mind separate from this ignorance in our present state, and so it is co-emergent with mind itself.

This co-emergent ignorance has always been there in the same way that the eyes have always been unable to see the face. From the moment that we are born and begin using our eyes up to the present time, we have never yet seen our face directly. It simply does not work that way. It has always been the case that mind can experience anything but its own nature. This fundamental ignorance is built in, so to speak.

Given that this is the case, a further distortion takes place. The essential intangibility or emptiness of the nature of mind in and of itself, is distorted into what we experience as the self or subject—something solid, real, or existent in and of itself, something tangible which we experience as the self or the subjective pole in our experience.

Then the illuminating potential of the mind, which can and does give rise to all of these appearances and experiences that mind undergoes, is distorted into the objective pole of our experience, into the phenomenal world and the sensory objects that we experience as separate from the self. At this point a dualistic split has already taken place. We experience the distortion of the essential intangibility and illuminating potential of mind itself in

a subject/object frame of reference that we think of as the basis of our on-going experience. Again we are going to label this and give it the name, *obscuration of habitual tendencies*. From beginningless time, just as there has been ignorance of mind, there has also been this habit of experiencing in terms of subject and object.

This is a state or condition that will continue if we do not attain enlightenment. If one does not transcend the ignorance and obscuration which lead to this distortion, then this state is permanent. One cannot expect such a fundamental

It has always been the case that mind can experience anything but its own nature. This fundamental ignorance is built in

habitual tendency to simply wear itself out and disappear. Instead, it continues to reinforce itself and will do so as long as the individual does not attain enlightenment.

Even in the dream state, when we go to sleep and have a dream, we can see this fundamental dualism as part of our experience, as an on-going experience of something which carries over from waking consciousness. Even though one goes to sleep and dreams and experiences an entirely different realm than the physical waking state of existence—with all sorts of projections of mind playing themselves out in the dream—there is still the fundamental perception of “I” and “other.” It is still that basic dualistic split that permits all the other more complex aspects of the dream state—such as pleasure, happiness, pain, and so on, to take place, because there is that underlying on-going dualistic element in our experience.

In the future when each and every one of us comes to die, that is, when the physical body dies and is disposed of, the mind goes on to experience a totally formless non-physical state of experience, a totally disembodied state, in that there is no physical basis for the consciousness at that point. There is, however, a continued impression in the mind of some kind of embodiment, some kind of mental body. There is still a fundamental split, in that the appearances that arise in the mind are projected into the environment and experienced as something other than mind itself. So even in the bardo state, the after-death state between physical death and physical rebirth, there is the on-going habitual tendency of mind to experience self and other.

We have the distortion of this essential, intangible nature of mind into something solid and tangible—the ego or subject. The illuminating potential of mind is distorted into something other, which is projected as separate from the self. Now based upon that, and given that there is this

dualistic framework, emotional reactions develop between subject and object. So an emotional complexity of mind, which we call the *obscuration of afflictive emotions*, or the *obscuration of kleshas*, develops based upon this dualism.

Initially, there are the patterns of either attraction, or aversion and repulsion. In other words, there is a love-hate relationship between subject and object that mind perceives in the world around it. That is the beginning of the most basic level of emotional confusion in the mind. And so given that there is this fundamental split in the first place—the subject/object split of self and other—then the situation arises where the subject or the object is pleasing to the self, and also there arises the situation where the object is threatening or repulsive. As well, there is an element of stupidity,

mental dullness or apathy in the situation, in that one is simply not aware of what is really taking place. Instead, one is caught up in the superficial appearance of the emotional situation.

In seeking the basis of emotional confusion in the mind, we first distinguish three patterns: attraction or attachment, aversion, and stupidity or dullness. These are the three basic emotional patterns in the mind. The question then is: What experiences this dualism? What is experiencing self and other and all the emotional reactions between self and other? Mind itself, due to its inherently intangible, illuminating, dynamic, and unimpeded nature, is experiencing dualistic mind.

It is good to pause for a moment to reflect on this and to attempt to experience for ourselves whether this is the case or not, whether what has been described is what is taking place.

The unenlightened being we have examined so far has a fundamental lack of direct experience. Mind does not experience its own essential intangibility, its illuminating potential, or its dynamic and unimpeded awareness. Because of this fundamen-

We have the distortion of this essential, intangible nature of the mind into something solid and tangible—the ego or subject. The illuminating potential of mind is distorted into something other

tal lack of direct experience, our experience has been distorted into a subject/object frame of reference. And a certain level of emotional confusion has set in based upon this dualistic frame of reference.

We are caught up in emotional reactions due to the syndrome of subjects being attracted to or repelled by objects which is based on the basic misunderstanding of what exactly is taking place.

Further development of emotional complexity takes place in the following way: From the attachment syndrome, an emotion of greed (avarice or grasping) develops. Based upon aversion, anger and jealousy develop. Based upon stupidity, pride develops.

We find reference in the Buddhist tradition to six basic emotions: three primary emotions and their three secondary developments. In fact, the complexity does not stop there, because from any one of these primary emotions, thousands of secondary ramifications, variations and permutations can develop. There would seem to be an almost infinite number of different emotional situations, if one wished to analyze them and assign a particular primary emotion as the dominant factor. We find described in the tradition that there are 21,000 emotional states based upon attachment, 21,000 based upon aversion, 21,000 based upon stupidity, and 21,000 in which these forces appear in combination. In an attempt to describe this emotional complexity the tradition describes it as the 84,000 different emotional states, 84,000 types of emotional afflictions.

Because of this emotional complexity based upon fundamental confusion, we behave in certain ways: physically, verbally, and mentally. We react to emotional confusion through these three gates. These actions, be they physical, verbal, or mental, by repetition become tendencies and these tendencies become reactive habits. These reactive habit-tendencies, once they are estab-

We are caught up in emotional reactions due to the syndrome of subjects being attracted to or repelled by objects, which is based on the basic misunderstanding of what exactly is taking place

lished, lead to specific results in our experience later on. There is a causality between one's reactions and one's experiences. This is the level of obscuration that we call the *obscuration of karma*.

The karmic level of these tendencies reinforced by physical, verbal, and mental actions or thought patterns is based upon this confusion. Therefore, this confusion itself is directly or indirectly harmful both to oneself and to others, because it perpetuates the confusion.

These four levels of confusion or obscuration are dependent one upon the other. Not that one is arising after the other, but simply that one is based upon the other. The confusion in the mind is first and foremost the lack of direct experience of mind's essential purity, the inherent transcending awareness which is the nature of mind itself. Due to this fundamen-

tal ignorance in the mind, the dualistic frame of reference—the fixation of self and other as separate and independent entities—develops. This is the second level of confusion which is based upon this primary lack of direct experience of the true nature of mind.

Based upon this dualistic clinging to self and other, a mass of complex emotional confusion, the 84,000 afflictive emotional states, has developed, which is the third level of obscuration.

Finally, the fourth or the gross level of obscuration is the karmic level of all of these unskillful and negative tendencies, reinforced through physical, verbal, and mental actions and thought processes based upon emotional confusion.

In our present confusion then, as unenlightened beings, we experience the totality of these four levels of obscuration all at the same time. The inherent purity of mind has not been lost in us and cannot be lost, but it is obscured to the point that what one experiences is one big state of obscuration. The impurity, which is the confusion, covers the pure nature of the mind as clouds obscure the

sun.

The single most important element in our experience, which binds all of that confusion together, is egocentricity, the clinging to the reality of self or ego, the thought, “I am.” We might say that it is the glue or the binding that holds the obscurations together.

Until there is illumination of all of those levels of confusion and obscuration in the mind, then there can not be a true state of enlightenment or realization. Given that the water has already been polluted by sediment, then the idea is to recover its original purity and transparency. Given that the sky has become obscured by clouds and fog to the point where the sun cannot be seen, then the idea is to clear away the clouds and fog banks so that one can see and be warmed by the sun without hindrance. Once we understand and experience this essential intangibility and this illuminating quality, then the dynamic and unimpeded awareness of the manifestation of mind can begin to loosen the bond of ego-clinging. At that point, this almost incredible binding stricture, which the clinging to self and to the appearances of reality produces, can dissolve.

Once this initial loosening takes place, then one can begin to use one’s physical, verbal and mental capacities in a skillful and productive manner. This is why there are physical spiritual practices such as prostrations. This is why there are verbal spiritual practices such as recitation of mantra and prayers. This is why there are mental spiritual practices such as meditation and various states of mind generated through meditation. To use these physical, verbal, and mental faculties in skillful spiritual practice is to eliminate the karmic level of obscuration, is to counterbalance negative karmic tendencies and eventually to remove them as factors of, or leading to, confusion.

More specifically, through the practice of meditation, one develops the experience of shamatha, which is the experience of stability or calmness of

mind, the ability of mind to rest in a given state without emotional confusion and distractions. At that point, one begins to eliminate the third level of obscuration, the level of emotional confusion.

The next phase of meditation experience is one we term the vipashyana experience, which is insight into the nature of mind. This is often technically termed egolessness or the experience of egolessness, the egolessness of the individual self or ego and the egolessness of all phenomena as independent entities in and of themselves. In the experience of vipashyana one begins to realize that both the ego and the objects and situations we perceive in the external world lack any ultimate reality. With the vipashyana experience—insight

into the nature of the mind—the second level of obscuration, dualistic clinging, is eliminated.

[While the third and fourth levels of obscuration are regarded as *gross, emotional obscurations*, the second and first levels are regarded as *subtle, cognitive obscurations*.]

Then finally, developing beyond this experience of insight, there is a fundamental transformation of unknowing to a state of knowing, changing a state of

unawareness to a state of awareness, from ignorance to a state of direct perception and direct experience of mind. Then mind can see or experience its own nature. This is what we term the mahamudra experience. Mahamudra means “great symbol,” which is a code word for the direct experience of the fundamental nature of mind. At this point the most subtle level of obscuration or level of confusion in the mind has been removed. Ignorance has been transformed into intelligent awareness.

This is how we define buddhahood, the attainment of complete enlightenment. The word “buddha” is a Sanskrit term which was translated into Tibetan as *sangye*. *Sang* means to eliminate, in the sense that all of these levels of obscuration and confusion in the mind have been eliminated. *Gye* means simply to manifest or unfold, which refers to the unlimited expression of the inherent

To use these physical, verbal, and mental faculties in skillful spiritual practice is to eliminate the karmic level of obscuration

awareness and nature of mind that ensues upon enlightenment. That is the definition of buddhahood, the illumination which allows this manifestation.

The nectar, the elixir which allows one to effect that transformation, the illumination which makes such unfolding take place, is contained within the teachings of dharma. It is the function of the spiritual teacher to give these teachings and that in fact is what this process requires. Having received these teachings then one absorbs them.

One actually takes them in and experiences them through one's own practice. Then one can become enlightened. One can effect that transformation, become a buddha, and become completely enlightened. So when we speak of a sentient being, an unenlightened being, and when we speak about a buddha, an enlightened being, we are not speaking about something here and something else over there. The transformation seems to be this simple: There is a state of unenlightenment or there is a state of enlightenment, and all that is necessary for one to become the other is for that transformation to be effected.

There are many lower states of existence that we cannot directly perceive—the hell states, the ghost realms, and the animal realms that we cannot directly perceive in our present limited circumstances. We can, however, see a great deal of other kinds of animal life around us. We can directly perceive the life in the ocean, on the land, and in the air, including insects. All of these forms of life, all life that is sentient, have inherent in their make-up, this potential for enlightenment. And we can see quite plainly that in the vast majority of these animal states of existence there can be no appreciation of mental states and that there can be no steps made towards actualization of mental awareness. The mind is so obscured by ignorance—there is such a

fundamental lack of intelligence in animal life—that the kinds of concepts we are discussing today are completely closed to their kind of mentality. It is only in the human state of rebirth that we have the intelligence necessary to perceive the situation we are in and to effect the transformation necessary to become enlightened. So, while these other forms of life have this potential, it is temporarily blocked and unavailable to them because of the limitations of that state of rebirth.

This is not to say that any one of these beings could not at some future point attain enlightenment in some other state of rebirth, because the situation is a very complex one due to the backlog of karma which is quite literally infinite. There have been infinite cycles of rebirth up to the present time. In every sentient being there has been an infinite reinforcing of positive and negative tendencies. In the case of confusion, only negative karma has been reinforced. However, it is possible that positive or virtuous tendencies can be established. And because these tendencies play themselves out, one after the other according to their relative strengths, it is possible from the point of view of spiritual awareness that at a certain point in the future any one of those non-

It is only in the human state of rebirth that we have the intelligence necessary to perceive the situation we are in and to effect the transformation necessary to become enlightened

human forms of life could pass from that form of life and attain a much higher form of life in its next rebirth. At that point, connections with spiritual teachings and teachers could then be established and such beings could attain enlightenment. They could discover their own buddha potential and effect the transformation to enlightenment. So we cannot rule out the possibility that in particular states of rebirth this path will be open to them.

In presenting his teachings, the Buddha Shakyamuni spoke of karmic causality as the most crucial concept for understanding the spiritual path and the transformation that the teachings of the buddhadharma can effect. The Buddha talked

very extensively about causality, the infallible interdependence of cause and effect on a karmic level, the states of happiness produced by positive and virtuous physical, verbal, and mental actions, and the negative and harmful results and states of suffering and pain caused by negative and unwholesome actions.

The way in which the enlightened mind expresses itself through manifesting and being active in the world to lead beings to enlightenment is quite incredible. So it should come as no surprise to us that we see parallels in the various religious and spiritual philosophies that develop. For example, if we take a look at the Christian teachings on karma we can see that while it is not labeled in that way—it is not perceived of as a karmic process—there is nevertheless an emphasis on one's actions and the effects of one's actions. There is definitely some causality recognized between the actions that one commits and the experience that the mind and body undergo in the future. In this way Christianity and Buddhism are similar. They may not speak of the process in the same way, or use exactly the same labels, but many parallels can be seen. For example, in the Christian tradition the attitude may be one of acting in accordance with or in opposition to the will of God. And so there is the idea that certain kinds of actions are acceptable in the eyes of God and are in accordance with the will of God, which lead to positive results that will benefit the person performing the actions, while, on the other hand, there are actions which are contrary to the will of God, which produce suffering and pain for the person committing the action.

In the Buddhist tradition we speak of one's own karma, those tendencies of mind, speech, and body which one has established, the results of which one will have to personally experience. In this way the karmic process is more self-contained, and it is expressed as one's own actions coming back upon one. But the end result is the same. In either case

there is a basis for a moral choice. This is based upon the understanding that certain actions produce positive results and certain actions produce negative results. In reference to the different ways of expressing the inevitable interdependence of cause and effect, we have a saying in Tibet:

“Whether you beat someone or strike someone the result is the same—a negative action with a negative effect.” In both cases you are hitting the person. On this level the two doctrines present the same concept in a different way, but the end result is the same. There is a basis for moral choice in both the doctrine of karma in Buddhism and the doctrine of divine punishment and reward in Christianity in accordance with whether or not actions are in accord with the will of God.

There is a basis for moral choice in both the doctrine of karma in Buddhism and the doctrine of divine punishment and reward in Christianity

The way this karmic process is explained in the buddhadharma is that the impure aspect of mind, the fundamental ignorance of mind and the many attendant states of cognitive and emotional confusion and obscuration of mind act as a basis upon which the karmic tendencies can form or develop. For example, the fundamental state of unawareness is like the earth upon which seeds can be planted. These seeds represent

the karmic tendencies which are reinforced by our physical, verbal, and mental actions. Once a seed has been planted, for it to come to fruition there needs to be the support from the earth and soil, nourishment of the soil, water, light, heat, and so forth. Without these circumstances the seed will simply remain inert. When all the circumstances that the seed requires are present, then it germinates, grows, flowers, and multiplies. It comes to fruition. In the same way, any karmic tendency which is established and reinforced through a particular action is stored in some sense in that fundamental state of confused awareness. It is a *latent* tendency until such time as the circumstances in the environment within the mind itself provide an avenue by which that tendency can

emerge and become an active part of one's experience and mature as an aspect of one's experience.

The pure nature of mind, the original transcending awareness which is the fundamental nature of mind as we have described it—essentially intangible, empty of limiting characteristics, no thing in and of itself—this essentially intangible experience which also exhibits illuminating potential and dynamic unimpeded awareness, is not something that is subject to birth or death. It is not something that arises at any given point and then disappears at another point. Essentially intangible as it is, mind is not subject to birth or death. It is an infinite process without beginning and without end. On the fundamental level of mind itself we are speaking of something eternal.* Mind is not subject to the process of birth or death because it is no thing in and of itself. This essential intangibility of mind exempts it from being subject to arising from any one point and falling away at any other point. On the other hand, the confused state of awareness which we experience because of all of the four levels of obscuration that we have been describing, gives rise to appearances and experiences which are not marked by this eternity. They are subject to change. They arise and they fade. There is a continual coming and going of projections, appearances, experiences, thoughts, emotions, and so forth in the mind. There is this continual instability which is the basis of frustration and pain in one's individual consciousness. This has been the case up to the present time and will continue to be so as long as the individual does not attain enlightenment. As long as there is no transcending of the confusion which produces these impermanent and unstable experiences there will continue to be the suffering and pain as well as the merely temporary attractive states of pleasure and happiness that occur on the mundane level. There will continue to be an on-going flux in the mind of unstable states of pleasure and pain, of happiness and unhappi-

The physical death of the body does not constitute the death of the mind

ness, without any end in sight. For true and permanent happiness and benefit to occur it is necessary to transcend the whole process which gives rise to those unstable appearances.

We experience a physical body now. The physical body is a result of the maturation of various karmic tendencies, and whatever the mind experiences it experiences through this physical body. The maturation of these various karmic tendencies brings about a particular state of physical existence. Even if that physical body is totally destroyed—perhaps it is bombed to smithereens to the point where there is not a single trace of that physical body left—at that point the mind continues and, due to the trauma produced by death, enters into a state of unconsciousness. This state of unconsciousness lasts for only a few days at the most, whereupon there is a re-awakening of the mind. At this point, the mind begins to experience

what we term the bardo state—the after-death state or the intermediate state between death and rebirth. During this time, the world is as real to the individual consciousness as the world we now experience is to us in our waking state. The mind ascribes to its own

impressions and experiences in the after-death state the same amount of reality as we ascribe now to our own world. So the physical death of the body does not constitute the death of the mind.

When the Buddha Shakyamuni described this karmic process he spoke in terms of previous existences. Not only had there been previous existences that the mind had undergone, but one could actually look to one's physical body and to one's actual situation in this life to determine, to some extent, what the karmic tendencies in previous existences had been. So he said at one point, "If one wants to understand what the mind has experienced, look at one's present physical body." Is the body a strong, healthy, long-lived body? Does the person enjoy health or fame or influence? These are results of meritorious and positive karmic tendencies which have led to such states and experiences. The Buddha also said that if a person is wealthy, this is a sign that they were generous in

***Editor's note:** Rinpoche is speaking here from the point of view of Shentong Madhyamaka.

previous lives in which they shared their wealth, and that through the merit gained thereby, karmic causation has led to the experience of wealth for them in this life. If, on the other hand, a person is subject to poverty and want and deprivation, then this is a sign that there has been theft and taking from others and harming and depriving others in a previous lifetime.

If the mind and the body of the person are happy, the person is healthy, and that person has lived for a long time, then this is a sign that the person has nourished and cherished life in previous lifetimes. On the other hand, if a person experiences a great deal of pain, suffering, illness, and disease and dies very young, then this is a sign that the karmic tendencies from previous lives were produced by the taking of life, killing, and causing physical or mental injuries to other beings. The Buddha spoke of this direct correlation between karmic tendencies established in previous existences and the actual physical body and station and situation in life one experiences now.

But this process also takes into account future states of existence, without which, in fact, spiritual teaching would be of no use at all. If it were not true that the mind goes on to experience other states of existence, then there would be no need for spiritual teachings. If the mind died with the body then the only benefit available to us, even on a very temporary level, would be to work in the world as much as possible to develop the greatest extent of happiness and fulfillment in this life alone, and that would be it. But all spiritual teachings recognize that mind goes on to other states of experience. If that were not the case, then there would be no need for any spiritual teachings, and they would not have arisen in the first place. But there is this understanding of a causal relationship between our mental continuum and future states of existence that is fundamental and crucial to all spiritual traditions.

The Buddha also said that not only can one go

to one's physical body and experiences in this life to determine previous karmic tendencies, but one can also look at one's actions in this life to determine one's future experience.

The Buddha Shakyamuni said, "If you want to see where the mind has been look at your body; and if you want to see where the mind is going look at your present actions." If one's actions are moti-

The Buddha Shakyamuni said, 'If you want to see where the mind has been, look at your body; and if you want to see where the mind is going, look at your present actions'

vated to a great extent by anger and malevolence, if one takes pleasure in stealing from and hurting other beings—and this includes killing and hurting animals for pleasure as well—and if the tendencies in one's mind are continually strengthened and reinforced by thoughts of such things, then these are the patterns that can lead the mind to a rebirth in hell. And even if a mind with such tendencies is not reborn in a hell realm and is somehow able to attain human rebirth, one will undergo sickness, suffering, and a short life

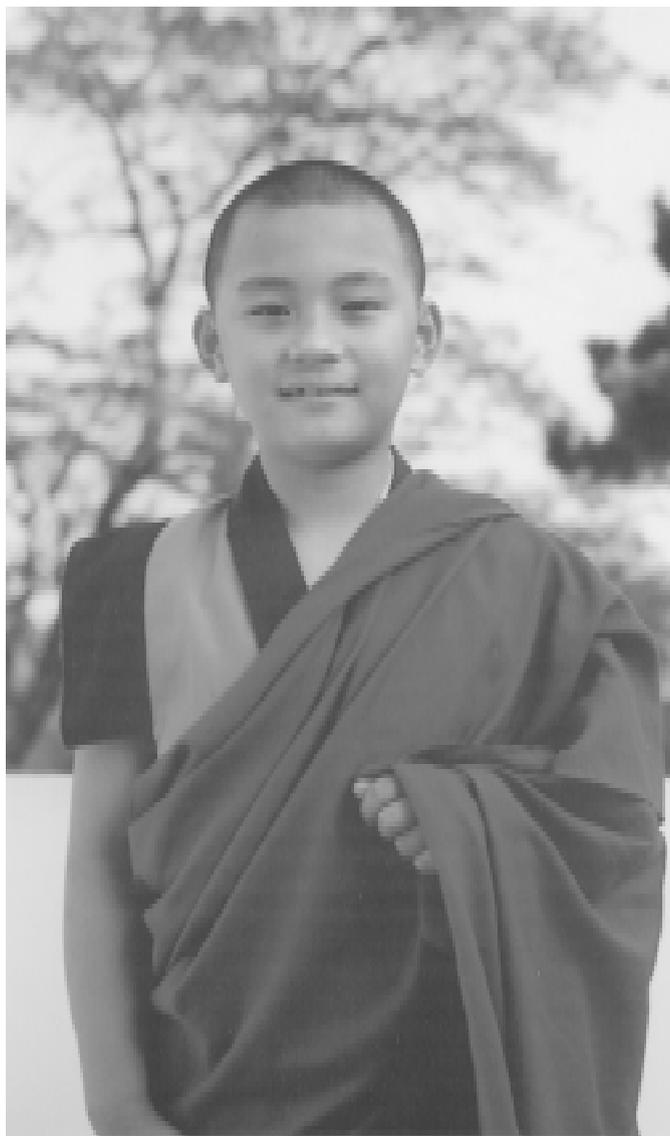
that is miserable because of the karmic result of that kind of malevolent activity. On the other hand, if one's actions are those of cherishing life and are motivated by benevolence and altruistic concerns for others, then karmic tendencies are established which can lead to rebirth in a god realm. This is still in the cycle of rebirth, but in an extremely evolved, comfortable, pleasant, and happy state of existence. If the mind does not attain to such a high state of rebirth but to a human rebirth, then it would enjoy a productive long life, healthy, happy, and prosperous as a result of the positive karmic effects of the positive tendencies established by such benevolent actions in the past.

We tend to think that the prosperity, wealth, and security that we enjoy in this life are directly dependent upon our immediate efforts of studying and working hard to build up security and stability and so forth. No doubt that is a factor and there is certainly causality on that level as well. But there are situations where we simply cannot justify that

kind of understanding as the only way of explaining things, because when a rich person or a rich family has a child and that child has done no work but is born into wealth and is immediately wealthy, then there is no reference to the child's direct efforts in his or her present life to acquire a high station of wealth. In the same way, we may see a person who is born into a family that is very poor and the child may starve and experience extreme mental and physical suffering from the start, without having done anything in this life to deserve that suffering. What helps to explain this seeming contradiction is the idea that the karmic process is the result of negative karmic tendencies that were generated in and already existent in previous lives and that were reinforced by negative actions in previous lives and that consequently produce an experience of poverty, want, and suffering in this life, though there may be seemingly nothing in the immediate situation to justify such an experience. So it is these kinds of situations that impress upon us the validity of the karmic process of causality as it is described and demonstrated, which is the relationship between actions and their results in our experience.

In experiencing human rebirth we have a very fortunate opportunity, because only the human experience affords one the opportunity to exercise a certain degree of free will, and thereby affords one the opportunity to establish the kind of karmic

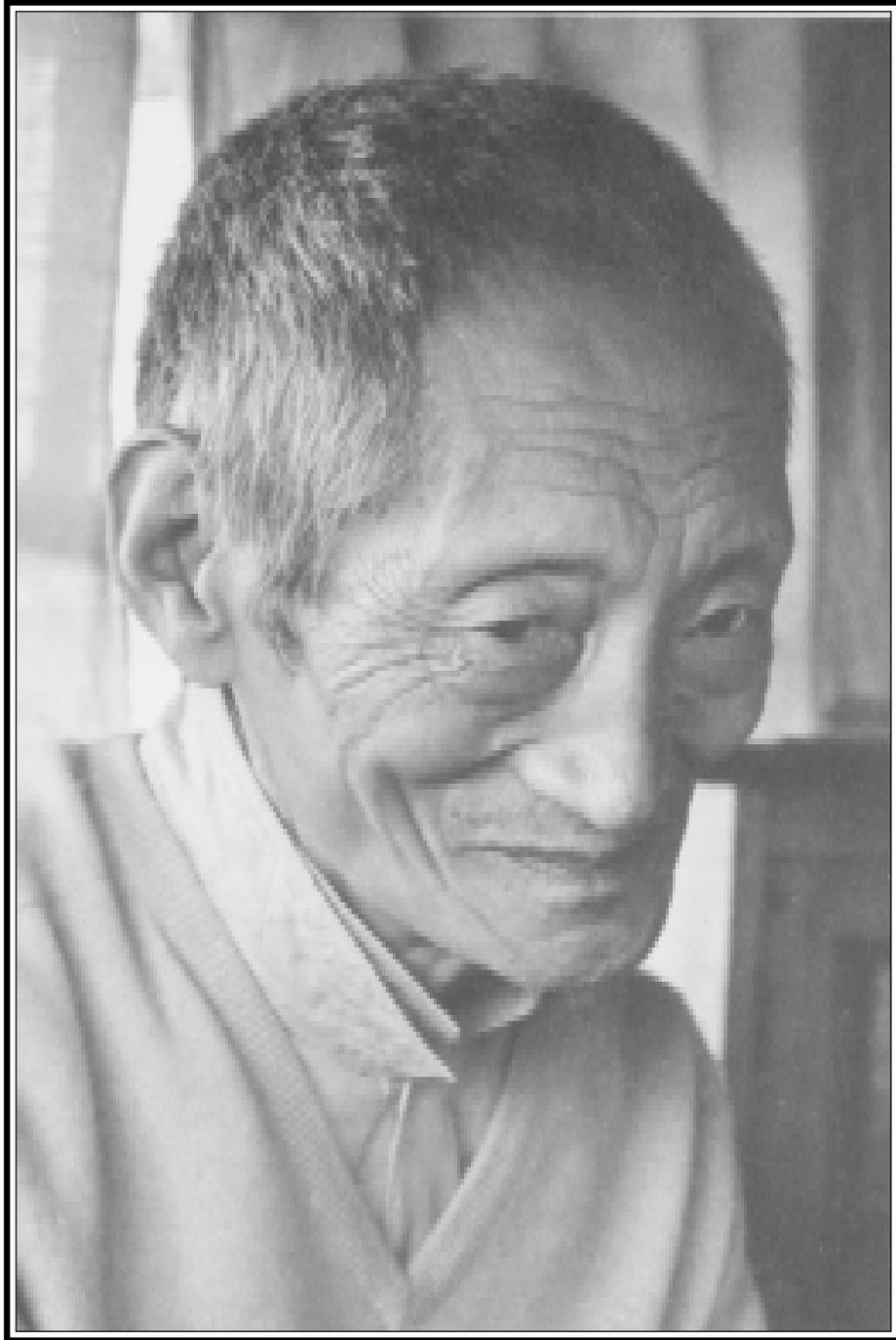
habits that will direct one toward enlightenment or at least to higher states of rebirth. However, one can also quite easily establish negative karma that will ensure the mind a lower state of rebirth. One



Yangsi Rinpoche, the reincarnate Kalu Rinpoche

is, in a certain sense, at a pivotal point between an upward or a downward direction. One has the choice to go to a higher state of rebirth or to a lower state of rebirth. In an animal rebirth the mind is far more limited because of the limitations of this lower realm. The mind there has very little choice. An animal is driven by its own instincts and impulses to commit actions which in many ways reinforce negative karmic tendencies leading to lower states of rebirth. The qualities of faith, compassion, benevolence, and altruism, which are conducive to spiritual development—and on a mundane level to positive karmic tendencies being established and reinforced—these avenues are closed to animal life.

During this morning's session we have been concerned for the most part with the state of things as they are now, the different levels of obscurations that we all experience as unenlightened beings in the cycle of rebirth and the various states of experience in the cycle of rebirth and so forth. We have been speaking about things from the point of view of samsara. Later on today we hope to go more into the concept of nirvana. ❸



His Holiness Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche

Mahamudra: the Essence of All the Buddha's Teachings

The following edited transcript is a continuation of Rinpoche's September 11, 1982, teaching on mahamudra. Rinpoche gave the teaching in Tibetan; it was orally translated by Lama Chökyi Nyima.

By His Holiness Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche

This nature of mind that we have been discussing—the essential emptiness of mind or intangibility of mind, its being “no thing” in and of itself, but nevertheless, exhibiting an illuminating potential, and a dynamic unimpeded awareness—are terms that one has probably never heard before.* But through the grace and blessing of the Buddha Shakyamuni, we have teachings which can expose us to this truth. They not only confirm for us that we have this true nature of mind inherently in our make-up, but also that, through the skillful application of the techniques and methods of buddhadharma, we can experience and actualize that pure nature in attaining enlightenment.

It is mind, on the one hand, that experiences all of the confusion and all the illusions and obscurations which give rise to the experience of samsara [the cycle of conditioned rebirth and all of the states of experience within that cycle of rebirth]. It is mind which gives rise to and experiences all of these situations. On the other hand, it is the same mind which is inherently unimpeded and gives rise to and experiences all of the qualities and potentials of the enlightened state of mind. So, whether we are speaking of the unenlightened state of being or the enlightened state of being, everything happens within the mind itself; nothing falls outside of it. It is mind which experiences both of these states.

In our particular case, being human and enjoying this human state of rebirth indicates to us that there has been a considerable development and establishment of merit and virtuous, positive karmic tendencies in our previous lifetimes. Fur-

thermore, it would seem we have had a connection with the three jewels and the tradition of dharma—all of which is coming into maturity in this life. We have this physical body as quite a fortunate state of rebirth and we are able to make contact or re-establish contact with these teachings and understand and apply them.

The embodiment that we now experience is a physical one, which is nevertheless mental in origin; it arises from the mind. Its origin, ultimately speaking, is the mind. When we go to sleep and dream we experience the dream state, which is a different kind of embodiment. The mind does not experience through the physical body at that point, but it experiences a purely mental body, which is another kind of embodiment based upon habitual tendencies in the mind. These tendencies can be subtle ones of dualistic clinging and obvious ones based on our experiences during this life, which form patterns that arise in the dream state. Furthermore, in the future, when each and every one of us dies, the physical body disintegrates and the mind goes on to experience another state of being. This is a disembodied state, in that there is no physical basis for the consciousness. Nevertheless, there is a sense of embodiment in the mind which we term the mental body. In that situation there is still an impression of “I.” I exist. And so the three states—the physical body which is the maturation of karmic tendencies, the dream body of habitual tendencies, and the mental body of the after-death state—constitute different elements of rebirth, which follow one after the other in a continual procession.

The essence or quintessence of all of the Buddha's teachings are those teachings which describe and point out the mahamudra experience. This term mahamudra in Sanskrit means “supreme symbol” or “supreme seal,” like a seal on a document, and is translated into Tibetan quite literally as *chak gya chenpo*, [phyag-rgya-chenpo]. *Chak gya* in Tibetan means “seal” and *chenpo* means “great” or “supreme.” The term *mudra* in Sanskrit or *chakgya* in Tibetan can be broken down further into two syllables. The first, *chak*, is an honorific word in Tibetan for “mind,” which literally is a code word for sunyata or the empti-

***Editor's note:** The Tibetan terms being translated here are *tong*, *sal*, *magakpa*, which literally mean empty, clear, and unimpeded or emptiness, clarity (lucidity, luminosity), and unimpededness.

ness of mind and all phenomena. This is the essential intangibility and the ultimate non-reality of mind and all phenomena. The second syllable, *gya*, refers to the all-embracing nature of this experience, outside of which no aspect of one's experience falls. It refers to the all-embracing awareness of the essential emptiness of mind and its experiences, and the all-embracing emptiness of all phenomena.

Chenpo in Tibetan, or *maha* in Sanskrit, means great or supreme. It indicates that this is the ultimate experience and there is nothing greater. So the term mahamudra refers to the all-embracing awareness of the emptiness of mind and of each and every aspect of one's experiences.

On the one hand we find this term *mudra* or "seal" or "symbol" which can be explained as a cipher or code word for this condition, emptiness, outside of which no aspect of one's experience exists or happens. We also find reference in Buddhism to the *maha ati* teachings, in Tibetan *dzogchen*, which means the "supreme perfection" or the "supreme completion." This term refers to a state of being which is all-inclusive, which is complete and embraces all of one's experiences in their entirety. So again, there is nothing that falls outside of this experience or this state of mind. There is nothing that is not included in this experience; it is complete in and of itself. It is supreme perfection and supreme completion. This is the term *dzogchen*.

In the dzogchen tradition we find that the teachings which expose one to this concept are so profound that, according to the tradition, if one meditates upon them by night, one will attain enlightenment that same night, and if one meditates upon them by day, one will attain enlightenment that day. In some cases, if a person is fortunate enough and has the proper karmic background, it will not be necessary to meditate at all. If that person simply hears these teachings then they will bring about that state of realization. It is also possible that if one encounters or hears the

mahamudra teachings, in a single instant one can become enlightened. In this case, one is dealing with a very direct path to enlightenment.

So we might wonder—is this really true? Well yes, it is true. This transformation can be effected. If the fundamental ignorance or the lack of the direct experience of the nature of mind is trans-

formed into awareness, then in an instant that transformation can be effected. It is only necessary for that fundamental transformation to take place. But practically speaking, of course, these four levels of obscuration seem very solid at this point. We experience them as being very solid impediments or barriers to direct experience. Until those levels of obscuration have been thinned out, that kind of transformation is going to be very difficult.

What needs to happen in order to develop this experience of

mahamudra—this direct experience of the nature of mind? There are two fundamental elements in one's spiritual transformation: one's own efforts in the purification of one's negativity and mental and emotional obscurations and one's own efforts to develop positive qualities such as merit and awareness, and one's devotion to one's guru, one's spiritual teacher, which also plays an essential part in bringing about this transformation. These two fundamental elements will bring one to the attainment of the mahamudra experience.

In the Buddhist tradition we sometimes, technically, call this pure, fundamental nature of mind, before any distorting element of confusion or obscuration sets in, "co-emergent transcending awareness,"* which is co-emergent with consciousness itself in that it is the inherent nature of mind without all of these obscuring factors. Referring to this attainment of enlightenment termed the mahamudra experience—the state of co-emergent

***Editor's note:** The term *yeshe* is more frequently translated as "wisdom" or "primordial awareness" these days, which would then give one "co-emergent wisdom" or "co-emergent primordial awareness" in this case.

The term mahamudra refers to the all-embracing awareness of the emptiness of mind and of each and every aspect of one's experiences

awareness—we find a reference in one text which states that in order to bring about the emergence of transcending co-emergent awareness, the only effective means are one's own efforts in the purification of obscurations and the development of merit and awareness and one's devotion to and reliance upon a qualified guru. One should understand that any other approach would be stupid. One would be wasting one's time with any other approach than these two methods.

This is not to say that it is in every case necessary to work extraordinarily hard to attain enlightenment and experience mahamudra. It depends on the circumstances. If the person is a very spiritually sensitive and mature individual as a result of lifetimes of spiritual development and purification and the development of merit and awareness, and so forth, then a more or less instantaneous transformation could take place. If that kind of person with those qualifications meets a skillful, enlightened teacher in the proper circumstances, then they could attain the experience of mahamudra immediately. It is possible, but it depends upon the circumstance.

What kind of qualities would that kind of person have? That kind of spiritually sensitive person would have faith and conviction in the teachings they were receiving. When they heard discussions on the nature of the mind and the sunyata experience, the emptiness of mind, there would be the kind of conviction that said: "Yes, this is true, this is the way it is." They would have unswerving confidence in the information they were receiving. They would also have an unswerving faith in their guru as a fully qualified and realized being. There would be no doubts on that level, in terms either of the teachings or of the teacher. They would also have an intense compassion for all other beings and the understanding that, while each and every being has this potential to become enlightened, all the confusion and obscurations which block that direct experience

create endless suffering and frustration for all beings. That would be the source of their compassion. Such a person would have intense dedication and diligence in their spiritual practice so that any particular task that was required, any particular practice that needed to be worked through, would be met and carried through with complete diligence and commitment. If all of these qualities come together, then one has an extremely spiritually sensitive person with acute capabilities which allow this very rare transformation to take place instantaneously.*

Given that one is not perhaps such a person with extremely acute capabilities, who is spiritually mature, but is, in fact, on a lesser level of attainment, at a level of preparation, how does one go about attaining this state of ultimate aware-

ness? The situation that unenlightened beings find themselves in is similar to what we described earlier with the sun shining in the sky. The sun may be there in the sky but it is obscured from our view because clouds cover it. If one is going to see the sun one is going to have to clear the clouds out of the way first. If one has sufficiently thick levels of obscuration and confusion in one's mind then one cannot have that direct experience immediately. It simply cannot be an aspect of one's experience now. When that is the case, then one must work at clearing away those obscurations to the point

where direct experience can take place. That is the function of one's practice. One must eliminate the various levels of obscuration and confusion in the mind in order to permit the inherently pure nature

The only effective means are one's own effort in the purification of obscurations and the development of merit and awareness and one's devotion to and reliance upon a qualified guru

***Editor's note:** In this regard, the editor once asked Lama Wangchen Rinpoche, who was the previous Kalu Rinpoche's nephew and who spent a great deal of time as a boy and young adult traveling with and serving Kalu Rinpoche, if he had ever asked Rinpoche when and under what conditions he had attained enlightenment. Lama Wangchen said, yes, he had asked that question, and that Rinpoche's answer was that his mind had always been the same all of his life, even in earliest childhood.

of mind to manifest itself directly.

Again, one does not need to give up in despair and think, well, since I am obviously not a very sensitive person with extremely acute capabilities, then it is hopeless for me. I have so many obscurations, so thick and so solid, that it is going to take me many lifetimes before I can work it all off. We are not meant to feel that way. The purpose of all the truly incredible teachings of both the sutras and the tantric teachings of the Buddha is to bring that transformation into effect very rapidly. One does not have to let these levels of cognitive and emotional confusion and obscuration play themselves out, so to speak, as one gradually chips away at them, attempting to come to the point where a significant experience can take place. One can actually take control over one's situation and effect this transformation through the skillful practice of these precious teachings. Skillful methods give one the means for a greatly disproportionate result in a very short term of practice. If one practices regularly, even for a few minutes or a few hours daily, one can eliminate the confusion and obscuration that took eons to accumulate. That is the particular blessing and efficacy of spiritual practice. It provides one with skillful and effective means of clearing away these obscurations so that in a relatively small amount of time, one can experience a great effect in one's total make-up.

We say there are many people who are interested in Buddhist teachings and many people who are practicing the Buddhist teachings, but how is it that they are not already enlightened? What is missing is the kind of commitment that is necessary, the kind of total involvement which can be seen in the life of Milarepa. This total involvement permits total absorption in spiritual practice; and it is only because we lack this kind of intensity of commitment that we do not effect the transformation to enlightenment more quickly. This can be demonstrated if we look at all of the activities that we engage in day and night, which simply involve

If one practices regularly, even for a few minutes or a few hours daily, one can eliminate the confusion and obscurations that took eons to accumulate

us in the world and leave us very little time and energy for spiritual practice. If we totaled up our activity day and night, perhaps only one or two percent is really being directed to the dharma. Because there is a lack of intensity in one's commitment to one's practice, there is a commensurate lack of intensity in the results of one's practice. If we increased the time committed to spiritual practice to equal more nearly the time that we now devote to mundane activities, and involved ourselves at the same level of intensity, then we could effect this transformation. The transformation

might not come about in this lifetime, as one might lack the intensity necessary, but certainly the transformation could happen in the bardo or after-death state, or within a significantly small number of lifetimes. In two or three lifetimes, one could effect the total transformation from a state of unenlightened awareness to a state of totally enlightened awareness.

Today we are discussing the question of mahamudra, the ultimate experience of the nature of mind that we have described as being empty and essentially intangible, mind as being “no thing” in and of itself, but nevertheless, exhibiting qualities which are an illuminating potential [cognitive clarity or cognitive lucidity] and the ability to experience the unimpeded and dynamic manifestation of awareness.

A way to confirm this empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind is simply to let the mind rest in its own natural state without any distraction or any dullness. This is a way of confirming the way or path one takes to attain the state of mahamudra. The point is that the mind does not look at anything—does not try to experience anything, but simply *is*. One lets the mind be in its own natural state without any distraction, but also with this bare spark of awareness, the dynamic quality of awareness not being blocked or impeded. The mind is neither dull nor is it agitated or dis-

tracted, but is simply resting in the state of bare, uncontrived awareness.

At this point, while the mind is resting in this empty state of non-discursive awareness, we could introduce an element of conscious thought and simply watch what happens. This could be a thought or an emotion, an experience of faith or compassion, or whatever. One could simply allow it to arise. One could stimulate the mind to give rise to a certain thought, emotion, or feeling tone. Or, if thoughts and emotions already exist, one could simply be aware of what happens. Is the thought that arises of the mind, is it separate from the mind, or is it identical with the mind? What exactly is happening when a thought arises in the mind? What exactly is going on? This is something one can confirm for oneself through this kind of approach. One can deliberately bring up the thought or emotion or feeling—either positive or negative. The point is simply to confirm for oneself what is happening.

No doubt each and every one of us has someone or something to which we are very attached. It may be a husband, wife, lover, or a particular possession or accomplishment to which we are very attached. If we have great pride in it, we are, therefore, very attached to it. We have a great deal of attachment and desire for that thing or that person. Using this particular approach in meditation—letting the mind rest in this state of intangible awareness—one can call the thought of that person or that thing or that accomplishment to mind. As that attachment to that person, situation, thing, or whatever arises then one can observe: Does it arise from mind itself, or is there something that exists in and of itself? If it does arise from mind, what does this mind look like? What is the mind like when giving rise to the desire or attachment? What does the desire or attachment look like? What kind of shape or color or form or tangibility does it have? It is useful to investigate the mind in this way.

Without there being desire in the mind, there would be no desire in the body. Without there being anger in the mind, there would be no anger in the body

At present, we have a vague or naive understanding of “I exist” or “I am, I have a mind.” We are also very aware of the physical body. We think, my body, this body of mine, and we tend to regard the two as one. I am my mind and body together as one lump. And so we tend to feel or experience emotions arising on a physical and mental level at the same time, as though they were somehow

inherent in the body and the mind. But actually, the origin of all these feelings, thoughts, and emotions is mental in nature. Ultimately speaking, the way these emotions arise in the mind has nothing to do with the body. We have simply conditioned the mind to experience them as if there was some physical origin for any given emotion, which is actually not the case. The mind is like a stern king and the body is like a humble servant. And it is the body's function to follow the orders of the mind. Mind directs the body

in various activities and the body simply follows the mind without being an entity itself, having no identity in and of itself. Which means that without there being desire in the mind there would be no desire in the body. Without there being anger in the mind there would be no anger in the body. The body can only express itself in these ways because of what is in the mind to begin with.

So right now we have quite a problem because we experience our mind and body as a unit and we feel that whatever comes up in the mind must be immediately translated into physical or verbal action. We feel that there is no choice in the matter. Thus, when desire or anger arises in the mind we will go to any lengths to express it on a physical or verbal level. We will go through any hardship to make sure the anger or desire gets expressed on a physical or verbal level. This is our understanding, so we think it must happen that way: The emotions arise in the mind and body seemingly together, and there can be no other way of experiencing them. If this were really the case, then when we die, and mind and body separate, it would seem that the corpse would continue to feel desire and

anger and act accordingly. Even though consciousness would be absent, there would still be a capacity of the body to manifest these emotions and to play them out.

It is necessary here to understand how emotions arise in the mind and how the physical body is based upon the projections of the mind. We must understand more about the nature of mind itself, particularly the essential intangibility of the mind that gives rise to all of these emotions. Having understood the intangibility of mind and having understood that thoughts and emotions arise from the mind, then one needs to extend this understanding to see the intangibility of thoughts and emotions, given that they arise from an intangible and essentially empty state of mind. They themselves are a state of that intangible nature. They are not solid things in and of themselves.

If in fact, these thoughts and emotions—such as attachment, aversion, envy, anger, pride, and so forth—are not solid things, if they are intangible, then we do not have to go through all the trouble of playing them out physically, verbally, or mentally. All of that becomes meaningless, if they are, in fact, nothing in and of themselves. Even if one understands this concept only intellectually—this concept of the emptiness of mind and the emptiness of thoughts and emotions which arise from the mind—and even if one does not develop this understanding further by experiencing it directly in meditation, one should know that a great deal of the trouble can still be eliminated simply by understanding that this is the case, that the projections of the mind are as intangible and empty as mind itself. It is for this reason that the Indian mahasiddha Nagarjuna said in one of his texts: “Wherever emptiness is appropriate, everything is appropriate. Wherever emptiness is not appropriate, nothing is.” The point he was making is that when approaching meditation, if one has this basic understanding of the

If in fact, these thoughts and emotions . . . are not solid things, if they are intangible, then we do not have to go through all the trouble of playing them out physically, verbally, or mentally

emptiness of mind and all that is projected and experienced by mind, then whatever particular method or technique is used in meditation will be very effective. But without this basic understanding of emptiness, no technique is going to be very effective. It all hinges on this fundamental understanding.

Emptiness should be defined at this point. Emptiness is not what we mean when we say that a house is empty or a container is empty—that there is an absence of something. That is not the case at all. The term here is used to indicate that the mind in and of itself is empty of, or devoid of, limiting characteristics. It cannot be pinned down as being such and such a color or such and such a shape or size or in such and such a location. Those kinds of tangible limiting characteristics are totally inapplicable to mind. And so we say that mind is empty.

The emptiness of mind is something that can actually be demonstrated empirically. It might not be demonstrated in a way that we are willing to accept right away, but we could indicate the emptiness of mind just as we can indicate any object and say, “That is what it is like.” If we consider all the years we spent at home and going to school getting an education and continually accumulating knowledge, then we might see that all of that knowledge does not go anywhere. It does not go somewhere in America or in this town or in this body. In fact, it is doubtful that the body could hold it all, there is so much of it. Where does it go? It does not go anywhere because mind does not behave according to such parameters. Learning is not a thing that has to be put somewhere. It is an expression of mind as essentially intangible or empty of limiting characteristics. Because mind is inherently empty, no thing in and of itself, it should not surprise us that a projection or manifestation of the mind is equally empty.

The same kind of process that we described earlier for karmic tendencies which are established and reinforced in the mind, applies here as well, because the learning that one does is a kind of potential—a causal factor which is stored in a certain sense. It is a latent tendency. The fundamental confused consciousness* is a storing ground for these tendencies. This is not meant in the physical sense of storing, as something that you put somewhere, but in the sense of that latent tendency being stored until such time as circumstances cause it to emerge.

In the case of learning, we establish a tendency which is then put on hold until such time as we require that knowledge. When one comes into a situation where all the circumstances require that knowledge to come forth, it does, because one has already learned it and one knows what to do and so one goes ahead. The cause and effect relationship is perfectly valid. One can use this example as the basis for understanding the karmic process—the validity of the cause and effect relationship of an action and an experience, one leading to the other. In this way there is a connection to the latent tendency, which is not lost but remains latent until such time as the circumstances impel it to mature. This is what is known as emptiness arising as cause and condition. The fundamental intangible experiences manifest or behave in certain ways according to causality.**

When one is engaged in the practice of mahamudra, there is a particular advanced level of realization which is termed *ro chik*, which in Tibetan means one flavor or one taste. At this point, the identical nature of subject and object becomes apparent. There is no longer a split between subject and object. Causality becomes empirically obvious. One can see the connections, not in a visual way, but in a way so that one can see a particular cause leading to a particular effect. It becomes extremely evident, though it may not be evident at our current level of understanding.

If we were to take all of the thoughts and ideas that we have in a single day or night and tried to

contain them in this whole room, it is doubtful that the room could hold them all—if they had any tangibility or form. But these thoughts and ideas do not. This again exhibits the essential intangibility and essential emptiness of mind and its experiences.

Let us take another example that is perhaps closer to home. If all of the forms and objects which

****Editor's note:** There are a number of important ideas that are being expressed here. The first is the emptiness, the insubstantiality of the cause, which we refer to as a latency, but which we could never find as any sort of substantial entity. If we were able, in an instant just before the ripening of any particular cause, to search all the infinite universes omnisciently, we would not be able to find that cause as a tangible, substantial entity. If we searched in the same way for the exact conditions which give rise to the ripening of that cause, we wouldn't be able to find them either. The cause—what we sometimes call the root cause or the karmic cause—we can never find as a substantial entity not only because it is an action, therefore intangible, and therefore not an entity, but also because it is always gone by the time the result ripens. For example, you might ask what is the cause of a child, and you might say a gestating woman in labor. But by the time the child is born and we can rightly say there is a child, the gestating woman in labor no longer exists, and while she does exist, there is no child. In this way cause and effect—gestating woman in labor and child—do not exist at the same time, and if they do not exist at the same time, how could one be the cause of the other? But at the same time we do know that there is a logic to the way things occur, and this logic is called interdependence. We know that in dependence upon the activity of copulation at the time of ovulation and in the proximity of a consciousness in the bardo and a bit of microscopic swimming around, an embryo is conceived. We know that in dependence on such conception, the process of gestation begins. We know that in dependence on gestation and a lot of good eating and many other factors the embryo will grow in size and the woman will swell and change shape. We know that in dependence on that, at some point the unborn child will find the womb uncomfortable and the woman will have pains and contractions and sooner or later the baby will be born. There is a logic to these interdependences which we describe in terms of karmic causes, conditions, and results, and in terms of the twelve links of interdependent arising. And we say that from the standpoint of relative truth—the way things *appear* to us—that this whole process arises in accordance with causes and conditions. But if we take the time to examine any of myriad causes and conditions involved, we will see that they do not exist inherently from their own side independent of other causes and conditions. And so therefore we say that they are empty of inherent existence. In the ultimate analysis—from the standpoint of ultimate truth—they do not exist. They are empty. This is called emptiness arising as causes and conditions. It is also called the union of emptiness and interdependence. It is also called the union of the two truths—the union of absolute truth and relative truth. And it is by virtue of a buddha's understanding all of this that it is said that a buddha understands both how things are, and how they appear.

***Editor's note:** Here the translator is referring to the *alaya vijnana*, which is fundamental dualistic consciousness, which is the root of samsara.

one saw on television in the course of a single day had any tangibility they would probably fill the whole of Los Angeles. But they do not. They do not have that kind of tangibility at all.

We find this concept of emptiness a very fundamental one in the Buddhist teachings. In the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, the literature dealing with the perfection of wisdom and the experience of sunyata or emptiness, one finds very lengthy analyses of the experience of emptiness, which determine and explain it from different points of view. We sometimes find reference to the eighteen different aspects of sunyata, and to the very involved details of the analyses of this experience, which develops an understanding of the essential emptiness of that experience and of mind itself.

In both the Tibetan and the Japanese traditions of Buddhism great emphasis is placed on this principle of sunyata and on the experience of sunyata during the course of meditation and spiritual practice. As well, *The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge*, the *Heart Sutra* as it is commonly called, is recited by practitioners of both these traditions. The language differs, but the essential concepts which are presented in that sutra remain the same. Both Tibetans and Japanese recite at one point in this text: “There is no eye, there is no ear, there is no nose, there is no tongue, there is no body, there is no mind,” thereby denying the ultimate reality of all of these aspects of our experience as things in and of themselves.

But if one does not have an understanding of what is meant by these assertions, if one takes them at face value, it seems quite absurd. Someone is saying that there is no eye, no ear, no nose, and in fact, they do have eyes, ears, a nose, and so on, so what are we talking about? There seems to be a denial of what is quite obvious.

We can demonstrate the truth of these assertions by using the example of a dream. When one dreams one hears, sees, tastes, smells, touches,

We can extend our experience of dreams to understand that all phenomena and all states of experience are fundamentally the same. They partake of the same illusory nature

and thinks, yet none of the sense organs are being used during the dream. The mind is experiencing its dream as if the sense organs were being used, but there is no ultimate validity to that experience when one wakes up and the dream is gone. We regard the dream as something that the mind came up with—it was just a dream. We can extend our experience of dreams to understand that all phenomena and all states of experience are fundamentally the same. They partake of the same illusory nature—they are not real in and of themselves. There is no ultimate validity to phenomena in any case. It is on that basis that this teaching was given and is spoken or recited. If one does not have this basic understanding of emptiness and the appreciation of the intangibility of

thoughts and emotions which arise in the mind, then, even if one concerns oneself with the practice of dharma and meditation, one is going to run into a lot of difficulty.

If one is practicing a meditation such as the meditation of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, one meditates oneself in the form of Avalokitesvara. Then when one lies down to go to sleep, does the bodhisattva also lie down and go to sleep? We can run into problems like this, which bring about a certain logical gap in what one is doing if one is treating this meditation as too solid.

Once one has appreciated the emptiness of mind, it does not pose any problem. Emptiness does not get up or lie down. It is not subject to limitations. That kind of framework simply does not apply. So there is a greater freedom in the way one can use the mind when one understands that it is essentially empty.

Referring to the *Heart Sutra* again—no ear, eye, and so on—one also finds reference to a particular mantra, *Om Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha*, which is the mantra of the prajnaparamita doctrine. It condenses or encapsulates the sunyata experience into a verbal

mantra and this is described as the mantra which pacifies all suffering. The idea is that the mantra stands for the experience of emptiness, in which all suffering loses all ground to stand on and therefore there is no basis for the arising of suffering. This is the case once one has seen the essential emptiness of mind and all its experiences.

The point of all this is that when a person experiences extreme pain or suffering, the ideal approach to such a situation would be for them to understand that the experience arises from the mind. The mind is essentially intangible, essentially empty, and therefore, so is the experience. With that understanding and with the experience of the truth of that understanding, the ability of the experience of suffering to take hold of one dissolves. That is the ultimate answer to suffering—the ability to see through the illusory nature of the experience itself.

Understanding the fundamental nature of mind is crucial to one's future spiritual development and the ability to deal effectively with pain and suffering. It is like the cure-all medicine that can be applied in the case of any affliction. To one's worst disease one could apply this medicine and it would be effective. Then through cultivating that understanding of the nature of mind, one approaches the mahamudra experience—the direct absorption into the direct experience of mind on an on-going level. Moreover, as one comes to a correct understanding of the nature of mind, one begins to appreciate more and more the state of buddhahood, the realizations of bodhisattvas, and enlightenment. The more one has faith in these concepts and faith in those who have attained these realizations, the more one develops. And the more one develops spiritually, the more one has faith in these concepts and in the beings who have realized them, because one can see far more clearly just what is entailed. This understanding in and of itself boosts one's faith. Again, a correct understanding of the nature of mind develops one's

This is the ultimate answer to suffering—the ability to see through the illusory nature of the experience

compassion and empathy for other beings, because one can see the reason why all beings suffer so much. One can see that beings suffer so much because of this naive clinging to the situation of “I am real,” “this is real,” “there is nothing other than this right here.” When our minds are conditioned by such dualistic ego-clinging, we are forced to suffer accordingly and to pay a penalty for that naive assumption. As one's personal understanding of the nature of mind develops through experience, one's compassion develops automatically. It simply arises as a matter of course.

To speak for a moment in a formal Buddhist context—the first step in Buddhist practice is what is known as taking refuge—taking the vow of refuge. The context in which we take the vow of refuge is the appreciation of one's own limitations vis-à-vis the incredible potential and qualities and freedom from suffering that are inherent in the state of enlightenment that one will experience as one attains enlightenment.

First, in the Buddhist tradition, we take refuge in the buddha and in buddhahood itself, which is the state of being of total enlightenment: the manifestation of the infinite potential and the incredible qualities of mind inherent in the true

nature of mind, and the transcendence of all suffering and pain.

Second, we take refuge in the dharma. These are the teachings which were presented by enlightened beings in order to allow all sentient beings in our situation to find our way out of our confusion.

Third, we take refuge in the sangha. This is the assembly of those who realize the truth of these teachings and in turn transmit them to others and act as spiritual guides and advisers to

others.

In the Buddhist context the first step in spiritual practice is formally to take refuge in these spiritual principles—in the Buddha, dharma, and sangha—as one's source of blessing and inspiration. They represent the embodiment of all the

potential and incredible benefits that one does not experience right now, but which one could achieve through one's own practice. Without that initial faith in them, however, there would be no commitment and there would be no point to even begin the path, let alone to try to carry it through to fruition. That initial faith or confidence is what allows one or causes one to make the first step along the spiritual path.

Someone who has taken refuge, at least in the formal sense, is someone we might say is a Buddhist. The point of all this—the giving and taking of the vows of refuge—is not to make Buddhism the biggest group and to get lots of followers for Buddhism and to try to make everyone a Buddhist. This is not the case. The point is that this is the first step that someone who wishes to follow this path of enlightenment goes through in order to set themselves on that path. Having taken that step, that person can find sufficient inspiration, faith, and confidence to allow them to carry through with the personal attainment of enlightenment. This is the context in which the vow is given.

If what we were trying to do here is to establish a Buddhist army to go in and invade some country, then we would have to recruit as many people as we could. That is not the point here. The point is to give the opportunity to as many beings as may wish to seek enlightenment. That is the reason for giving the vow of refuge, so that everyone who wishes to take that first step along the spiritual path may have the opportunity to do so. This is why the vows of refuge are open to anyone regardless of their religious preference, regardless of their race, regardless of any worldly aspect of their conditioning. The vows of refuge are open to any being who wishes to make this first step along the path.

With this first virtuous impulse that causes someone to take this first positive step of taking refuge, that person enters into what we term the path of accumulation, the initial phase of one's

spiritual development. The first step is to take refuge. As one's practice develops and one begins to gather the means to effect one's own spiritual transformation, one develops along this path of accumulation. In the traditional literature this is described as taking the initial step on the path to enlightenment. Later there is an intermediate and an intensive or concluding phase on this path of accumulation.

With this understanding then, one engages in purification techniques to develop one's merit and awareness, and also in meditation techniques, such as stabilizing and calming the mind and developing insight, and so on. In this way one develops a working basis, a particular framework of practice, that one can apply and that one can make a commitment to carrying through with vigor, effort, and perseverance. When one makes this kind of commitment to one's practice, regardless of the obstacles presented by the situation one is in, and one begins to make something of one's spiritual path, then one is said to have reached and to be on the path of application. When, having gathered all the necessary prerequisites,* one begins to apply them, then at that

point, one has entered the second stage on the path, the phase of application. Then, with forbearance in the face of obstacles, with vigor, perseverance, and commitment to practice, one carries on.

There are four stages which are recognized traditionally in the path of application. The first of these is technically termed warmth, the second is termed climax or peak. The third is termed patience—patience in a transcendental sense, that is, not in the ordinary sense of being patient. The fourth is termed the most excellent of worldly

***Editor's note:** i.e. when one has listened to and studied the dharma adequately to understand the basis of what one is doing, when one has thoroughly contemplated it, thought about it, and discussed it in order to clear up any of one's doubts or lack of understanding, and when one has received the requisite empowerments, spiritual authorizations through reading (*lung*), and meditation instructions.

The vows of refuge are open to anyone regardless of their religious preferences, regardless of their race, regardless of any worldly aspect of their conditioning

dharmas.* Once one passes through these successive stages on the path of application, this takes one to the next path, termed the path of vision or the path of seeing. When one speaks of this path of vision, the first thing that is asked is, “What is seen with this vision that takes place?”

What is seen or experienced is the fundamental nature of mind. The emptiness of mind that we have been discussing begins to present the first glimmer of a stable on-going element in one’s experience. At that point it is as if one were flying in an airplane and had already taken off. Any mountains, rivers, or valleys that would have been an obstacle if one were on foot, no longer present any problem. This first stable element of the realization of the emptiness of mind constitutes the first moment on the path of vision. It is like taking off, and what had been an obstacle previously, no longer constitutes an obstacle.

At this point, the connection between the blessings of the three jewels, of one’s spiritual teachers, and of one’s own efforts in purification bring about a situation where there is this realization of emptiness of mind and an increased freedom of mind. At that point, the emotions and thoughts that normally the mind is subject to have lost a great deal of impact. They are not totally absent, but they are far more weak, much less influential than they were, and mind itself—as opposed to emotionally afflicted mind and reactive mind—becomes able to take the dominant role. This state gives the mind greater freedom to express itself and to control its own experiences.

People are fascinated with the idea of the first, second, third, all the way up to the tenth level of bodhisattva realization. They are always saying, “What are the signs? What kind of signs are there that this is taking place? Do you see rainbows, or does this happen or does that happen?” No, what is happening is that this freedom of mind through realization increases—that is all. That is really all

***Editor’s note:** For further elaboration of the meaning of these terms and the stages themselves, see Chapter 18: The Aspects of the Five Paths, in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, by Gampopa as translated by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen, Rinpoche, or in *Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom*, which is a different translation of the same text.

that takes place. There are ways in which this freedom does express itself. For example, suppose there were 100 different images of the Buddha, showing different colors, different postures and so on, in 100 different places around the world—in India, in China, in America, Canada, and in France—and one were required to meditate on these 100 different images of Buddha at one time. We would be doing pretty well if we could get one of them to stay in our minds, because our minds are limited at this point. But the mind at the first level of bodhisattva realization can encompass all of those 100 states of mind in a single instant with no contradiction, with nothing left out and no sense of conflict at all. The mind can simply embrace those 100 different images of Buddha in different colors and different locations and different postures in a single instant without any kind of problem.** There is such freedom of mind.

There is this limited freedom of mind that is beginning to express itself. It still has limitations but it is far greater than what we experience now. A story that might illustrate this concerns a tantric saint named Jomdara who had a particular transmission of a tantric cycle known as Hevajra. Having transmitted this empowerment and the teachings concerned with this meditation on the form of the deity Hevajra, Jomdara sent a student into retreat. The form of the deity Hevajra has sixteen arms and is quite a complex figure. The student meditated on this form and identified with this

****Editor’s note:** Here and in subsequent passages, Kalu Rinpoche is referring to bodhisattvas who have attained their realization of the true nature of mind through the extremely long and arduous period of time required if one is only practicing the mahayana sutra tradition. Because this process takes so long, these kinds of qualities are said to be fully present at the time that they attain the path of seeing, which is the first moment at which, when meditating, they always have stable realization of emptiness or the true nature of mind. For those bodhisattvas who attain their realization through the practice of the mahayana tantra tradition, the vajrayana—through the practice of which one can attain enlightenment very quickly, even in one lifetime if one is extremely diligent—these kinds of qualities generally do not appear in that same lifetime. Such a bodhisattva, it is said, will attain the realization of dharmakaya at the time of reaching the path of seeing, but will attain the samboghakaya only after death. And it is said that if such a bodhisattva practices secretly and diligently in their following lifetime that all of these vast qualities will likely arise. For more on the nature of these qualities see note on page 30.

form in meditation. He attained quite a significant degree of success in his practice to the point that he felt as though he could actually manifest those sixteen arms. He felt as though he actually was the deity. At that point, the teacher, Jomdara, came to visit him to see how his student was doing as he had heard of the particular state that his student had reached. When he came to see him Jomdara said, “You should wash my feet.” Now in India, of course, it is very hot and dusty and when someone comes to visit from a long journey and their feet are hot and dusty it is a mark of respect and courtesy to wash the visitor’s feet in cold water. When the guru came to visit the student, he said he was quite hot and tired and dusty from the trip and so the student brought the water in a basin to wash the guru’s feet. The guru said, “Wash one of my feet with each of your hands.” So, with his left hand he began to wash the guru’s right foot and with the right hand the guru’s left foot. All of a sudden he looked down and the guru had four feet. That posed no problem. He simply emanated two more hands and washed the four feet. Suddenly there were eight feet. Fine, no problem, he emanated eight hands. Then there were sixteen feet, so he emanated sixteen hands. Then he found himself looking a thirty-two feet and he was stuck. He had treated his meditation of sixteen hands as so real and substantial that he could not get beyond that set number.

This is what we are talking about when referring to the limited ability of mind to express itself when it is without total mastery. Another story that can illustrate this limited or incomplete mastery over one’s experience and the mind is illustrated in the context of miracles that took place between Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi, and another Tibetan master, who was also quite accomplished, named Naro Bönchung. Naro Bönchung’s particular miraculous power, however, still had some limits. When he and Milarepa were engaged in a contest of miracles, at one point they were beside a lake named Manosarowar, which is quite

The mind that reaches the first level of bodhisattvahood can manifest 100 emanations in a single instant

large. Naro Bönchung placed one foot on one shore and one foot on the other side and straddled the lake and became enormous in size and dared

Milarepa to better him.

Milarepa then completely covered the lake without the lake becoming any smaller and without his becoming any bigger. He was able to completely cover the lake, because he had reached the state of mastery where those kinds of dualistic limitations no longer played any part. He was beyond that kind of limited framework.

At the first level of bodhisattva realization there is this limited freedom of mind which permits the mind to express itself with greater freedom than we now experience. Instead of there being simply one physical body that the mind experiences, the mind that reaches the first level of bodhisattvahood can manifest 100 emanations in a single instant. This poses no conflict or logical problem at that point. In fact, the texts speak of twelve different qualities which are simply an expression of this freedom of mind which is beginning to develop.*

In the following bodhisattva levels—the second, third, fourth, and so on—it is written that these various qualities increase tenfold on each of the successive levels. By the time one is at the tenth level of bodhisattva realization it is said that one can enter 100 million states of mind in a single

***Editor’s note:** For further elaboration of the various powers of bodhisattvas residing on the ten bodhisattva bhumis or levels, see Chapter 19 of *Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom*. Gampopa describes the twelve particular abilities of a first level bodhisattva in the following way: “At best, in an instant, a short moment, just a fraction of time, they can: (1) attain a hundred profound absorptions and experience their stable fruition, (2) see a hundred buddhas, (3) most properly be aware of those buddhas’ blessings [i.e. transmission of realization], (4) shake a hundred world systems [with the truth of their teachings], (5) visit a hundred buddhafiels, (6) illuminate a hundred world systems, (7) bring a hundred sentient beings to full maturity, (8) live a hundred eons, (9) be excellently aware of the past and future up to a hundred eons past or hence, (10) open a hundred gates of dharma, (11) manifest a hundred emanations anywhere and (12) manifest each of these physical forms as being accompanied by a hundred other bodhisattvas.”

instant, that one can produce 100 million emanations in a single moment.* There is this incredible freedom of mind which has developed.

With the attainment of total enlightenment—buddhahood—beyond this tenth level of bodhisattva realization, even this incredible level

***Editor's note:** It is likely that the translator got it wrong at this point, for in *Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom*, Gampopa talks of the particular ability of a tenth level bodhisattva: "In one instant, a short moment, a small fraction of time, they can enter as many profound absorptions as there are pure particles in a thousand million, million 'countless' buddhafi elds etc. etc." Concerning the meaning of "countless," the translators, Ken and Katia Holmes write in a footnote on countless: "In the various systems of counting that were imported to Tibet from India, there are names for each multiple of 10, i.e. the equivalent of our words, 'hundred,' 'thousand,' etc. up to 10 to the 59th power. In some systems there are names for multiples of 100, reaching further than figures 120 numbers long. These figures were used, among other things, in Buddhism, to compare realities experienced by different sorts of beings—their relative lifespans, etc. 'Countless' signifies a figure beyond those having their own name, rather than something which was uncountable." Therefore, it would appear that Kalu Rinpoche's translator's figure of 100 million was a gross underestimation.

of limited freedom of the tenth level cannot compare to the unlimited freedom of full enlightenment, because at that point all limiting factors have been removed completely. There has been a total elimination of the four levels of obscuration that we spoke of earlier; thus, the unlimited potential of mind can express itself entirely, and so we cannot speak at this point in terms of hundreds of thousands, or of billions or trillions. There is simply no limit to what is possible and that is why we speak of the qualities of buddhahood as infinite. That is why we speak of their enlightened activities for the benefit of all beings as unlimited or infinite.

The teachings of buddhadharma, which can enable the practitioner to discover the state of total enlightenment, still exist. They are still accessible. So we have a choice. We can choose to follow the path and to attain the state of enlightenment, or we can choose to wander about in confusion, which will lead one into various states of rebirth [replete with suffering]. Certainly we have this choice. ㊦



Lamas gathered in 1983 for a picture in front of the Main Shrine Hall at Kalu Rinpoche's monastery in Sonada near Darjeeling, India. At the time Rinpoche was bestowing the six-month cycle of empowerments called the Rinchen Terdzöd to a great gathering of Kagyu tulkus, lamas, monks and nuns, and lay people. In the front row, seated left to right are Tai Situ Rinpoche and Kalu Rinpoche. In the back, standing, are Khenchen Tulku Rinpoche, Saljay Rinpoche, Thrangu Rinpoche, Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche, Tenga Rinpoche, Bokar Rinpoche, and Khenpo Dönyö.

Chöd: Cutting Through The Four Maras

The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche gave a chöd teaching and empowerment in Vancouver, British Columbia, July 2 through 5, 1998, sponsored by Karme Thekchen Chöling. The following is an edited transcript of that teaching, which Rinpoche gave in Tibetan and which was orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso. © Tenga Rinpoche

**By The Venerable
Tenga Rinpoche**



The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

For many years I have not been able to come back to Vancouver, although I have continually prayed for the welfare of the Vancouver sangha. After such a long absence I am delighted to be able to return here and to meet with all of you again. I welcome you to this event.

the full and new moon, to practice shamatha/vipashyana together, or the Chenrezig meditation or yidam sadhanas, and so on. The dharma center is a place where people can practice together, which is very powerful and important. It is also an institution that can invite resident and visiting

I am very pleased to see that the center, Karme Thekchen Chöling, which is a center of His Holiness The Seventeenth Karmapa, has been created and that all of you are working very hard to keep its activities growing and flourishing. The dharma center is more, however, than an institution that is merely kept running for its own sake. The need for dharma centers is real because when dharma centers exist, there is a place where people can meet at auspicious times, such as

teachers to turn the dharmachakra,* which brings a great deal of benefit for many people and establishes, at the very least, a habit of dharma in the minds of many.

Maintaining a dharma center is not easy. It requires the maintenance of a building, and so on, and requires a great deal of work and some expense. Up to now the members of Kar-me Thekchen Chöling have done very well in creating and maintaining this center. Please continue. Remember that in maintaining a dharma center you are doing so for the sake of the buddhadharma in general and for the benefit of the sangha in this city in specific. And so I want to thank all of you who have contributed funds and work, putting all of what you have together to make this dharma center possible. I would also like to present Kar-me Thekchen Chöling with this painting of King Vaishravana, who in essence is the same as Jhambala,** as an auspicious support for the center. Now please begin by chanting the lineage supplication.

At the beginning of listening to the dharma, it is essential to clarify your motivation for doing so. The motivation that is needed in order to listen in the fullest way is bodhicitta, the thought that you are going to listen to and practice the teachings in order to liberate all beings. The reason that we generate this motivation is that all sentient beings are suffering. They are either experiencing intolerable suffering right at this moment or they are certain to experience it at some point in the future. All of these beings, who are suffering against their own will in this way, have, at one time or another during your previous lives, been intensely kind to you. They have been your father, your mother, and so on. So therefore, if you understand that, you will feel it necessary to free all

***Editor's note:** To turn the wheel of the dharma, which is to say, to teach the dharma, which in turn sets in motion all the short- and long-term benefits, both seen and unseen, attendant upon such an event.

****Editor's note:** Jhambala is an enlightened deity of wealth.

these beings from the sufferings of samsara in general and the sufferings of lower states of existence in particular. So you should generate the motivation that you will listen to and will practice the teachings in order to bring about that liberation of all beings from suffering.

Impurely motivated virtuous actions are like the water tree which bears fruit only once and then dies

There are two benefits to possessing this motivation: the present or immediate benefit, and the long-term or ultimate benefit. The present or immediate benefit of possessing the motivation of bodhicitta is that all of your virtuous actions become roots that perennially yield more and more virtue, like a tree that yearly bears fruit while it itself

continues to grow, thereby being able to yield more and more fruit every year. In that way all virtuous actions that are embraced by bodhicitta flourish naturally. On the other hand, if you engage in virtuous actions without the motivation of bodhicitta, if you engage in virtuous action for your own benefit, or in order to accumulate merit for yourself, or in order to remove your own obstacles, or in order to become famous, or in order to acquire social position, or to acquire the service of others—because such motivation is impure, although the action is virtuous and therefore will bear a virtuous or positive result, it will do so only one time, while the root of virtue itself will disappear. In that way such impurely motivated virtuous actions are like the water tree which bears fruit only once and then dies.

The difference between the hinayana and mahayana traditions of Buddhism rests entirely on the absence or presence of bodhicitta, respectively. It was taught by the Buddha that people have different dispositions. Some people naturally are concerned with benefitting others and are diligent in doing that which is beneficial to others. Such people have a natural mahayana disposition. Other people find the idea of engaging in troublesome activities in order to benefit others extremely frightening and think, I can't do anything for anyone else, I can only help myself. Those people have a natural hinayana disposition. The funda-

mental difference between a hinayana and a mahayana practitioner is that the former does not, and latter does, possess bodhicitta as their motivation.

In fact, it could be said that bodhicitta is the essence of all buddhadharma. This is true with regard to whatever we practice, whether it is vajrayana or mahayana. In some cases the practices are the ground for the development of bodhicitta; in some cases they are the path leading to bodhicitta; and in some cases they are the result of bodhicitta. But in some way or another, all practices relate to bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is primarily divided into two divisions: relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta. Relative bodhicitta is the motivation that we generate. For example, when we are listening to the dharma or practicing it, we think that we are doing so in order to be able to liberate all beings. Relative bodhicitta is also the love and compassion for all beings that we cultivate. Absolute bodhicitta is what we cultivate through the practice of such meditations as shamatha and vipashyana that are concerned with recognizing the nature of the mind.

The subject of this seminar is the practice of chöd, and the practice of chöd can involve a lot of different visualizations—the visualization of different deities and many other types of visualizations as well. We only have three sessions in which to do this, so there is no way that I could explain to you the entire elaborate practice of chöd in this time. Rather than attempting to go through chöd in a haphazard way, I would rather explain in a very full way the essential meaning of chöd and the practice of what is called the absolute or ultimate chöd, which is a form of, or another way of looking at, shamatha and vipashyana practice. I think that this will be more useful and applicable to you given our lack of time and the busyness of your lives.

No doubt some of you have bought the commentary, *The Garden of All Joy*, and the liturgy for the

Surmang chöd practice. Surmang is the monastery of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and it has a lineage of the chöd practice that is practiced extensively in the Kagyu lineage. At the end of this seminar I will give the reading transmission for both the liturgy and the commentary of this practice, and then, having received those transmissions, if you wish to do an elaborate chöd practice, you can go to the two lamas who live here in Vancouver and they will explain it to you. This would take some time, so it would be a gradual process for those who really wish that form of elaborate practice.

In order for me to explain the meaning of chöd, you must first remember that the Buddha's teachings, the Buddha's turning of the dharmachakra, consisted of three distinct phases or styles. The first of these, called the first dharmachakra, is usually known as the dharmachakra of the four noble truths. The reason for this is that what the Buddha taught during that period of his teachings is essentially contained in these four truths. The first two of these truths are called the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering. These two explain the experience of samsara and the cause of samsara. They describe the presence of suffering in our experience and the fact that this suffering is caused by the presence of mental afflictions in our minds. The second two truths are the truth of the cessation of suffering, which is nirvana or peace, which is the result, and the truth of the path, the fourth noble truth, which is the cause or path which leads to that result.

The second dharmachakra, the intermediate dharmachakra, is called the dharmachakra of the absence of inherent characteristics. What this means is that all things to which we can ascribe perceived characteristics—such as a form, a shape or a color, and so on—are relative truths. They each of them have a relative truth or existence. The nature of each and every relative truth is emptiness, which is their absence of inherent or inherently existent characteristics. That emptiness is

The absolute or ultimate chöd . . . is a form of, or another way of looking at, shamatha and vipashyana practice

absolute truth. So the emphasis in the second or intermediate dharmachakra of the Buddha was the proclamation of absolute truth.

The absolute truth is that all things are empty. But the emptiness of things is not like the non-existence of the horns on a rabbit. Emptiness does not mean absolute nonexistence.

Nor is it like the emptiness of empty space; it is not a mere absence. Because, while the nature of each and every thing is emptiness, nevertheless emptiness manifests as relative truth with an internal consistency. Relative truth, within the realm of relative truth, is consistent. This means, for example, that, while the nature of fire is emptiness, nevertheless fire always has the consistent characteristics of fire. It is hot, it can burn, it produces light, and so on. So, because of this characteristic of relative truth, which is consistency of function, because of that, relative truth is extremely powerful and intense. But the power and intensity of relative truth derive from its emptiness. Because relative truth is in its absolute nature empty, it can manifest so powerfully or intensely.

How do relative truths appear or manifest? They are said to appear through the coming together of the subtlest particles, which are of eight types. The particles of earth, of water, of fire, of air, of sound, of smell, of taste, and what are called tactile particles. The coming together of these eight particles becomes the basis for the appearance of matter. Now these eight particles can vary in their interactions. Sometimes they assist one another and sometimes they destroy one another. For example, if you have a fire that is burning, and you pour a great deal of water on the fire and the fire goes out, that indicates that there were more water particles than fire particles. On the other hand, if you have a burning fire and you pour a little bit of water on the fire and the fire gets stronger, that indicates that there were more fire particles than water.

The term in Buddhist texts for these particles is

While the nature of each and every thing is emptiness, nevertheless emptiness manifests as relative truth with an internal consistency

subtlest partless particles or subtlest particles, and they are sometimes referred to in English as atoms. Now the basis for the interaction, whether it is one of assistance or opposition of the particles, is the fact that they partake of the same fundamental nature which is emptiness. The reason why

these particles appear to us in the first place is that we have a habit within our minds of experiencing them. Therefore, even the appearance of particles is the display of our own minds. An indication of this is that when someone has an extremely stable practice of tranquillity or shamatha meditation, they can actually look at these subtlest particles and determine their individual characteristics and their individual qualities and so on. The reason why they can experience these things in medita-

tion is that their mind's nature is emptiness, the particles' nature is emptiness, and the appearance of the particles is produced by a habit that is contained within their minds. There have appeared many mahasiddhas, both in India and Tibet, who have exhibited such miracles as being able to pass through water without drowning, being able to pass through fire without being burned, and so on. These abilities come from their recognition that external appearances and the experiencing mind or cognition are of the same fundamental nature. Through that recognition, and since they have become free from any grasping at the inherent reality of appearances, the qualities or characteristics of appearances no longer have control over them. The basic message of the intermediate dharmachakra was that all appearances, all relative truths, are in their nature emptiness, which is the absolute truth, and that therefore, these two truths—the relative and the absolute—are actually a unity, only distinguished for the sake of clarity.

The application of this view to working with one's mind came to be called chöd or cutting through in Tibet. It has had various other names. For example, in the tradition of Naropa as it was found in India, it was called equal taste. In the

tradition of Guru Rinpoche it was called the practice of secret conduct. In the tradition of Padampa Sangye it was called the pacification of suffering. And in the tradition of Aryadeva it was called the short text or the concise tradition of Aryadeva.

Padampa Sangye went to Tibet where he encountered the wisdom dakini Machig Labdron, who had been born in Tibet. She received these instructions from him and the tradition of these instructions that stems from her is called chöd. The term chöd literally means to cut something, but it does not mean that you are going to be taking an ax or a sword and cutting something up. The term chöd refers to cutting through the four maras. The first of the four maras in the context of chöd is called the *substantial mara*, which refers to anything that can actually be experienced with the senses, such as forms that can be seen by the eyes, smells that can be smelled by the nose, sounds that can be heard by the ears, and so forth. This mara is called substantial because it has the substantial characteristic of impeding. Solid substances can physically impede you. If you want to go somewhere and there is a solid object in between you and where you want to go, you cannot walk through the solid object ordinarily. In the same way these appearances of the senses, since they have the consistent functions of those sense appearances, are substantial, solid, or impeding.

Why are these sense appearances classified as a mara? Let us look, for example, at one aspect of the substantial mara, which is beautiful form, something you can see that you find pleasant or attractive in some way. Any time you experience something as pleasant, you have become attached to it. Becoming attached to it, you generate a craving for it, a desire for it, and an identification with it and, therefore, more pride, and so on. Your craving, desire, and pride inspire you to engage in various actions in order to acquire it—actions of body, actions of speech, actions of mind—even to the point where you might actually kill or steal in

order to acquire this beautiful form, which would cause you to be reborn in a future life in the hell realms and so on. In short, this attachment to pleasant form or beautiful form is one of the things that casts us into samsara and, therefore, is a mara.

As well, some of the things we encounter with the senses, such as visual forms, are unpleasant to us. For example, take the sight of someone we regard as an enemy. Perceiving them as unpleasant, we react to them with hatred and aversion. Then we become more arrogant, aggressive, and jealous, and we engage in various actions of body, speech, and mind in order to harm those we regard as enemies, and so on. Doing this we accumulate negative karma which causes us to be reborn in the hells and other lower states of existence in future lives.

What makes these external appearances maras—and, therefore that which is the root of the actual substantial mara itself—is this tendency of attachment and aversion within one’s mind. So that which actually has to be cut through are the habits of attachment and aversion. In order to cut through these habits one has to meditate on selflessness or emptiness. This is to say, one must practice shamatha and vipashyana, which is really the essence of chöd practice.

The second mara is the *insubstantial mara*. The insubstantial mara is the kleshas which arise within one’s mind. These are called insubstantial because the mind, of which they are the display, is insubstantial. It has no color, shape or form, and so forth. The reason that thoughts are referred to as maras is that, inspired by thought, we engage in a great deal of negative action, which causes us to experience suffering. Thoughts appear to arise of themselves. Thoughts of attachment, aversion, pride, or jealousy can simply just arise and inspire one to engage in a great deal of afflicted action. Because thoughts inspire negative actions of body, speech, and mind—which in turn create negative karma ex-

The first mara . . . is called the substantial mara, which refers to anything that can actually be experienced with the senses

actly as was the case with the interaction with the substantial mara—and because in that way thoughts can cause one to be reborn in lower states of existence and to experience intolerable suffering there, they are called the insubstantial mara.

The third mara is called the *mara of elation*. In essence the mara of elation is a kind of intoxicating pride in which you think things like, I am doing very well, I am one of the best, things are going really well for me, and so forth. How does this happen? Well, for example, suppose you have become extremely famous. You think, I am the most famous person in the world, I am the best. And in that way you become overconfident. That thought of overconfidence is called the mara of elation.

This mara of elation can also arise when, for example, you become tremendously affluent, or when you acquire some kind of spiritual quality or experience, when you have a vision of your yidam deity, or when you experience signs of attainment in your dreams, and so on. Anything that makes you proud, and especially anything that you identify as the best, anything that you hold to be supreme in and of itself, is the occurrence of this mara. Because when you hold something, such as a meditation experience, to be supreme, then, even if it is something very good and began very well, it becomes an impediment.

The fourth mara is the *mara of fixation*, which refers to the fixation on a self. This fixation on a self is the source of all of the maras. Fundamentally, fixation on a self or the false apprehension of a self is the thought “I,” the thought of oneself as existing. But we cannot avoid this thought and even need it on the path. For example, we need to retain the concepts and intentions: “I must engage in the path so that I can attain buddhahood so that I can benefit innumerable sentient beings.” Now these concepts are indeed the same concept of “I,” which is a fixation on a self, but because these motivations and concepts do not themselves cast you into lower states of existence, then these uses of the concept “I” are not regarded as the actual

fixation on a self.

The fixation on a self which needs to be eradicated is the reactive identification with yourself and all of the things that you associate with yourself. For example, when someone with whom you identify, someone you regard as “my friend” or something like that, is in anyway harmed or threatened, or when something that you want, something that will make you happy, something that will make you wealthy, and so on, is threatened or is taken away from you, there is a strongly aggressive reaction. That aggressive reaction is the fixation on a self that needs to be transcended.

This concept “I” is a concept that we generate on an inappropriate basis, which is to say, that this thing, this self that we assume to exist, does not in fact exist. We generally apply this concept to our physical bodies, with which we identify so strongly. But the physical body is like, for example, a mala or rosary. We can identify a mala or rosary, but this is a concept that we apply to 108 beads that have been strung together on a cord. And as long as the beads are together on that cord we would call that group of things a mala. But if the cord is cut and the beads are separated we would not call any one of those beads a mala or rosary. We would just call the bead a bead.

If we search for the basis of imputation of the self—for whatever it is that we think is the self—when we look at the way we react to things and the way we think when we think, “this might harm me, this might hurt me,” fundamentally, we identify this imputed self with our body. But if you look at your body, you will see that your body is a composite of many parts. There is skin, there is flesh, there is blood, there is lymph, there are the various limbs, the organs and so on. And each of these things is quite distinct from the others. Therefore, there is not any one thing that can be called the body. So ultimately there is no self, there is no “I”. But, because we have a beginningless habit of believing in or assuming the existence of the “I,” then we continue to wander in samsara.

The fourth mara is the mara of fixation, which refers to fixation on a self

How is it that this habit can cause us to wander in samsara? The example of dreams helps us to understand. When you are asleep, your body is actually lying there asleep in your bed. Nevertheless, when you dream you seem to be doing all kinds of things that your body is not really doing. You seem to be going to various places and you might seem to encounter extremely unpleasant things like tigers and poisonous snakes. And if you encounter these unpleasant things in your dreams, you probably become extremely frightened and try to run away from them. And maybe you succeed and maybe you do not. In any case, you seem to have a body in the dream. The body that seems to be yours in the dream is called a “habitual body,” and it is nothing but a projection of your mind.

Another instance of this was spoken of by Shantideva when he wrote, “Where did all of this fire come from and who created this burning ground? All of this is the display of a mind afflicted by evil actions.” The meaning of this is that when someone is reborn in a hell realm, they actually experience a horrendous environment in which the air or atmosphere is filled with flames. All solid materials, like the ground of the realm and so on, are red hot metal, and all liquids which we would call water are molten metal. But it is not the case that there is anyone who could build this, that someone is stoking the fires to keep them going, that someone has actually designed the burning iron ground, and that someone keeps the pots of molten metal filled up. These phenomena are simply the display or the projection of that person’s previous actions. Having engaged in certain kinds of actions, then when you reach the intermediate state and start to take that type of rebirth, that is how you experience everything. The ground is on fire, the liquids are molten metal, and any beings you encounter appear as terrifying executioners. In this way, all appearances are projections of the mind, and the reason for this projection is the false

imputation of the mind as an inherently existent self.

The actual accumulator of karma is your mind.

The body and the speech merely assist or enable the mind’s accumulation of karma. And that which experiences the ripening of karma is, in the final analysis, your mind, not really your body or speech.

The methods of purifying this habit of fixation on a self include all the different kinds of Buddhist practice. The purification or eradication of the habit of fixation on a self is the purpose of all Buddhist practice without exception. However, because that which accumulates karma is the mind, and because that which experiences the results of karma is the mind, the main practice for the purification or eradication of this habit is coming to recognize the mind’s nature, which means the practice of shamatha (tranquillity) and vipashyana (insight).

tion or eradication of this habit is coming to recognize the mind’s nature, which means the practice of shamatha (tranquillity) and vipashyana (insight).

No doubt, some of you are veteran practitioners of the dharma who have practiced a great deal of shamatha and vipashyana. And no doubt, others of you have never even heard of shamatha and vipashyana. And there are probably all sorts of gradations in between. But in any case, because this is what the essence of chöd practice consists of, for the remaining sessions of this seminar what I will be doing is explaining in detail how to do these two practices.

Once you understand properly how to practice shamatha and vipashyana, then your attainment of liberation depends entirely on your own effort, your own exertion. It was therefore said by the Buddha, “I can show you the path or the methods of liberation, but the actual attainment of it depends upon your own diligence.”

By exertion do we mean that in order to practice properly you have to spend your entire life in retreat? No. Meditation on the mind’s nature, employing practices like shamatha and

Once you understand properly how to practice shamatha and vipashyana, then your attainment of liberation depends entirely on your own effort, your own exertion

vipashyana, can be done in the midst of a busy life. You practice the mindfulness of these practices throughout all of your activities, while walking, while working, while talking, and so on. And you also do formal sitting practice of meditation at times when you are not specifically doing something else. If you practice in this way, then you will discover that the path to liberation is not merely legend or history. You will discover that the path that we practice today has been practiced by every generation of Buddhist practitioners, starting from Vajradhara down through Tilopa and Naropa, and so on, down to The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapas. And you will discover that the blessing of this lineage is unimpaired because, in each generation, each holder of the lineage has attained buddhahood through this path and this practice.

These countries of Canada and the United States of America have what appears to be the highest standard of living in this world. And living in these countries and at the same time having access to teachers and the dharma and so on, you have excellent leisure and opportunity to practice dharma. But if you think about it properly, even though you possess all of this right now, if you do not practice, then it will all be wasted. Your life will still prove to be impermanent. One day it will be over. Think of how many people you know who have died, and remember that every single person who is now alive one day will be dead. And remember that when your life is over, this excellent opportunity will be over. All that will remain will be your mind and the karma you will have accumulated. And if you have accumulated a lot of good karma, then you will be reborn in another fortunate situation in which you can practice dharma and maybe even attain buddhahood. But if you have been lazy and you have not practiced, then only the karma you have accumulated throughout previous lives will have power to impel your rebirth. And you do not know what you have done in previous lives. You could easily be reborn as an animal. Or even if you escape rebirth as an animal, you could be reborn in a situation where you cannot practice. In short, now is the time to practice.

In the next couple of days I will explain the

practice of shamatha and vipashyana and we will practice them together. And then after the program, if you have further questions, then you can ask the lamas who live here. And especially you can ask Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, who lives here. So if you have any questions about what I have said this evening, please go ahead.

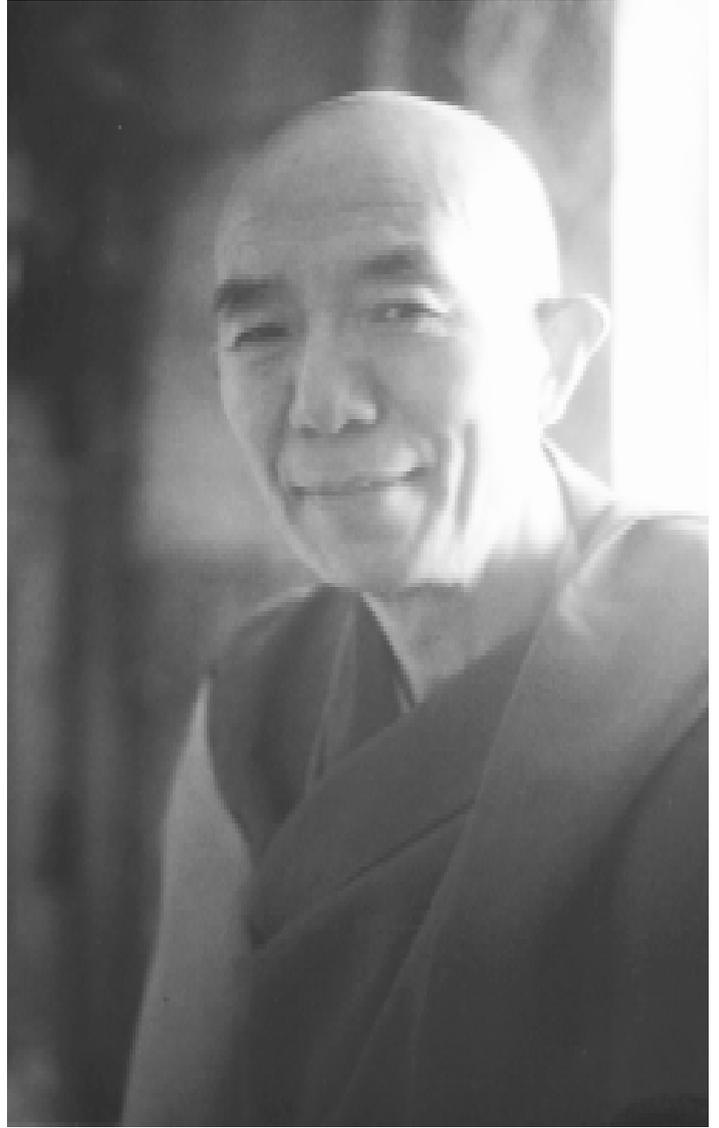
Question: My question is simply the distinction between the first and the second mara. Sometimes I feel it is all in the mind, our aversions and our attractions. So what's really the distinction?

Tenga Rinpoche: As you say, both are really kleshas that arise within the mind. The distinction is that the first one, the substantial mara, is a reaction to an external appearance of some kind, a reaction to some kind of external experience or stimulus. The second, the insubstantial mara, is when kleshas arise in your mind independent of what is going on outside of you. That is actually a very important question. It is good that you asked it. If you can ask questions like that, then your questions will help everybody.

Tomorrow we will start with the instruction in shamatha practice, beginning with The Seven Dharmas of Vairocana, which concerns meditation posture. Now we will close by dedicating the merit to all beings. This is very important, because by dedicating the merit in this way, the merit that we accrue by hearing and giving the teachings will never be used up, nor can it be destroyed by our own kleshas.

With regard to the manner of dedication, even if you do not know how to dedicate the merit perfectly, if you refer in your thought of dedication to the dedications of previous buddhas and bodhisattvas—such as by thinking, however Buddha Shakyamuni and bodhisattvas like Manjushri and Samantabhadra dedicated their merit, I dedicate this merit in that same way. Through referring to perfect dedications in that way, your dedication becomes extremely powerful. 

A Teaching on Chöd Techniques for Shamatha, the Practice of Tranquillity



The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

Continuing The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche's teaching on chöd, the following is an edited transcript from the second night. © Tenga Rinpoche

By The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

The methods for realizing selflessness start with the practices of shamatha, which is tranquillity, and vipashyana, which is insight. The meaning of shamatha is resting in pacification or resting in tranquillity. Normally we have so many thoughts running through our minds, such a great variety of thoughts, that we are distracted and consequently agitated. The practice of shamatha consists of pacifying that

agitation and distraction of thought and then learning to rest or remain in that peace and tranquillity. The reason why we need to practice shamatha is that thoughts obscure the nature of our mind, which is to say, that as long as these thoughts have not been pacified, it is very difficult for us to actually see our mind's nature. Through practicing shamatha one gradually pacifies thoughts, which makes it very easy to see the mind's nature.

The basis for the cultivation of shamatha is what is called threefold isolation, which refers to physical, verbal and mental isolation. Physical isolation means that while you are practicing shamatha, you engage in no physical activity, such

as work or the various other things you might do physically. Verbal isolation means that while practicing shamatha, in the session of shamatha practice, you stop talking. You stop using your speech entirely. And mental isolation means that while practicing shamatha you do not intentionally entertain thoughts, such as thoughts of what you have done in the past or thoughts or plans you have for the future.

It is sometimes thought that the physical posture required for shamatha practice is The Seven Dharmas of Vairocana. This is indeed the ideal posture and should be used by someone who is physically capable of comfortably maintaining it. However, if you have an injury or some other condition, such as a back injury or an injury to the knees that makes this posture medically inadvisable, you should use some posture that is comfortable.

For those who can assume this posture, the first of the seven dharmas or seven aspects of the Vairocana posture is that your legs be fully crossed in the vajra posture. The primary function of this is that it causes the eliminating or expelling wind to be drawn into the central channel, the avadhuti. The second aspect of posture is that the hands be placed below the navel in the gesture of even placement or meditation. This causes the digestive wind to be drawn into the avadhuti. The third aspect is that the arms be straightened, pushing the shoulders upward, which causes the pervasive winds to be drawn into the central channel. The fourth is that the spine be held as straight as possible, which causes the winds of the four main wheels or chakras—the mahasukha chakra or wheel of great bliss in the head, the sambogha chakra or wheel of enjoyment in the throat, the dharma chakra in the heart and the nirmana chakra or wheel of emanation in the abdomen behind the navel—to be drawn into the central channel. The fifth is that your chin be pushed inward, slightly bending your neck. This causes the

The breath, as we know it, is a function of karmic wind, and therefore, working with the breath has many benefits

upward moving wind to be drawn into the central channel, the avadhuti. The sixth is that your lips be allowed to rest naturally, which is to say, that they be neither forcibly held closed nor gaping open, and that at the same time the tip of your tongue touch the upper palate. This causes thoughts to lessen naturally. The seventh is that you gaze with naturally opened eyes slightly downward through an imaginary line about four finger widths in front of the tip of your nose. This type of gaze causes your awareness to be naturally clear. It protects you from the defects of torpor and sleepiness. These are the seven aspects of posture called The Seven Dharmas of Vairocana.

With regard to the mental techniques of shamatha, there are a great variety. The one I am going to present this evening, which is the one usually taught at the beginning, is following the breath. The breath, as we know it, is a function of karmic wind, and therefore, working with the breath has many benefits. When a human body is created through conception and gestation, the primary channels that appear within it are the avadhuti, the central channel, in the center of the body; the rasana to the right of the avadhuti, which is red; and the lalana to the left of the avadhuti, which is white. Now these two side channels flow into or join the avadhuti below the navel. But at the top they hook forward and end in your right and left nostrils, respectively. Therefore, there are distinct qualities to the breath that flow through either the right or the left nostril. The breath that flows through the right nostril, which is connected with the rasana channel, is called the poisonous wind of the sun, and it is the aspect of prajna. The breath that flows through the left nostril is called the ambrosial wind of the moon, and it is the aspect of upaya, method or great bliss.

The breath or winds that flow through each of the two nostrils in both cases partake of the winds of the five elements. But they have different

functions. The winds of the five elements that flow through the rasana and therefore emerge from and enter via the right nostril are the winds that generate the five kleshas: attachment, aversion, pride, jealousy, and apathy.* The winds that flow through the left nostril and are therefore connected to the lalana, are the winds that allow the contact of a sense faculty with its object. They are the winds that allow, for example, for the visual apprehension of form, the apprehension of sound by the ear, and so forth.

Therefore, when you practice shamatha by following the breath, as your mind cools down then the winds of these two side channels are brought into the central channel or the avadhuti. When the winds from the rasana, the right-hand channel, are brought into the avadhuti, because these are the winds when remaining outside of the avadhuti that generate the kleshas, then when they are brought into the avadhuti, the kleshas naturally are reduced or cooled down. And when the winds from the left-hand channel, the lalana, are brought into the avadhuti, because these are the winds when left outside the avadhuti that produce the bewildered experience of the senses, then when they are brought into the avadhuti, your sense consciousnesses naturally become clarified. And becoming clarified, you develop extraordinary

***Editor's note:** The term being translated here, either *marigpa* or *timug*, is probably most frequently translated as ignorance. However, *marigpa* has more the sense of fundamental ignorance that is our basic misperception of reality, and is more or less synonymous with *she chi dripa*, the veil of knowledge; while *timug* has more the sense of mental dullness, bewilderment, confusion, mental wandering, stupidity, ignoring, and apathy. It seems that sometimes *marigpa* is used to express the meaning of *timug*, but that *timug* is never used to express the fundamental misperception of reality. All kleshas arise from one or another of the three basic reactions we can have within the context of dualistic perception. Whenever one of our six senses makes contact with an object of any of the six senses, there is either a feeling of pleasure, which gives rise to desire for the object; a feeling of displeasure, which gives rise to aversion towards the object; or a neutral feeling, which gives rise to apathy or indifference. Hence, Lama Yeshe's translation.

In the mahamudra commentaries, it says that if you can practice for short sessions many times throughout the day, then that is best

sensibilities, such as the ability, for example, to see things at a great distance, to hear things from a great distance, and so forth.

When you use the breath as a shamatha technique, it is important not to manipulate the breath in any way. You should not attempt to forcefully regulate the breathing or to breathe more forcefully than normal, nor should you attempt to stop breathing in any way. You simply use the natural coming and going of the breath as the basis for meditation.

Of course, when you are practicing shamatha, thoughts will still continue to arise. When you find that the presence of a thought has distracted you from the breathing, then simply recognizing that you have become distracted, let go of the thought and return to the technique, which in this case is following the breath. Now we will try this together, that is to say, shamatha practice using following the breath as the technique, for about ten minutes.

The period of time for which you do this practice, that is to say, the duration of the session, is up to you. If you have a lot of time that you can use for practice and if you can practice for a long time every day, that is excellent. But if you can practice for shorter periods, that is also acceptable. Generally speaking, in the mahamudra commentaries it says that if you can practice for short sessions many times throughout the day, then that is best.

If you have any questions about this technique, for example, what exactly it means to place your mind on the breath, how to do it, how to use your awareness in coordination with the breathing and so on, now would be a good time to ask. And remember that any of your questions are likely shared by others, so that your question will help others.

Question: Rinpoche, I have two questions. The first is that ordinarily in the instruction concerning the placement of the eyes, the reason we are in-

structed to look slightly downward with partially closed eyes is to calm agitation, and that, in order to clarify torpor, we are generally instructed to look upward. Rinpoche seemed to teach half of it, the opposite way this time. So, would he please clarify that, and secondly, would he say something further about the all pervasive wind?

Tenga Rinpoche: In fact, the idea of this gaze is that by preventing agitation or pacifying agitation, the mind becomes clearer. It is also true that there are instructions to raise or lower the gaze, depending upon whether you are affected more by torpor or agitation. Basically, you use a gaze appropriate to the specific type of practice you are doing. For example, if you are doing dzogchen practice, or if you are doing the luminosity practice from among the six dharmas in the mahamudra tradition, you would always use a gaze that is directed upward into the midst of space. On the other hand, for almost all forms of shamatha practice you look downward. The reason why you lower the gaze in shamatha practice is that the primary problem that shamatha is remedying is agitation. Ordinarily, sentient beings experience an uninterrupted display of agitated or agitating thoughts, and the primary or initial function of shamatha practice is to pacify them. Therefore, the most appropriate gaze, in order to do so, is lowered.

You might want to know why it is that lowering your gaze pacifies thoughts. The reason is most clearly explained in dzogchen commentaries, where it is explained that there is a physical connection between the channels or nerves of the eyes and the channel of the heart. The channel that goes from the heart to the eyes is called the crystal *kati* channel. Because of the physical connection between the eyes and the heart, there is a particularly intimate connection—if one considers all the various sense organs—between the eyes and conceptual thought. Therefore, your eyes in a sense are the gate for conceptual thought, as well as for visual perception. This is also why, in the practice

The reason why you lower your gaze in shamatha practice is that the primary problem that shamatha is remedying is agitation

of dzogchen itself, when working with the visions of the forty-two peaceful and fifty-eight wrathful deities, these visions can arise in the first place. The actual innate presence of the peaceful and wrathful deities within your body is primarily within the heart chakra, the dharma chakra, where they abide in the form of the white and red bodhicitta. But because of the physical connection between the heart and the eyes, then when doing dzogchen practice, you see apparently outside yourself these peaceful and wrathful deities, initially in the forms of circles or discs of light, and then smaller discs of light, and then finally in the full forms of the deities themselves. Because of this

same connection, in the ordinary context or ordinary situation, your thoughts are very much connected to the physical heart, and you can therefore affect the development of thought by changing your gaze, specifically by lowering it.

When some people hear this talk of the connection between conceptual thought and the heart, they respond by saying, “But are not the channels or the physical constituents that produce conceptual thought in the brain?” The answer is that they are also in the brain. They are actually throughout your body. For example, the channels that allow for sensory experience, the five main channels of the senses, are found in the brain, and they are surrounded by 500 minor or subsidiary channels. The channels that produce conceptual thought are found in the heart, and are also surrounded by 500 subsidiary channels. The first channel to be generated in the human fetus is found in the navel, and is also surrounded eventually by 500 subsidiary channels. And finally, the channels connected with procreation are found in the lower abdomen at the level of the genitals, also surrounded by many other channels.

There is a certain question about the pervasive wind. The pervasive wind is the wind or energy that pervades or fills your entire body and allows, for example, for tactile sensation throughout the body. One instance of this is the fact that any part

of your body, such as the top of your head, that you touch even slightly with a sharp needle will produce a strong sensation, and if you touch the needle to the soles of your feet, it will produce the same type of sensation. The reason why you have this capacity for physical sensation throughout your body is that you have a wind or energy that fills your entire physical body.

The primary function of the pervasive wind is to allow for movement of the limbs. That is to say, it is the wind that actually moves the limbs. And so, when someone becomes paralyzed in one or another of their limbs, that comes about, according to Tibetan medicine, from an impairment of the pervasive wind.

This of course, brings up the five root winds in general. A human being has five primary energies, which are called the five root winds. The first of these is called the vitality wind or the wind of great vitality. And it arises very, very early in the human gestation, when the white drop from the father comes to actually reside in the upper part of the head in the developing human being and the red drop from the mother comes to reside in the abdomen below the navel. What is held in place between these two is what becomes, or is, the central channel, the *avadhuti*. And what is inside the central channel, what flows through the central channel is the fundamental vitality or life force of that human being, which is called the wind of great vitality. The nature of this wind is essentially the same as the mind of that being.

The wind of great vitality is this basic wind from the navel on upward. Below the navel this energy has another name, which is the second of the winds, the eliminating wind, which is used in the acts of urination, defecation, and so on.

The third wind is the digestive wind and its function is to digest food and drink. Specifically it separates the nutrition from the dregs or the poisonous or unnecessary parts of the food, and causes the nutritive parts to enter the bloodstream via the kidneys and the dregs to be expelled into urinary and other systems.

The presence of a strong undercurrent of thought, when you are meditating, is an indication of torpor

The fourth wind is the upward moving wind, which controls all functions of speech, allowing you to speak and sing and do everything that you do with your speech and your voice. So those four plus the pervasive wind make the five root winds. Any more questions?

Question: Rinpoche, in the context of *shinay* or shamatha, how do we relate to the subtle undercurrent of thought? It seems that once coarse thoughts are pacified, then what one finds is this *okgyu*, or subtle undercurrent

of thought, and while it doesn't seem to create an impediment to the meditation, it doesn't at the same time seem to be a state of perfect *shinay* or stillness.

Tenga Rinpoche: Well, the presence of a strong undercurrent of thought, when you are meditating, is an indication of torpor. The undercurrent is actually a function of torpor. It is actually part of the process of falling asleep. So, if you find that the undercurrent becomes evident, then that means you need to exert the force of awareness more so as to put more energy into alertness.

Now I will explain a second shamatha technique. In this technique, you place in front of yourself in your line of vision an image of the Buddha. This may be either a photograph of a painting of the Buddha or it may be a statue. In either case, you direct your awareness to the heart of the image and rest your mind on that. This technique was taught by the Buddha himself in the *Samadhiraja Sutra*, the *Discourse on the Monarch of Meditative Absorptions*. It was said by the Buddha that the power or benefit of this technique lies in the fact that the physical form of the Buddha is actually an embodiment of the qualities of the *dharmakaya*. Therefore, by using the physical form as a basis for meditation, you come to be a great bodhisattva who is constantly in a state of meditative absorption. This technique is varied slightly depending upon what occurs in your meditation

practice. If while using this technique you find that you are afflicted by agitation, then you should direct your gaze and your awareness downward to the lion throne, lotus and moon-disc seat on which the Buddha is depicted as being seated. If, on the other hand, you find that you are aware of the undercurrent of thought and that in general you are afflicted by torpor, then you can direct your gaze and awareness either to the area between the eyebrows of the Buddha or to the crown protuberance on the top of the Buddha's head. So we will try this technique for five minutes. In this case, it will involve your visualizing the Buddha in front of you. So, imagine that the Buddha is seated on a golden throne upheld by eight lions on top of which is a lotus and moon-disc seat. Imagine that the Buddha himself is brilliant gold in color. He is seated with his legs fully crossed in vajra posture. His right hand is extended palm inward over his right knee touching the ground in the earth pressing gesture, his left hand is palm upward in his lap in the gesture of even placement or meditation. He is adorned with the three robes of a monk and so forth. Visualizing the Buddha in this way, then direct your awareness to his heart.

Both of these techniques—following the breath and directing your awareness to the form of the Buddha—are called shamatha with focus, because you are using a support or an intentional focus for your cultivation of shamatha. [meditation]

Do you have any questions specifically about the second technique, directing your awareness to the body of the Buddha?

Question: I have two questions. The first question relates to the first technique. Would Rinpoche talk more about the volume, the repetition, and the duration of the breath? For me my in-breath will be like this: [breathes], and I will stop breathing naturally, and then I will slowly have a very short out breath. It seems as though it is just circling in my head. I wonder if there is torpor? And should I try to have deep breath or light breath? The second question is about visualization. Do you actually

visualize whatever it is in space as being solid? I just can't visualize anything.

Translator: Are you talking about the body of the Buddha technique?

Question: Yes.

Rinpoche: With regard to your first question, if you find that your breath is very short or quick, or that the rhythm is irregular, it does not matter. It does not affect the validity or effectiveness of the technique. You should breathe naturally, whatever is natural for your body. People do naturally have different rhythms of breathing. Some people, for example, tend to breathe very, very quietly or gently. And other people tend to breathe very, very forcefully, just naturally. These differences are

The deity is always visualized as clear and vivid, but insubstantial

connected with the constitution of their channels as individuals. Some people, not necessarily male or female, have very coarse channels, which are called male channels, irrespective of the person's gender. And other people have very fine channels, and those are called female channels, again irrespective

of the person's gender. And then some people have channels which are kind of halfway in between the two, which are called neuter channels. You simply just work with whatever kind of channels you have.

With regard to your second question, if you were asking about visualizing the body of the Buddha, it should not be visualized as substantial, but as luminous, like something made entirely out of light, like a rainbow. This is true not only in visualizing the body of the Buddha in this particular shamatha practice, but also of any visualization of any deity in any practice. The deity is always visualized as clear and vivid, but insubstantial.

Question: Rinpoche, I am wondering if, when you are visualizing in this shamatha practice the Buddha in rainbow light or the lions, are you allowed to move from the heart? Let's say that you lose partial focus on the heart, can you then move

to one or another object, like the lotus or the lions or the golden throne? Or is that a distraction?

Rinpoche: In this technique you direct your awareness one-pointedly to the Buddha's heart, and you do not try to generate a clear appearance or a clear visualization of the other details—if you are doing this technique as a visualization. This meditation can also be done with an external support, like a physical image or a statue, in which case there is no visualization. But if you are doing it as a visualization, then you do not need to generate a clear visualization of all the details. You simply direct your awareness to the Buddha's heart. This is a little bit different from the generation stage practice. In generation stage practices there is a gradual clarification of each and every detail of the visualization. For example, you begin by clearly visualizing the lotus pedestal, and then the moon seat or sun and moon-disc seat or cushion, and then the body of the deity in each detail. Of course, while you are visualizing the partial or complete form of the deity, you may no longer have a clear visualization of the lotus and the moon, and so on. But that is okay, because you went through it. So you do it bit by bit.

Here, in directing your mind to the Buddha's heart, you are not trying to generate that kind of clear appearance. But in generation stage practices, when people have the problem that they just cannot visualize the deity, when they cannot get a clear appearance or a clear visualization of the deity, the reason is usually simply that they have not cultivated a habit through familiarization with the deity's appearance. The deity is not a habitual object of their mind yet. So the way to rectify that problem is, apart from the times in which you are engaged in a generation stage practice, simply to sit in front of a painting, an accurate painting of the deity, and in that way, by directing your awareness and your physical gaze at the painting come

to familiarize yourself with the deity's appearance, color, scepters, ornaments, jewelry, robes, costume, and so on. And once your mind has become habituated to this image of the deity, then it becomes extremely easy to produce a clear image of that deity in generation stage practice.

The other type of shamatha practice is shamatha without a focus, which means that there is no technique used to anchor the mind in any way. You simply allow your mind to rest naturally, which means basically to allow your mind to rest in emptiness. When doing this technique, when thoughts arise, then you simply let go of them and return to a state of the mind at rest.

To place the practice of shamatha in the larger context of the path, especially in the specific tradition of the vajrayana, one should know that all the practices of the vajrayana path are included in two classes of techniques, which are called the generation stage and the completion stage. The generation stage is fundamentally the practice of the visualization of deities, and also includes, of course, the recitation of their mantras, and so forth. At the

When [people] cannot get a clear appearance, or a clear visualization of the deity, the reason is usually simply that they have not cultivated a habit through familiarization with the deity's appearance

end of every session of generation stage practice one dissolves the visualization and rests the mind without contrivance or alteration in emptiness. That resting of the mind in emptiness, which is the essence of the completion stage, is the actual profound path of the vajrayana itself, and the cultivation of shamatha and vipashyana is the cultivation of the aspects or resources which make up that profound and quick path of the completion stage. The function of the generation stage is to be a supportive method or supportive technique, one which enables one to actually practice the completion stage. Therefore, by extension,

we could say that the function of other vajrayana practices—such as the gathering of the accumulations of wisdom and merit through prostrations and mandala offerings, and the purifica-

tion of obscurations, and so on—is that they are supportive techniques conducive to the cultivation of both the generation and completion stages.

With regard to our particular approach to shamatha practice, it was said by Jetsun Milarepa, “Not being attached to the pond of shamatha, may the flower of vipashyana be born.” This means that you need to cultivate a state of stable shamatha, but that this cannot be viewed as an end in itself. Having cultivated shamatha, you need to go beyond shamatha and gain experience of your mind’s nature, which is vipashyana, the experience of insight. When you begin actually to cultivate insight or

vipashyana, you begin the actual practice of mahamudra itself. So, if you can integrate as much shamatha/vipashyana practice as possible into your daily practice, for however much time you have, that will make your practice, whatever else it may be, extremely profound and genuine. So now we will try a shamatha practice without a focus or support for five minutes. [meditation]

If you have any questions about shamatha practice without a focus please ask them.

Question: Rinpoche, one question, basically about when we are meditating in shamatha practice without a focus or with a focus. When we came into the room this evening we recited the Dorje Chang Tungma, the lineage prayer, and cultivated refuge and bodhicitta, and then later we will dedicate the



Buddha inside the MahaBodhi temple at Bodhgaya

merit. Is that enough during one session like a two-hour teaching? I tend to take refuge again before and to dedicate merit afterwards each time you ask us to go into a five- or ten-minute meditation session. Is that necessary or not?

Tenga Rinpoche:

When a long session is being broken up like this into small periods of meditation, then it is sufficient if the lineage supplication, the refuge and bodhicitta, and so on, are done once at the beginning. If you can recollect refuge and bodhicitta at the beginning of each short session within that longer session then that is excellent, but you do not need to.

Tomorrow night, I

will begin by explaining the technique of vipashyana or insight meditation. I will also explain some of the reasons for practicing it, and the background of it, and then, after that, I will give the reading transmissions for Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye’s commentary on chöd practice, *The Garden of All Joy*, and for a concise liturgy that goes with that. The day after tomorrow I will give the empowerment for chöd practice, and after that I will teach the most concise form of chöd practice, which was written by Jamgon Lodro Thaye. It is found in a book that he wrote called *Post-meditation Practices For Between All Sessions*. I will explain the practice to you, and then we will do it once together. So let us conclude by dedicating the merit to all beings. (5)

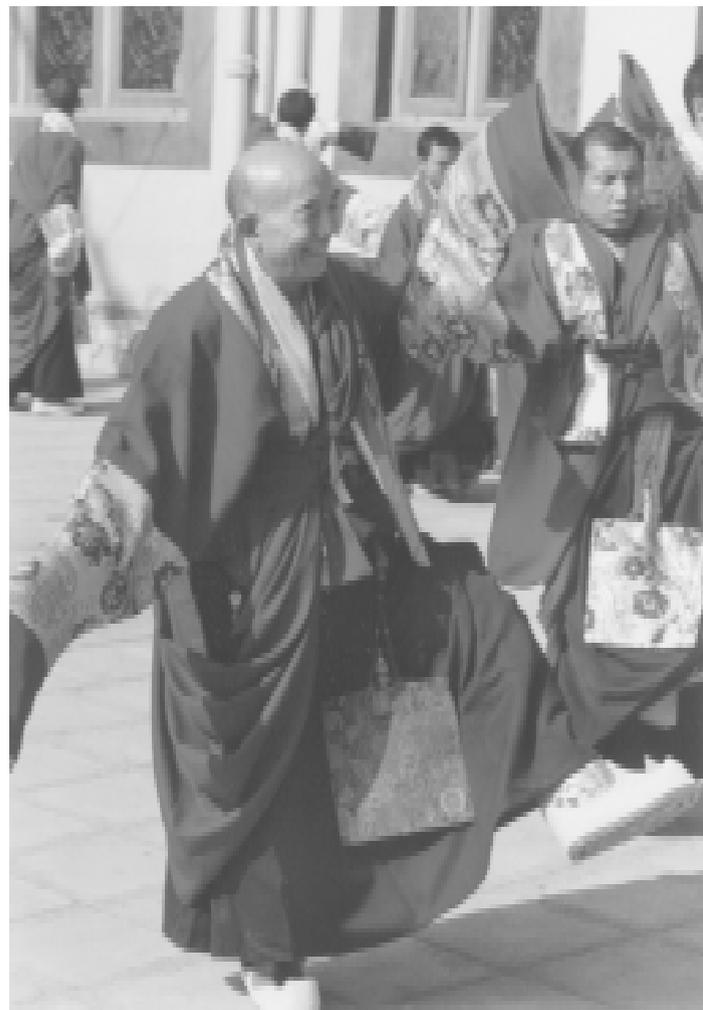
Experiencing the Nature of Mind Through Vispashyana

A Teaching on Chöd

Continuing The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche's teaching on chöd, the following is an edited transcript from the third night. © Tenga Rinpoche

By The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

Last night, I explained several different methods of shamatha practice and then we performed them together. About the meaning of shamatha, it was said by The Third Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, in his *Aspiration of Mahamudra*, "May the waves of coarse and subtle thoughts be pacified,



The Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

and may the mind come to be unmoving and at rest." The essence of shamatha is a state in which the waves of thought have come to rest or have been pacified, and the mind rests or abides within that tranquillity. The stanza continues, "Free from the defects of torpor, obscuration, and agitation, may the ocean of shamatha remain unmoving or free of waves." Torpor, dullness, and agitation are defects that can afflict shamatha practice. Torpor and dullness are essentially a state of unclarity or even sleepiness within the mind, and agitation is uncontrolled distraction. There are several ways to alleviate these, through physical position, through various visualizations, and so on. Whichever method one may care to use, some method needs to be applied in order to remove whichever of these defects has arisen, and then one can return to the basic practice of shamatha.

In the practice of shamatha there are three stages of tranquillity or rest. The first is called the waterfall stage. This describes the movement of thoughts within the mind when they resemble the quick flow of water over a cliff forming a waterfall. Just as the flow of the drops of water is unceasing and is so forceful and agitated that, when they hit the body of water at the bottom of the waterfall, you cannot see the pebbles under the surface of the water, in the same way, at this initial stage of shamatha practice, thoughts flow so continuously or uninterruptedly that it seems to you as though you actually have more thoughts than you had before you started meditating. In fact it is not the case that you have more thoughts than before. What is going on is that for the first time you are aware of how many thoughts are passing through your mind. Because this is actually an increase in awareness and not an increase in the presence of thought itself, this is actually the first sign that

your mind is starting to settle down.

The second stage is called the stage which is like a slowly moving or slowly flowing river. When a great river flows along its course, the flow of the water may produce some bubbles and so forth but not many waves. In the same way, at this stage of shamatha practice, from time to time thoughts will continue to arise but they are not as agitated nor as continuous or uninterrupted as they were in the previous stage. Therefore, this is a stage of some degree of stability of shamatha.

The third and final stage is like an ocean without waves. When an ocean has no waves, of course it is completely tranquil and unmoving, and in the same way, when this degree of stability of shamatha has been reached, no thoughts arise in the mind. This is therefore the highest degree of shamatha practice.

While meditating on the *nature* of your mind, according to the mahamudra tradition, there are four stages. The first of these four is called *one-pointedness*. One-pointedness is described or summarized by Jamgon Lodro Thaye in his *Song of Mahamudra* when he says, “In brief, one-pointedness is the stage at which the mind remains in even placement for as long as you wish.” What this means is that when you have reached the stage or cultivated the stage of one-pointedness, then your mind will remain in a state of even placement for as long as you intend it to. So, for example, if you decide you are going to rest your mind in its own nature for two hours, then for those two hours no thought will arise that prevents you or distracts you from recognizing that nature. Or if you say at six in the morning, “I am going to rest my mind until six p.m.,” your mind stays at rest for that long. In short, one-pointedness is a state of freedom or control over meditative absorption in general. As is well known, there are three gradations to it, which are called lesser, intermediate, and greater one-pointedness. What is being described here is essentially greater one-pointedness.

Stable shamatha is the gateway to the preparation for vipashyana or insight

When you have achieved this, which is the perfection of shamatha, you have achieved the first of the four paths of mahamudra. Having achieved that kind of stability in shamatha, you become able

actually to see the nature of your mind directly for the first time.

Therefore, that kind of stable shamatha is the gateway to the preparation for vipashyana or insight.

The practice of vipashyana is described by The Third Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, in the *Aspiration of Mahamudra* in the

following words, “By looking at that mind, which cannot be looked at, one sees that which cannot be seen.” The meaning of this is that, when you look at your mind, you are not looking at anything *per se*, because there is not anything to be looked at. That is to say, there is not any substantial characteristic or quality that you can detect, conceptually apprehend and describe, such as color, shape, origin, location, destination, and so on. The mind has no color, it has no shape, it has no size, it has no origin, it has no location, and it has no destination. If the mind were something substantial, surely it would have such characteristics. But not being something substantial, it does not possess these characteristics and, therefore, what the mind is cannot be conceived of, cannot be conceptually grasped or apprehended, and therefore, cannot be described. So in that way, the mind cannot be looked at. In a sense, it cannot be seen. Nevertheless, the practice consists of looking at that, again and again.

The stanza goes on to say, “Through looking at the mind in that way, you come to see vividly, just as it is, that which cannot be seen.” The meaning of this is that, although there is not any object in the mind or that is the mind that you can see or detect, because of the blessing of the guru and your own accumulation of merit, there is a realization in your direct experience of the meaning of this not seeing. This realization of that which cannot be seen is what is called insight or vipashyana. Through having that kind of experience, then you cut through, within your own mind, which is to say

within the direct experience of your own mind, any doubt about what the mind is and what the mind is not—whether it exists, whether it does not exist, and so on. This kind of certainty or resolution comes from your own direct experience of your mind's nature.

The ability to see the nature of your mind depends primarily upon two things: cultivating a stable state of shamatha, and receiving the blessing of your root guru. Most importantly, when the blessing of your guru enters your heart, then there will be a spontaneous realization of vipashyana. The way to receive the blessing of the root guru is fundamentally through cultivating faith in, trust in, and devotion to the guru, and then, with those as a basis, practicing in the following way: Visualize in the sky in front of you your root guru seated on a lion throne, lotus, sun and moon disc seat, either in the form in which you ordinarily perceive him or her, or in the form of the dharmakaya Vajradhara.* Then supplicate your root guru one-pointedly and finally think that from the forehead of your root guru rays of white light shoot out. These strike and enter your forehead, granting you the blessing of the guru's body. From your guru's throat center rays of red light shoot out. These strike and enter your throat, granting you the blessing of the guru's speech. From your guru's heart center rays of blue light shoot out. These strike and enter your heart, granting you the blessing of the guru's mind. And finally, from your guru's forehead, throat and heart, rays of white, red, and blue light respectively, shoot out, strike and enter the same three places, granting you the blessings of your guru's body, speech and mind, causing you to attain the supreme siddhi of mahamudra. Then, finally, think that the guru melts into a mass of light and dis-

***Editor's note:** Kalu Rinpoche, commenting on this question of how to visualize the guru, said in 1977, "If you have seen me as Vajradhara, then you may visualize me in my ordinary form. If you haven't, then you had better visualize me in the form of Vajradhara. Otherwise you might just get the blessing of a little old man."

solves into yourself, at which point your mind and your guru's mind, which is the wisdom of the dharmakaya, are utterly mixed. Then simply rest your mind without alteration.

What is meant by not altering the mind is that when you rest your mind at that time, in that way, do not think about the past, do not attempt to prolong the past by thinking about what you did yesterday or what you did last month, for that matter. And do not beckon the future, by which is meant, do not think about what you are going to do tomorrow or what you are going to do next year and so forth. And with regard to now, do not attempt to alter or change the nature of your mind,

just rest in it as it is, as you find it. Do not attempt to do anything to it. If you can preserve this way of resting the mind through the application of mindfulness and of alertness, then you will vividly see your mind's nature. The mind's nature cannot be meaningfully described with words or language of any kind. People have applied various terms to it, such as saying that it is lucid or that it is resplendently brilliant or that it is glaringly brilliant. But

basically mind's nature is beyond any kind of speech; it is something that you simply have to experience for yourself. In any case, when you experience the nature of your own mind, that is the realization of vipashyana.

When you are resting your mind without alteration in that way, and then when you have some experience of your mind's nature, in the first instant there will be an experience or a recognition, and in the next instant there will arise the thought, "This is it," at which point you are thinking. Do not be frightened by the emergence of thought in that situation. You do not have to try to chase that thought away. Simply use that thought or whatever thought you become aware of as the basis for meditation by looking directly at it. By resting within the thought, by looking directly at the thought rather than attempting to banish the thought, the thought will dissolve, and when it dissolves, you are back in the experience of

When the blessing of the root guru enters your heart, then there will be a spontaneous realization of vipashyana

vipashyana itself.

So, you need to try this to see if you actually recognize your mind's nature or not. In order to do so, first, as I explained, visualize your root guru, whoever it is, in the sky in front of you. Then, supplicating the guru, receive the four empowerments in the sequence that I mentioned.

Then dissolve the guru into yourself and mix your mind with the guru's mind, and in that way, rest without alteration or fabrication. And now we are going to do it. [meditation]

Through applying this method of practice, you can gain a vipashyana experience. And also, through applying this method or technique, you can determine whether or not you actually have vipashyana experience. If however, you want to ask any questions about this, about what you experience when you do this, or whether or not you can deal with whatever arises when you attempt to do this—thoughts, emotions, and so on—please go ahead.

Question: Rinpoche, although I have experienced some success with both shamatha and vipashyana meditation, I have never been able to visualize clearly. I find myself manifesting the intention that I am experiencing some visualization, I react as if there were something there, but the screen has always been clouded and still is.

Tenga Rinpoche: If you can practice shamatha and vipashyana properly, then you do not need visualizations, because shamatha and vipashyana are the actual, the main, or ultimate practice of working with the mind itself in the completion stage.

Question: Rinpoche, I have a question concerning the gaze. We had instructions from Thrangu Rinpoche for doing mahamudra wherein the gaze is raised slightly, and what I was wondering about is whether one raises the gaze by actually raising the head or by raising the gaze itself.

Translator: You mean by moving the eyes or

bending the neck?

Question: Yes, because the reason I ask is that the neck is placed in a certain position for a certain reason and it seems a little bit weird if you were to change that posture.

Tenga Rinpoche: In the case of a raised gaze, all you are doing is raising the angle at which the eyes are looking. You do not alter or move the chin or the head.

If you have vipashyana recognition through your meditation practice, then you have reached the border of the second of the four stages of mahamudra, which is called *simplicity* or

beyond elaboration. The meaning of beyond elaboration or simplicity is that the nature that you are starting to experience is beyond any kind of conceptual elaboration or conceptual complexity. Therefore, it was said about this nature by The Third Karmapa, "It does not exist,"—or you could also think of it as "It is not something,"—"because it is not seen even by buddhas." But also, "It does not not exist,"—or you could think of it as, "It is not nothing,"—"because it is the basis for all of samsara and nirvana." The meaning of this is that when you experience your mind's nature there is nothing substantial or nothing there that you are experiencing. But nevertheless, that nature itself is the cognitive capacity which allows for all experience—both experience in the state of bewilderment, which we call samsara, and experience in the state free of bewilderment, which we call nirvana, and which consists of the experience of the kayas and qualities and realms of buddhahood.

Even though you may have gained some recognition of your mind's nature, gaining this recognition once and then stopping the practice of meditation will not get you anywhere. It is like beginning a journey but stopping as soon as you start. What you need to do once you gain recognition is to foster or cultivate this recognition through the application of mindfulness and alertness.

Mindfulness is recollection of the mind's nature

If you can practice shamatha and vipashyana properly, then you do not need visualizations

and alertness is the faculty of examining the meditative state to see whether you have become distracted, that is to say, to see whether or not you have lost mindfulness. In a sense this is dualistic. After all, that which you are viewing is the mind and that which is viewing it is that same mind. There is not really a separate subject and a separate object. Nevertheless, in the beginning, we have to be a bit dualistic and, to some extent, artificially split the viewer and the viewed in order to preserve the initial consciousness and the somewhat fabricated faculties of mindfulness and alertness. In any case, continually viewing the mind with mindfulness and alertness is the practice of what we call mahamudra or vipashyana.

Even though you preserve mindfulness and alertness as the method or substance of the practice, nevertheless, until you reach a very high level of meditation practice, there will never come a time in which you are completely free of distraction. The nature of distraction is that you are unaware of when you have become distracted, but you are aware of when you recognize that you are distracted, and as soon as you recognize that you are distracted, you simply return to looking at the nature of your mind.

This undistracted mindfulness and alertness needs to be maintained, not only in even placement, which is to say, during formal meditation practice, but also throughout all of your actions. When you are going about your daily activities, when you remember the practice, immediately exert that meditative awareness. For example, when you are walking, or talking to someone, and you remember the practice, then at that moment look at your mind, be mindful of your mind's nature.

The most important factor in practice is being undistracted. It was therefore said by the learned and accomplished Karma Chime Rinpoche, "The heart essence of the Kagyu lineage gurus is the repetitive or the continuous cultivation of mindful-

ness, the watchperson of mindfulness." That is what we call practice.

When you are practicing mindfulness, some of the thoughts that arise will be quite disturbing, such as thoughts that are very, very strong kleshas or thoughts of great suffering, or thoughts of intense fear. The key point in dealing with any of these disturbing thoughts is that, if you can look right at them such that they dissolve in their own place, that is to say, dissolve of themselves without your having to rely on any conceptual remedy or antidote for that particular thought, then that indicates that you are able to bring that thought to the path of mahamudra.

If you practice this path of meditation, then gradually you will be able to destroy the thought or concept that is the grasping at a self and the grasping at the reality of things in general, and as you destroy this very subtle concept, you become free from it. When you have destroyed all grasping at the reality of anything whatsoever, then you have reached the third level or third stage of mahamudra practice, which is the point at which in your experience appearances and mind are mixed. They are no longer experienced as two separate things. This third level is called *one taste*.

The meaning of one taste is that, at that point, you realize in your direct experience that all external appearances arise as the display or appearance of your own mind, and that therefore, they are the display of your own habits. When this is a decisive realization in direct experience, then there is no longer a split or division in your experience between experienced appearances and the experiencing mind. They are perceived or experienced as having the same fundamental flavor. This level of realization is therefore called one taste.

When you actually are able to experience this mixing together or unification of appearances and mind*, at that point you are able to display the

***Editor's note:** This could be stated, "When you are actually able to realize the inseparability of appearance and mind."

types of miracles which characterized the siddhas of India and Tibet. However, even though you may have realized one taste, you still need further training. You still have to continue to work with your mind.

If you continue to practice after the stage of one taste, then eventually you will reach the fourth and final stage of mahamudra, which is called *no meditation*. It is called no meditation because there is no longer the conceptualization or the experience of an object of meditation or a meditator. Therefore, you rest without effort throughout the day and night, throughout waking and sleeping, in the dharmakaya, in mahamudra. At that point all of your bewilderment or confusion has been purified.

About this stage, it was said by Jetsun Milarepa, “When I look at my mind I see that it is the actual buddha. Even if the predecessors, the forebears, were to see this, they would surely be delighted.”

What he is saying is that at this stage, when you look at your own mind, you experience the full force or full presence of buddhahood or awakening, but nevertheless, you continue to abide within an illusory body for the duration of your physical life for the benefit of others. At this stage of full realization, for your own benefit you have attained the dharmakaya, and for the benefit of others you begin to display the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya.

This is a method that we can actually practice, and if we practice it with diligence, we can actually reach the stage that I have just described, in this life. It is appropriate therefore to reflect upon this again and again, because by thinking of this you will generate more enthusiasm and more delight in practice.

This has been a brief description of the mahamudra path. If you have any questions, please ask them.

Question: Rinpoche, in the current practice and in the cases of past lineage masters, I am curious about how many people have attained this level of mahamudra simply by relying upon mahamudra

and no other method. It seems as though many of the past masters accomplished this state through reliance upon the path of method, *tap lam*. How many people can actually accomplish this or have accomplished this in the past without relying upon the path of method?

Tenga Rinpoche: So many people have attained awakening that they are numberless. There is no way to count them and say, “this many.” But since the Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in this world, attained buddhahood here, and began to teach and present the various vehicles, through his various presentations of dharma an uncountable number of beings have attained awakening. With regard, however to the relative emphasis on the path of liberation and the path of method, which are, in a sense, both aspects of what we call mahamudra, then some who have attained realization have emphasized the practice of mahamudra *per se*—that is to say, the path of liberation—and have supplemented it to some degree with the path of method. The path of method in the mahamudra context is The Six Dharmas of Naropa. Other

teachers have emphasized one or more of The Six Dharmas of Naropa, such as chandali or the illusory body and so on. In that way they have taken the path of method as their primary practice and then have supplemented or enhanced that path with the practice of mahamudra. There are many, many different ways, in

terms of proportion, in which these can be combined.

Question: As Buddhists we revere the life history, teachings, and practices that have come down to us from Shakyamuni Buddha. But very often we hear references, like this morning, reference to a previous birth of the Karmapa, that refer to much older dharma traditions and practice. What can Rinpoche teach about the dharma before Shakyamuni?

Tenga Rinpoche: All buddhas pass through the

So many people
have attained
awakening that
they are
numberless

same process, the same path, and attain the same awakening. They all begin by generating bodhicitta, and then they all go through a process of three periods of innumerable kalpas, gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom. Finally, at the culmination of this process, they attain buddhahood at an extraordinary place like Vajrasana.* Then they all turn the dharmachakra three times.** But what happens in the case of each buddha? Using the examples of the first four of this eon [kalpa], we know that first the Buddha Korwagig attained buddhahood and turned the wheel of dharma. Then his teachings persisted for a period of time and eventually vanished. Only after his teachings had vanished, did the second buddha, Buddha Serthub, attain buddhahood. Then his teachings persisted for a time, and then eventually they vanished. Only then did the third buddha, Buddha Ösung, attain buddhahood. His teachings persisted and then finally vanished. Only then, did the fourth buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, attain buddhahood and his teachings still persist. His teachings are still around. In general, this is called a fortunate eon because 1,000 buddhas, of whom Buddha Shakyamuni is the fourth, will appear. In particular, we are living in a fortunate period within this eon, because we are living within the period of a buddha's teaching, not in the break in between the disappearance of the one buddha's teachings and the appearance of the next buddha's teachings. And the teachings of this fourth buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni, are particularly distinguished, because he not only turned the dharmachakra three times, he also taught the vajrayana, which was not taught by the first three buddhas and is not taught by most buddhas.

Now I will give the reading transmission for the liturgy for chöd practice, which is called *The Generosity of the Body*, and for the commentary on that practice which is called *The Garden of All Joy*. Both of these were composed by Jamgon Lodro

***Editor's note:** Tib., *Dorje Den*, more commonly known in this realm as Bodhgaya.

****Editor's note:** They all turn the wheel of dharma three times, which is a way of saying that they all teach three major cycles of teachings.

Thaye, Jamgon Kongtrul the Great.

As I explained a few days ago, chöd is essentially a way of implementing the view of the intermediate dharmachakra presented by the Buddha. Chöd was emphasized and practiced by the mahasiddha, Padampa Sangye, who brought it from India to Tibet and passed it on to his disciple, Machig Labdron, who began the lineage and tradition of chöd. Machig Labdron's birth was predicted by the Buddha, who said that in the future, in the north in the region called Lap, there would appear a woman who would be a wisdom dakini known as Drolma. In accordance with that prediction, Machig Labdron was born in the area of Lap and exhibited the activity of a wisdom dakini, benefitting countless beings through this tradition, as was predicted by the Buddha. Machig Labdron is considered to be identical externally with Arya Tara, internally with Vajrayogini, and secretly with the wrathful dark Vajrayogini or Machig Tröma Nakmo. She is considered to be an embodiment in one person of all wisdom dakinis.

Machig herself inherited three distinct lineages of chöd. One is the father lineage of the father tantra of method, which she passed on to her son, Gyalwa Döndrup. The second one is the mother lineage connected with the mother tantra of knowledge, which she passed on to her son, Tönyön Samdrup. And the third is the non-dual lineage of the non-dual tantra of the ultimate meaning, which she passed on to her disciple, Khugom Chökyi Senge. Now this particular empowerment, which uses a tormo to give the empowerment of Machig Labdron herself, is connected primarily with the third lineage, the non-dual tantra according to Chökyi Senge.

[Rinpoche proceeded to prepare and bestow the empowerment of Chöd, and gave a concise teaching on an extremely concise twelve-line daily practice of Chöd.]

Finally, let us dedicate the merit to the longevity of all the glorious gurus who hold the lineage and to the happiness and prosperity and welfare of all sentient beings, in general, and, in particular to the speediest possible attainment of unsurpassable awakening by ourselves and all beings. ॐ

On the Twenty Emptinesses

A Commentary on Selected Verses from Chandrakirti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*



The Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

The Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche spoke about the Twenty Emptinesses on June 22, 1997, at Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling in Seattle. The following is an edited transcription of that teaching, which was given in Tibetan and orally translated by Ari Goldfield.

**By The Venerable
Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche**

1. EMPTINESS OF THE INNER

**Since it has no inherent nature,
The eye is empty of being an eye.
The ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are the
same way.
They are all described in a similar way.
(Chap. 6., v. 181)**

**They are not stable nor forever lasting,
Nor do they remain for a short time and
decay.
The eye and the rest that are the six
inner ones
Are things that have no essential nature at all.
This is what is meant by “emptiness of the
inner.” (182)**

These two verses are in accord with the explanation in the third chapter of *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* that the sense faculties are empty of true essence. And they are empty of true essence because they exist neither as one nor as many. So we first gain certainty about that and then we rest the mind in that certainty.

2. EMPTINESS OF THE OUTER

**For these reasons, form’s nature is emptiness;
Therefore form is empty of being form.
Sounds, odors, things that are tasted, and
what the body feels too,
All these phenomena are exactly the same.
(183)**

**Form and so forth have no essential nature:
This very lack of essence is called “emptiness
of the outer.” (184)**

Form—what is smelled, what is tasted, what is touched, what is heard, what is seen—none of these have any inherent nature. They are just like the appearances in dreams. Remembering that, we rest the mind in meditation. This is the same as the view expressed in Chapter 14 of Nagarjuna’s *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, which looks at the object that is seen, what sees, and the seer, and shows that none of them have any true existence.

So for example, in a dream the form that is seen, the eye that sees, and the person who is seeing, none of these ever really meet because they do not have any essence. In the *Heart Sutra* it says, there is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no phenomena. It is the same meaning.

3. EMPTINESS OF THE INNER AND THE OUTER

**That both inner and outer lack an essential
nature
Is what is called “emptiness of the inner and
the outer.” (184)**

[There was a gap in the tape here, but, based on the reasonings in other teachings on emptiness, one could surmise that Khenpo Rinpoche reasoned that once the emptiness of the inner had been demonstrated and the emptiness of the outer had been demonstrated, then it followed logically that the emptiness of their composite, the inner and the outer, had also been demonstrated.]

4. EMPTINESS OF EMPTINESS

**All phenomena lack the essential nature, and
The wisest of all call this “emptiness.”
Furthermore, the Wise One said,
This emptiness is empty of being an
inherently existent emptiness. (185)**

**The emptiness of what is called “emptiness”
Is the “emptiness of emptiness.”
The Buddha taught it to counteract
The mind’s tendency to think of emptiness
as something truly existent. (186)**

In order to reverse our tendency to turn emptiness into some kind of object, the Buddha taught the emptiness of emptiness. We might think, “Oh, emptiness is emptiness.” To free us from the belief that emptiness is emptiness, the Buddha taught the emptiness of emptiness.

5. EMPTINESS OF THE GREAT

**The “great” is what the ten directions
encompass:
All sentient beings and the entire universe.
The “immeasurables” prove the directions’
infiniteness:
They pervade the limitless directions, so they
cannot be measured in extent. (187)**

**That all ten directions in their whole vast extent
Are empty of essence is the “emptiness of
the great.”
The Buddha taught about its emptiness
To reverse our conception of the vast as
being real. (188)**

The directions are truly great, and the reason why is that they pervade all sentient beings in all of the worlds and places in the universe. So, in order to reverse our conception of the directions as

being something real Buddha taught the emptiness of the great, because until we realize that the directions are not real we will not be able to realize that everything in the directions is not real.

6. EMPTINESS OF THE ULTIMATE

**Because it is wanderer’s supreme of all needs,
Nirvana’s cessation is the ultimate here.
Nirvana, the Truth Body, is empty of itself,
And this is what the emptiness of the
ultimate is. (189)**

**The Knower of the Ultimate
Taught the “emptiness of the ultimate”
To counteract the mind’s tendency
To think that nirvana is a thing. (190)**

Our greatest need of all is to attain nirvana; that is why it is called the ultimate. It is the ultimate necessity. And yet even this ultimate necessity is neither one nor many. So it is not a truly existent entity. And it is empty. So in order to reverse our clinging to it as something real, the Buddha taught this emptiness of the ultimate. If we cling to nirvana as something real, then we will also think that its opposite, which is the cycle of existence, is something real. And if we think that both are real, then it is difficult to get out of our clinging to true existence. And so that is why it is important to understand that nirvana does not truly exist either.

This is analytical meditation according to the view of the middle way. Think about the reasons until you get certainty about it. After that, rest in meditation.

7. EMPTINESS OF THE COMPOSITE

**Because they arise from conditions
The three realms are “composite,” it is
taught.
They are empty of themselves,
And this, the Buddha taught, is the
“emptiness of the composite.” (191)**

Anything that is arisen from causes and conditions is called a composite phenomena. And these composite phenomena are beyond being one or many. (See note on page 62.) They have no true essence at

all. That is why the Buddha taught the emptiness of the composite. Understanding the emptiness of the composite helps to free us from our beliefs that the phenomena that we see [and experience] that arise from causes and conditions are truly existent. In short, this meditation on the true nature of the composite is a meditation on the true nature of samsara. Let's recite this again. [recitation] Again. [recitation]

8. EMPTINESS OF THE UNCOMPOSITE

When arising, cessation, and impermanence are not among its characteristics, A phenomenon is known as being “uncomposite.” They are empty of themselves. This is the “emptiness of the uncomposite.” (192)

A phenomenon that neither arises, nor ceases, nor has the quality of impermanence, is something that is uncomposite. There are three examples, three things which fit into this category. One is space. The other two fall into the category of cessation. One is the cessation of the afflictions that happens when there is wisdom realizing selflessness. That cessation is something that is by nature non-existence. The second type of cessation is ordinary cessation. For example, in this room there is no ox, no elephant, there is no snake. So that non-existence, in all three cases, is something that does not arise, that does not cease. It is not something impermanent. So these are uncomposite phenomena, and these, too, are empty of essence, they are empty of themselves. Let us recite this twice. [recitation]

9. EMPTINESS OF THAT WHICH IS BEYOND EXTREMES

That to which extremes do not apply Is expressed as being beyond extremes. Its emptiness of its very self Is explained as the “emptiness of that which is beyond extremes.” (193)

That which is beyond extremes—there are three. First is emptiness. Emptiness is beyond extremes. Second is dependent arising. Dependent arising is beyond the extremes. The third is the middle way path. That, too, is beyond extremes. For example,

Rinpoche has been teaching that the true nature of reality is the complete freedom from all conceptual elaborations about it. But if we take that to be something real, then that is also a problem. So we are taught that that, too, is empty. So let us recite this twice. [recitation]

We will recite the next two from the tenth emptiness.

10. EMPTINESS OF THAT WHICH HAS NEITHER BEGINNING NOR END

That which has no point from which it begins Nor boundary where it ends is the cycle of existence.

Since it is free from coming and going, It is just mere appearance, like a dream. (194)

Existence is void of any existence: This is the emptiness of That which neither begins nor ends. It was definitively taught in the commentaries. (195)

What is traditionally taught as being without beginning or end is the cycle of existence. Since the cycle of existence is without beginning or end, then sentient beings are without beginning or end. Ignorance is also without beginning or end. But this is not to say that they are without beginning or end in any permanent way; this is not to say in any way that they are permanent. It is like what is without beginning or end in a dream. That which appears in a dream is without any real truly existent beginning, and it is without any real truly existent end. It is the same thing. The cycle of existence, just like dreams, is without any truly existent beginning or any truly existent end. So, in order to reverse our clinging to that which is without beginning or end as being truly existent, the Buddha taught the emptiness of that which is without beginning or end. Two times. [recitation] If we think about samsara as something that does not come from anywhere and does not go anywhere, then we will understand this too. And that is something that is also taught in the text, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

11. EMPTINESS OF WHAT SHOULD NOT BE DISCARDED To “discard” something means

**To throw it away or to abandon it.
What should not be discarded is
What one should never cast away from
oneself—the great vehicle. (196)**

**What should not be discarded
Is empty of itself.
Since this emptiness is its very nature,
It is spoken of as the “emptiness of what
should not be discarded.” (197)**

That which should not be discarded is the dharma of the great vehicle, the mahayana. It says we should not discard it, we should not throw it away, we should not abandon it. They all mean the same thing. But at the same time we should understand that this dharma of the great vehicle has no essence. So it is empty also. Two more times. [recitation]

If we take the great vehicle's teachings to be something truly existent, then we think that the vehicle of the hearers, the first turning of the wheel of dharma, is something unimportant and has flaws in it. We should meditate on this.

12. EMPTINESS OF THE TRUE NATURE

**The true essence of composite and all other
phenomena is pure being,
Therefore, neither the students, the solitary
realizers,
The bodhisattvas, nor the buddhas
Created this essence anew. (198)**

**Therefore, this essence of the composite
and so forth
Is said to be the very nature of phenomena.
It itself is empty of itself.
This is the emptiness of the true nature. (199)**

All composite and all other phenomena have no truly existent essence. Their true nature is emptiness, but this true nature which is emptiness also does not truly exist. The true nature is also empty of being any kind of true nature. This is the emptiness of the true nature. If you think that all phenomena are empty and the nature of all phenomena is emptiness, and you cling to that as being something real, then you should meditate on the emptiness of that, too. Two more times. [recitation]

13. EMPTINESS OF ALL PHENOMENA

**The eighteen potentials, the six types of contact,
And from those six, the six types of feeling,
Furthermore, all that is form and all that is not,
The composite and the uncomposite—this
comprises all phenomena. (200)**

**All of these phenomena are free of being
themselves.
This emptiness is the “emptiness of all
phenomena.” (201)**

There are an incredible number of divisions and distinctions that we make between all different kinds of relative phenomena, all of the different kinds of phenomena that appear to us. If we take all of these divisions and distinctions to be real, then we need to meditate on the emptiness of all phenomena and all of the distinctions that go along with them. To every different appearance that appears we give a name. And we say this is this, and that is that, and all of these different kinds of things. What we need to realize is that there really is no basis for giving any of these names. All of these things that we see are just imputed by thoughts. They do not truly exist. Sometimes when we are studying we are buried under all the different distinctions that are made by the books that we are reading, or whatever it is that we are studying, and we get very tired. We get a headache from all of these different things that we have to learn. At that time it is good to meditate on the emptiness of it all. [laughter, then recitation]

14. EMPTINESS OF DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

**All composite and uncomposite phenomena
Have their own individual defining
characteristics.
These are empty of being themselves.
This is the “emptiness of defining
characteristics.” (215)**

This verse is one of a pair with the thirteenth emptiness because it is talking about the emptiness of the characteristics of phenomena. For example, if you have fire, then “fire” is the name, and the characteristics are the basis, that basis which is actually hot and actually does the burning. So the emptiness of all phenomena is talking

about the emptiness of all of these names and divisions. The emptiness of characteristics is talking about the fact that the bases for these names and divisions are also empty of any inherent existence.

According to the Sautrantika (sutra) school the names and the thoughts about phenomena do not really exist, but the phenomena, the bases themselves, do truly exist. So if we have thoughts like that, that these bases are things which truly exist, then we need to meditate on the emptiness of defining characteristics. [recitation]

In the song, *To Speak Truly of the Middle Way* by Milarepa, when Milarepa says that therefore not even the name samsara exists, what he is saying is that not only do the bases of imputation not exist, but also even the name “samsara,” even the names which we give to these bases do not exist.

15. EMPTINESS OF THE IMPERCEPTIBLE

**The present does not remain;
The past and future do not exist.
Wherever you look, you cannot see them,
So the three times are called,
“imperceptible.” (216)**

**The imperceptible is in essence empty of itself.
It is neither permanent and stable
Nor impermanent and fleeting.
This is the “emptiness of the imperceptible.” (217)**

If we have thoughts that the three times really exist, then it is important for us to meditate on the emptiness of the three times, the emptiness of the imperceptible. We think a lot about the past. We think a lot about the future. We think a lot about the present. And based on those thoughts all different sorts of suffering arise. So at those times we should think about how it is that the three times really do not exist and meditate on that. We should think about the proofs which are found in *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, like the one in the examination of time, where it says, if the present and the future were dependent on the past, the present and the future would exist in time past. So let us say this three times. [recitation]

The past and the future do not exist now, and the present does not even remain for an instant. So

where is time? Since the past does not exist then there is no suffering from the past. Since the future does not exist, there is no suffering from the future. And since the present is something that is fleeting and does not even remain for a moment there is no suffering in the present either. Since we think of the past, present, and future as existing in some continuum, where there is a connection between them, then we suffer as a result of that. We suffer because we confuse them all and we take all of them to be present somehow at the same time.

16. EMPTINESS THAT IS THE ABSENCE OF ENTITIES

**Since an entity arises from causes and conditions,
It lacks the nature of being a composite.
This emptiness of there being anything that
is a composite
Is the “emptiness that is the absence of
entities.” (218)**

Because they arise from causes and conditions, phenomena are said to be composite or are said to be a combination. But as we have seen, there really is no such thing as a combination, there really is no such thing as an entity formed by a combination. That entity is really a non-entity. And the emptiness of this non-entity is also the emptiness that is the absence of entities. So if we see that all entities really have no essence, that there really is no entity there when there is a combination, we might cling to that as being true. So that is why the sixteenth emptiness is taught. If we realize that all entities have no essence really and that there really are no entities at all, and then that makes us depressed because there is nothing, then we should meditate on the emptiness of that nothingness.

The sixteen emptinesses are condensed into four emptinesses that follow. These four emptinesses are a summary of the previous sixteen. The reason why they are presented is that there are so many things that are empty in these sixteen that it is easy to forget. So when that happens and you get to the end and you have forgotten what was at the beginning, then these four sum it all up very nicely. The first two talk about the relative, the world of apparent reality—

basically entities and non-entities, and nothing else. The second two talk about the ultimate truth. In the ultimate truth there are no divisions really, but from the perspective of thinking about the ultimate truth we can come up with lots of divisions. Basically here though there are two: There is the nature of all phenomena, i.e., the emptiness of entities, and also the ultimate truth is called the entity which is other. This means, basically, that which is different from relative truth. So let us say the first one together. [recitation]

1. EMPTINESS OF ENTITIES

In short, “entities” are Everything included in the five aggregates. Entities are empty of being entities, And this is the “emptiness of entities.” (219)

There are limitless numbers of entities that we can think of. But basically they are included in the five aggregates: the aggregates of form, feeling, mental discriminations, mental formations, consciousness. If we take those all into one, then we have “entities,” and those are all empty. So that is a helpful way to think about it. So this first one teaches the emptiness of all of that. Let us say this twice. [recitation]

The second is the emptiness of non-entities.

2. EMPTINESS OF NON-ENTITIES

In short, “non-entities” are All uncomposite phenomena. Non-entities are empty of being non-entities, And this is the “emptiness of non-entities.” (220)

The non-entities are again these three non-composite phenomena: space; the cessation of the afflictions that happens when there is wisdom realizing selflessness—that cessation is something that is by nature non-existence; and the ordinary cessation, for example, there is no ox, no elephant, there is no snake in this room. These three are uncomposite phenomena, non-entities, technically called. And non-entities are also empty of themselves, they are empty of being non-entities, and this is the emptiness of non-entities. Two times. [recitation]

3. EMPTINESS OF THE NATURE

The nature of phenomena is that they have no essence. It is called their “nature” because no one created it. The nature is empty of itself, And this is the “emptiness of the nature.” (221)

This emptiness has the exact same meaning as the twelfth emptiness which is the emptiness of the nature. If we have attachment to emptiness as emptiness, as being the true nature of phenomena, we need to meditate on the emptiness of the nature, too.

4. EMPTINESS OF THE ENTITY THAT IS OTHER

Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, The natural emptiness of all entities Is proclaimed to be The “entity that is other.” (222)

Other names for this are the “genuine limit” and “suchness.” They are empty of themselves and this is the “emptiness of the entity that is other.” In the sutras of The Great Mother, The Transcendent Perfection of Wisdom, These twenty emptinesses are explained in great detail. (223)

There are two reasons why the true nature of reality is the entity that is other. The first is that it is different from apparent reality, that is, the false appearance that appears to all of us. And second, it is the object of primordial awareness, the object of our inherent awareness, pristine awareness. And on the other hand the cycle of existence is the object of our ordinary consciousness. So for that reason it is other. [recitation]

If we get attached to the idea that emptiness is really something different from this cycle of existence on the one hand, and on the other hand, that it is the object of primordial inherent awareness, and that samsara is only the object of our ordinary consciousness, and if we cling to these things as being real, then we need to meditate on this emptiness of the entity that is other.

It is true that ultimate reality is just the object of our inherent awareness and not of our conscious-

ness, but this ultimate reality is empty of essence, it has no true existence to it. And neither does this inherent awareness have any inherent essence to it. So in that way the entity that is other is empty of essence.

When these four emptinesses, which are the summary of the sixteen, are explained, then we get twenty. There are these twenty divisions and these twenty different types of emptiness talked about, but from the perspective of emptiness itself, there are no divisions. These divisions do not really exist. Then if you think that this non-existence of any divisions is something real, then you should know that the true nature is beyond there being either divisions or no divisions.

This way of teaching the twenty emptinesses is in accordance with the way that Machig Labdron, the great yogini of Tibet, attained her realization. She read the entire hundred-thousand line, twelve-volume *Prajnaparamita Sutra* once a day for a month. Then at the end of that month she had direct realization of emptiness, and she became a siddha. She taught her students sixteen different types of meditation based on the sixteen types of emptiness. So there are sixteen different verses based on the sixteen different emptinesses, and then there are four more based on the four emptinesses, which are the condensed version. So we end up with twenty different verses which we can recite.

It would be very good if in the future you made a course like this one, where you would get together and make four sessions in a weekend, and had four different emptinesses for every session. Recite a verse and then meditate, recite another and meditate, like that. If you do four each session then you can do all sixteen in one weekend. If you do all sixteen together, as we did now, then that is called analytical meditation. That gets you to be an expert in both the meaning and the words.

Because Machig Labdron could read the whole twelve volumes of *the Prajnaparamita Sutra* in one day, she became incredibly renowned for her wisdom, for her learnedness. When Machig Labdron passed into nirvana, then they built a cremation box for her, and as her body was being cremated,

her son, Gyalwa Döndrup, sang a praise to her at each of the four doors of her cremation shrine. And in one of those praises he said, “Mother, Prajnaparamita Siddha,” which means that he was saying she was a really great siddha, an extraordinary siddha, because she attained her siddhahood not through the vajrayana like other siddhas, but through the prajnaparamita.

Machig Labdron’s son, Gyalwa Döndrup, when he was young was kind of a bum. He stole, he was a thief, and he was not really any good at all. But then based on the blessing of Machig Labdron, he listened to her instructions and turned it around and became a great siddha himself. One time he and his friends got together and they stole an ox, and they killed it. When the ox died it made a very loud and weird noise. When they ate the meat they all got really sick. So Gyalwa Döndrup went running to his mother’s house and finally started listening to her teachings, and then he became a great siddha. That shows how it is that doing bad things can lead to good results, because there are many siddhas like that who first engaged in all sorts of negative action and hurt people and animals, and that led to their feeling regret, and then they practiced the dharma and attained great siddhahood. In that way bad actions become your friends on the path, because, based on bad actions, you practice the dharma.

Others became great siddhas because they experienced great suffering. There is the example of Gampopa, Dakpo Rinpoche. First his son died, then his daughter died, then his wife died. He had intense suffering, but as a result, he became a great siddha. In that way suffering is a friend of our dharma practice.

Also anger is a friend of our dharma practice. There is the example of Marpa the translator who, when he was a child, had a ferocious temper and got into fights with every single kid in his village. So his parents said, “If you don’t practice the dharma, if you don’t go that way, then life is going to be really tough for you because you have a really bad temper.” So he practiced the dharma and became a great siddha. An example again of how negative actions can be a friend of our dharma practice is the example of Milarepa, who commit-

ted intensely bad deeds and felt intense regret as a result of them, and then devoted himself to the practice of dharma with intense diligence and became a great siddha.

Then there is the example of how sickness is a friend of our dharma practice, and that is Götsangpa, who when he was up meditating in the caves got really sick all of the time, and meditated on the essence of his illness. By meditating on the essence of his illness, he attained realization.

Rinpoche's departing aspiration prayer for us is

that, based on the merit we have accumulated from his explaining and our listening to his explanation of Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, of Milarepa's *To Speak Truly of the Middle Way*, and Chandrakirti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*, may all of our bad circumstances arise as our friends on the path. May all bad circumstances actually bring us benefit. May we realize emptiness, the complete freedom from all elaborations. And as a result of fulfilling these aspirations may we bring great benefit to all sentient beings. 

A Note on the Logic That Arrives at Emptiness

Much of what Rinpoche is talking about in this teaching is based on the following logic: Whatever the phenomenon is, if it is one, it must have one essence, one essential quality, or one intrinsic nature. So, for example, if we posit the existence of a human body, then under thorough analysis we must be able to find one unitary thing which is the body; it must logically be indivisible. What we find when we analyze the body is simply a collection of parts, and no unitary phenomenon called a body. In turn each and every part of which the body is made up—the torso, the thumb, the leg, etc.—when examined in the same way also fails to have any singular, unitary essential quality, essence, or intrinsic nature.

If, on the other hand we say that a phenomenon is many, that it is made of smaller units or particles, then there must logically be a smallest unit of which said phenomenon is compounded, which exists intrinsically and has a singular, unitary essential quality. But if we take again the phenomenon of the human body, regardless of how small a unit of matter that one designates as existing intrinsically and having a singular, unitary essential quality, you will find nothing. Because, no matter how small the unit of matter, no matter how small the particle, you must logically still be able to touch the left side of one against the right side of the other, which means that each particle must have a right and a left side, as well as a top and a bottom side, as well as a fore and an aft side. And if each particle has even two of these dimensions, it is still divisible into smaller particles of matter. Since this logic can be repeated ad infinitum with ever smaller particles of matter, it cannot be said that there is any such thing as a smallest unit of matter. And if there is no smallest unit of matter, then matter cannot be said to exist inherently. Therefore, material phenomena cannot be said to exist as many, and in fact must exist in some other way than as inherently existent entities. Therefore, our posited human body cannot be said to exist as many.

The same logic can be applied to mind. In the words of Thrangu Rinpoche, "As for the nature of the mind, we all tend to feel that we have a mind which we experience and with which we recognize things, and so on. But if we examine the experience of mind, we see that there is not a single thing which is the mind we are said to have. Consciousness has many different components—awareness of visual objects (forms, shapes and colors), awareness of

sounds, tactile consciousness, and mental consciousness—which are all separate ways of knowing. Each type of consciousness recognizes a particular field of experience in its own terms. Thus each of these six consciousnesses functions in its own terms. Thus each of these six consciousnesses functions in its own frame of reference and is at least somewhat independent of the others.

"So mind too is not a single, unitary thing, but a compound, just as external objects are [not single, unitary things]. If we examine in turn visual consciousness, we see that it has the potential to perceive various objects, with various forms and various colors, all arising in succession, with prior appearances disappearing at the moment that succeeding appearances occur. Thus visual consciousness is multiple and successive, has many different potential objects, and so cannot be a single unitary thing."

Then again, in the words of Thrangu Rinpoche, "Examining the successive manner in which consciousness cognizes its objects, we might be led to believe that each 'flash' of awareness, each moment of consciousness, is a fundamental unit of time, comparable to supposedly indivisible particles. However, if we could ever isolate such a particular unit of time, we would see that it could only occur within a framework of on-going consciousness—for awareness is never static—and hence would have to relate to a previous moment and future moment. That is, such a moment would not be a partless whole. Rather it would consist of three parts, that part relating to a previous moment being past relative to a postulated present, and that 'present' being past in relation to the future moment."

So there is no unitary essential quality, no single identifiable reality, in either the world that appears in an objective frame of reference or the subjective mind.

This same type of analysis can be applied to all phenomena, and in every case we find that there is no unitary essential quality, no single identifiable reality. And so we discover that no phenomenon exists as one, and since no phenomenon exists as one, no phenomenon can possibly exist as many, since many is simply a composite of many "ones," which we have seen do not exist with a singular, unitary nature. Therefore all phenomena are empty.

For further presentation of the meaning of emptiness, see the three teachings of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso in Volume 2, Number 2 of Shenpen Ösel, and *The Empty Door to Emptiness*, by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche.

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New KSOC Meditation and Class Schedule

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9-10:30 a.m.

Chenrezig practice

11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Mahamudra verses recitation and meditation as taught by The Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche at KSOC in August of 1998, led by Lama Tashi Namgyal; question and answer session at end of meditation

SUNDAYS

8-10:30 a.m.

Formless meditation

11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Teachings by Lama Tashi on Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF SHENPEN ÖSEL

Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche's commentary on selected verses from Nagarjuna's *Praise of the Dharmadhatu*, which is Nagarjuna's commentary on the Buddha's third turning of the wheel of dharma

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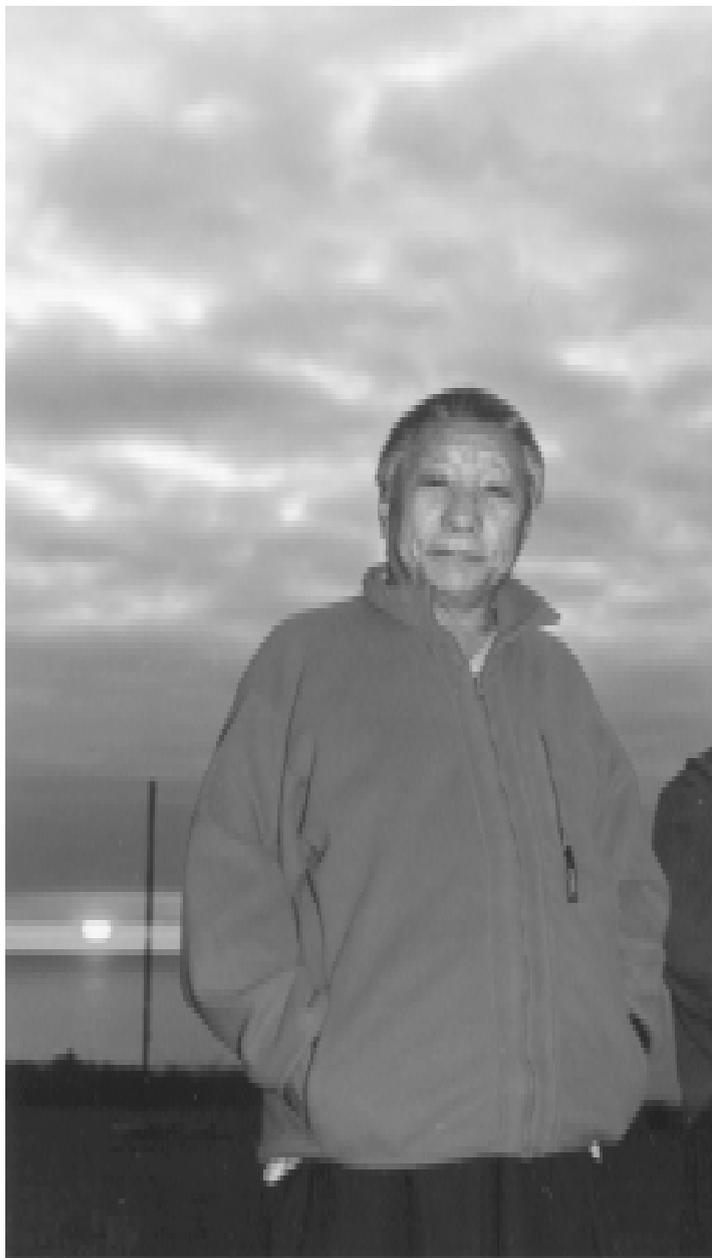
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May all of our bad circumstances arise as our friends on the path. May all bad circumstances actually bring us benefit. May we realize emptiness, the complete freedom from all elaborations. And as a result of fulfilling these aspirations may we bring great benefit to all sentient beings.

—The Venerable
Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

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