



SHENPEN ÖSEL

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

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1

MAY 1997



THE VERY VENERABLE KHENPO TSULTRIM GYAMTSO RINPOCHE

*Whoever knows this life to be like the reflection of the moon in water,
Whenever happiness arises will not be attached,
Whenever suffering arises will not be depressed,
And will attain true inner peace.*

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

During the soon-to-be four years of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling's (KSOC) existence, we have sought to provide an opportunity for the people of the Northwest — and in particular, for the people of the Seattle area — to meet the clear light of the Buddha's teachings so that they might derive the benefit that dharma practitioners have derived from these teachings now for 2,500 years. In particular, we have sought to present the teachings transmitted by the many lineages of what is loosely known as "Tibetan Buddhism," with an emphasis on the teachings passed down by the Karma Kagyu and Shangpa Kagyu lineages.

To this end, KSOC has presented an ongoing program of teachings by Lama Tashi Namgyal, a Western lama resident in Seattle, as well as occasional programs of teachings by visiting Tibetan and Western lamas. During this time, in order to publicize these teachings, we have gradually found ourselves entering step by step into the publishing business, first by publishing brochures and later by publishing two newsletters.

At the same time, we have been accumulating a growing library of tapes from these teachings, which in turn has spawned a small "cottage industry" of transcribers, who have been turning out transcripts of these teachings, which are gradually being edited. If these teachings are more widely disseminated, they might bring great benefit to many sentient beings, both to those who initially attended these teachings, as well as to others who were unable to attend.

Thus, KSOC is taking the bold step of printing an expanded newsletter or magazine, in order to deliver in some depth the pure teachings of the dharma as presented by recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, and to publicize upcoming programs given by lamas of our lineage sponsored by dharma centers throughout the Northwest. It is our intention to publish two, perhaps three times per year.

Our general aspiration is reflected in the name we have chosen for our endeavor, "Shenpen Ösel." Shenpen is Tibetan for "benefit to others;" Ösel literally means "clear light," which in this context refers to the cognitive lucidity of the mind in which is inherent all positive virtues. It was based on the realization of the indivisibility of emptiness (Sanskrit: *sunyata*) and this cognitive lucidity, that the Buddha spontaneously bestowed all of the teachings that have been passed down to us by all the lineages of Buddhism to this day, and which have brought unimaginable benefit to countless sentient beings. This union of emptiness and cognitive lucidity is also what is referred to as buddha nature, and is the true nature of mind of all sentient beings. It is with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings, so that all beings may be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature, that we embark on this endeavor for the benefit of others.

May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious.



Tibetan Mountain Yogin Brings Teachings on Emptiness to Seattle

Northwest dharma students will have a rare opportunity this June to hear teachings from Tibetan mountain yogin and meditation master, The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche.

In Seattle from June 17 through 25, Khenpo Rinpoche will give a series of teachings on the realization of sunyata or emptiness, entitled “On the True Nature of Mind.” These teachings will be based on two commentaries of Nagarjuna: *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way Called Wisdom) and *Dharmadhatustabam* (The Praises to the Dharmadhatu).

Direct experiential understanding or realization of sunyata is the ultimate goal of all Buddhist meditation disciplines, including both Zen practice and the practice of Tibetan tantric Buddhism, because it is this realization that liberates one from all varieties of anxiety and suffering.

Joining profound and vast knowledge of the dharma with profound realization of its true meaning, Khenpo Rinpoche communicates brilliantly, directly, and indelibly the essence of the path of the Buddha. He is famous for his skill in debate; and his book, *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*, is regarded as a classic presentation of the stages of development of a practitioner’s progressive understanding of sunyata.

Khenpo Rinpoche was born in Eastern Tibet in 1934. During and after receiving extensive teachings and empowerments from Lama Zopa Tharchin, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Dilyak Druppön Rinpoche, and His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, he spent many years living and meditating in caves and roaming and meditating in charnel grounds and cemeteries in Eastern and Central Tibet.

In 1959, he led a group of nuns who were having difficulty dealing with the Chinese invasion of Tibet to India. In the ensuing nine years, Khenpo Rinpoche lived in the Tibetan refugee camp in Buxador where he gained his khenpo degree from His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa.

He later received the geshe lharampa degree from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. During this time, he also received the vast cycle of Padmasambava's *terma* called the *Rinchen Terdzö* from His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and extensive teachings from the former Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. During this time he completed and mastered the studies of the sutras and tantras of all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, and Nyingma).

In 1976, with the blessings of His Holiness Karmapa, Khenpo Rinpoche established Thegchen Shedra in France, where he trains translators in depth in the study of Tibetan texts. In 1985, he established Marpa Institute for Translators in Nepal, where he has also guided many students in retreat near Milarepa's cave in Yolmo.

Together with Thrangu Rinpoche, he has been responsible for training the next generation of Kagyu khenpos who graduated in 1991 from the Nalanda Institute, founded by His Holiness Karmapa in Sikkim.

Dohas From

Khenpo Tsultrim Gyantso Rinpoche

“ *Family is impermanent, like a rainbow in the sky. To give up clinging to it as permanent and true is in accordance with the dharma. To abide in the true nature of mind, in clear light free from mental fabrications, relaxedly and self-subsidingly, is the supreme of all meditations.* ”

“ *The fortunate student knows how to see this life as a dream. If you look again and again into the unborn nature of mind and know how to rest relaxed, then within mind's own nature itself you will realize mahamudra.* ”

Rinpoche's Schedule of June Teachings

Khenpo Rinpoche will present an understanding of sunyata and buddha nature both from the point of view of the second cycle of the teachings of the Buddha and of the third and last cycle of the teachings of the Buddha. Those who can attend all 11 sessions will benefit greatly. The schedule is as follows:

Teachings based on **Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika***

Tuesday-Thursday, June 17-19
Monday-Wednesday, June 23-25
7:30-9:30 p.m.
Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC)
4322 Burke Ave. N. (Wallingford neighborhood)

Teachings based on **Nagarjuna's *Dharmadhatustabam***

Friday, June 20
7:30-9:30 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, June 21 and 22
10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and 2:30-5 p.m.
Catherine Blaine Elementary School, Room 144
2550 34th Ave. W. (Magnolia neighborhood)

Those who wish to meditate before each session should plan on arriving half an hour before the teachings begin.

Cost is \$150 for the entire series and \$75 for the Friday, Saturday, Sunday teachings only.

Attendance is limited to 60 at KSOC and to 100 at Catherine Blaine; pre-registration is encouraged.

For further information, call: (206) 632-1439,
(206) 722-6970, or (206) 323-4421.

For Rinpoche's fall schedule in the U.S., see page 29.

The Reason We Practice Meditation

By V.V. Thrangu Rinpoche

In the spread of Buddhism in America, the Kagyu lineage was in the forefront of the sending of lamas to America. Of these lamas, the three great progenitors of the dharma in America were His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa, His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche, and the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche.

It was very unfortunate that in the 1980s we lost all of these great beings, but in the aftermath, there were a number of remarkable lamas in the lineage who stepped forward to fill their places and to bring great benefit to sentient beings. Amongst these, in the forefront of them, was The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, abbot by appointment of His Holiness Karmapa of Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. He is also abbot of his own monasteries in Nepal and Tibet, of Tara Abbey — a women's monastery in Nepal, and by appointment of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, of Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia.

In addition he has been very generous and kind to Western students, teaching the dharma extensively in retreats and seminars throughout the world.

Rinpoche taught in Seattle for the first time in May 1996. This transcript is from his teachings the evening of May 24.

I'd like to begin by welcoming all of you here tonight. I recognize that you've come here out of your sincere interest in, and wish to practice, genuine dharma, and out of your respect for my teaching. And this is all delightful to me, and I thank you for it. I consider myself fortunate to have such an opportunity to form such a connection with you. To begin, I would like to recite a traditional supplication to the teachers of my lineage, and while doing so, I invite you to join me in an attitude of confidence and devotion.

(Chants.)

The essence of the buddha-dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, is practice. And when we say practice, we mean the practice of meditation, which can consist of either the meditation known as tranquility or that known as insight. But in either case, it must be implemented in actual practice. The reason we practice meditation is to attain happiness. And this means states of happiness in both the short term and the long term. With regard to short-term happiness, when we speak of happiness, we usually mean either or both of two things, one of which is physical pleasure and the other of which is mental pleasure. But if you look at either of these pleasant experiences, the root of either one has to be a mind that is at peace, a mind that is free of suffering. Because as long as your mind is unhappy and without any kind of tranquility or peace, then no matter how much physical pleasure you experience, it will not take the form of happiness per se. On the other hand, even if you lack the utmost ideal physical circumstances of wealth and so on, if your mind is at peace, you will be happy anyway.

We practice meditation, therefore, in part in order to obtain the short-term benefit of a state of mental happiness and peace. Now, the reason why meditation helps



The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche

with this is that, normally, we have a great deal of thought, or many different kinds of thoughts running through our minds. And some of these thoughts are pleasant, even delightful. Some of them, however, are unpleasant, agitating, and worrisome. Now, if you examine the thoughts that are present in your mind from time to time, you will see that the pleasant thoughts are comparatively few, and the unpleasant thoughts are many — which means that as long as your mind is ruled or controlled by the thoughts that pass through it, you will be quite unhappy. In order to gain control over this process, therefore, we begin with the meditation practice of tranquility, which produces a basic state of contentment and peace within the mind of the practitioner.

An example of this is the great Tibetan yogi Jetsun Milarepa, who lived in conditions of the utmost austerity. He lived in utter solitude, in caves and isolated mountains. His clothes were very poor; he had no nice clothes. His food was neither rich nor tasty. In fact, [for a number of years] he lived on nettle soup alone, as a result of which he became physically very thin, almost emaciated. Now, if you consider his external circumstances alone, the isolation and poverty in which he lived, you would think he must have been miserable. And yet, as we can tell from the many songs he composed, because his mind was fundamentally at peace, his experience was one of constant unfolding delight. His songs are songs that express the utmost state of delight or rapture. He saw every place he went to, no matter how isolated and austere an environment it was, as beautiful, and he experienced his life of utmost austerity as extremely pleasant.

In fact, the short-term benefits of meditation are more than merely peace of mind, because our physical health as well depends, to a great extent, upon our state of mind. And therefore, if you cultivate this state of mental contentment and peace, then you will tend not to become ill, and you will as well tend to heal easily if and when you do become ill. The reason for this is that one of the primary conditions which brings about states

of illness is mental agitation, which produces a corresponding agitation or disturbance of the channels and energies within your body. These generate new sicknesses, ones you have not yet experienced, and also prevent the healing of old sicknesses. This agitation of the channels and winds or energies also obstructs the benefit which could be derived from medical treatment. If you practice meditation, then as your mind settles down, the channels and the energies moving through the channels return to their rightful functioning, as a result of which you tend not to become ill and you are able to heal any illnesses you already have. And we can

see an illustration of this also in the life of Jetsun Milarepa, who engaged in the utmost austerities with regard to where he lived, the clothes he wore, the food he ate, and so on, throughout the early part of his life. And yet this did not harm his health, because he managed to have a very long life, was extremely vigorous and youthful to the end of his life, which indicates the fact that through the proper practice of meditation, the mental peace and contentment that is generated calms down or corrects the functioning of the channels and energies, allowing for the healing of

sickness and the prevention of sickness.

The ultimate or long-term benefit of the practice of meditation is becoming free of all suffering, which means no longer having to experience the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Now, this attainment of freedom is called, in the common language of all Buddhist traditions, buddhahood, and in the particular terminology of the vajrayana, the supreme attainment, or supreme siddhi. In any case, the root or basic cause of this attainment is the practice of meditation. The reason for this is, again, that generally we have a lot of thoughts running through our minds, some of which are beneficial — thoughts of love, compassion, rejoicing in the happiness of others, and so on — and many of which are negative — thoughts of attachment, aversion, jealousy, competitiveness, and so on. Now, there are comparatively few of the former type of thought and comparatively many of the latter type of thought, because we have such strong habits that have been accumulating within us over a period of time without

We begin with the meditation practice of tranquility, which produces a basic state of contentment and peace

beginning. And it's only by removing these habits of negativity that we can free ourselves from suffering.

You cannot simply remove these mental afflictions, or *kleshas*, by saying to yourself, "I will not generate any more mental affliction," because you do not have the necessary freedom of mind or control over the *kleshas* to do so. In order to relinquish these, you need to actually attain this freedom, which begins, according to the common path, with the cultivation of tranquility. Now, when you begin to meditate, [when] you begin to practice the basic meditation of tranquility meditation, you may find that your mind won't stay still for a moment. But this is not permanent. This will change as you practice, and you will eventually be able to place your mind at rest at will, at which point you have successfully alleviated the manifest disturbance of these mental afflictions or *kleshas*. On the basis of that, then you can apply the second technique, which is called insight, which consists of learning to recognize and directly experience the nature of your own mind. This nature is referred to as emptiness. When you recognize this nature and rest in it, then all of the *kleshas*, all of the mental afflictions that arise, dissolve into this emptiness and are no longer afflictions. Therefore, the freedom, or result, which is called buddhahood, depends upon the eradication of these mental afflictions, and that depends upon the practice of meditation.

The practice of tranquility and insight is the general path which is common to both the paths of sutra and tantra. In the specific context which is particular to the vajrayana, the main techniques are called the generation stage and the completion stage. These two techniques are extremely powerful and effective. Generation stage refers to the visualization of, for example, the form of a lineage guru, the form of a deity or *yidam*, or the form of a dharma protector. Now, initially, when first encountering this technique, it's not uncommon for beginners to think, what is the point of this? Well, the point of this is that we support and confirm our ignorance and suffering and our *kleshas* through the constant generation of impure projections or impure appearances which

make up our experience of samsara. And in order to transcend this process, we need to transcend these impure projections, together with the suffering that they bring about. A very effective way to do this is to replace these gradually, replace these projections of impurity, with pure projections, based on the iconography of the *yidam*, the *dharmapala*, and so on. By starting to experience the world as the mandala of the deity and all beings as the presence of that deity, then you gradually train yourself to let go of mental afflictions, let go of impure projections, and you create the environment for the natural manifestation of your own innate wisdom.

Now, all of this occurs gradually through this practice of the generation stage. The actual deities who are used can vary in appearance. Some of them are peaceful and some of them are wrathful. In general, the iconography of the wrathful deities points out the innate power of wisdom, and that of the peaceful deities the qualities of loving-kindness and compassion. Also, there are male deities and female deities. The male deities embody the method or compassion, and the female deities embody intelligence or wisdom.

For these reasons, it's appropriate to perform these practices of meditation upon deities. And because these practices are so prevalent in our tradition, if you go into a vajrayana practice place or temple, you will probably see lots of images of deities — peaceful deities, wrathful deities, and extraordinarily wrathful deities. And you'll see lots of shrines with some very eccentric offerings on them. Initially, if you're not used to all this, you might think, "What is all this?" And you might feel, "Well, the basic practices of tranquility and insight make a lot of sense, and are very interesting; and all these deities, all these rituals, and all these eccentric musical instruments are really not very interesting at all." However, each and every aspect of the iconography, and each and every implement you find in a shrine room, is there for a very specific reason. The reason in general is that we need to train ourselves to replace our projection of impurity or negativity with a projection or experience of purity. And you can't simply fake this, you can't simply talk yourself into this, because you're trying to replace something that is deeper than a con-

The ultimate or long-term benefit of the practice of meditation is becoming free of all suffering

cept. It's more like a feeling. So, therefore, in the technique by which you replace it, a great deal of feeling or experience of the energy of purity has to be actually generated, and in order to generate that, we use physical representations of offerings, we use musical instruments in order to inspire the feeling of purity, and so on. In short, all of these implements are useful in actually generating the experience of purity.

That is the first of the two techniques of vajrayana practice, the generation stage. The second technique is called the completion stage, and it consists of a variety of related techniques, of which perhaps the most important and the best known are mahamudra and dzogchen or “the great perfection.” Now, sometimes, it seems to be presented that dzogchen is more important, and at other times it seems to be presented that mahamudra is more important, and as a result people become a little bit confused about this and are unsure which tradition or which practice they should pursue. Ultimately, the practices in essence and in their result are the same. In fact, each of them has a variety of techniques within it. For example, within mahamudra practice alone, there are many methods which can be used, such as a *candali** and so forth, and within the practice of dzogchen alone there are as well many methods, such as the cultivation of primordial purity, spontaneous presence, and so on. But, ultimately, mahamudra practice is always presented as guidance on, or an introduction to, your mind, and dzogchen practice is always presented as a guidance on or introduction to your mind. Which means that the root of these is no different, and the practice of either mahamudra or dzogchen will generate a great benefit. Further, we find in *The Aspiration of Mahamudra* by the third Gyalwa Karmapa, Lord Rangjung Dorje, the following stanza:

It does not exist, and has not been seen, even by the Victors.

**gtum-mo* in Tibetan, meaning fierce or wrathful and referring to a kind of psychic heat generated and experienced through certain meditative practices of the vajrayana. This heat serves to burn up all types of obstacles and confusion. Included in the Six Doctrines of Naropa, the Six Doctrines of Niguma, and the Six Doctrines of Sukhasiddhi.

*It is not non-existent, it is the basis of all Samsara and Nirvana.
This is not contradictory, but is the great Middle Way.
May I come to see the nature which is beyond elaboration.*

And that is from the mahamudra tradition. Then, in *The Aspiration for the Realization of the Nature of the Great Perfection* by the omniscient Jigme Lingpa, an aspiration liturgy from the dzogchen tradition, we find the following stanza:

*It does not exist, it has not been seen, even by the Victors.
It is not non-existent, it is the basis of all Samsara and Nirvana.
It is not contradictory, it is the great Middle Way.
May I come to recognize dzogpa chenpo, the
nature of the ground.*

Meditation, however, depends in part upon the generation of loving-kindness and compassion

In other words, these two traditions are concerned entirely with the recognition of the same nature.

So both short-term and ultimate happiness depend on the cultivation of meditation, which from the common point of view of the sutras [the point of view held in common by all traditions of Buddhism] is tranquility

and insight, and from the uncommon point of view of the vajrayana is the generation and completion stages.

Meditation, however, depends in part upon the generation of loving-kindness and compassion. And this is true of any meditation, but it is especially most true of vajrayana meditation. The reason is that the specific vajrayana practices — the visualization of deities or meditation upon mahamudra and so on — depend upon the presence of a pure motivation on the part of the practitioner from the very start. If this pure motivation or genuine motivation is not present — and, since we're ordinary people, it's quite possible that it might not be present — not much benefit will really occur. For that reason, vajrayana practitioners always try to train their motivation, and try to develop the motivation that's known as the awakened mind, or bodhichitta.

Now, as an indication of this, if you look at the liturgies used in vajrayana practice, you'll see that the long and extensive forms of vajrayana liturgies always begin with a clarification of, or meditation upon, bodhichitta, and that even the short and shortest liturgies

always begin with a meditation upon bodhichitta, loving-kindness and compassion, the point of this being that this type of motivation is necessary for all meditation, but especially for vajrayana practice.

The only real meaning that we can give to our being born on this planet — and in particular being born as human beings on this planet — and the only really meaningful result that we can show for our lives is to have helped the world: to have helped our friends, to have helped all the beings on this planet as much as we can. And if we devote our lives or any significant part of our lives to destroying others and harming others, then to the extent that we actually do so, our lives have been meaningless. So if you understand that the only real point of a human life is to help others, to benefit others, to improve the world, then you must understand that the basis of not harming others but benefiting others is having the intention not to harm others and the intention to benefit others.

Now, the main cause of having such a stable intention or stable motivation is the actual cultivation of love and compassion for others. Which means, when you find yourself full of spite and viciousness — and it is not abnormal to be so — then you have to recognize it, and be aware of it as what it is, and let go of it. And then, even though you may be free of spite or viciousness, and you may have the wish to improve things, you may be thinking only of yourself; you may be thinking only of helping or benefiting yourself. When that's the case, then you have to recollect that the root of that type of mentality, which is quite petty and limited and tight, is desiring victory for yourself even at the expense of the suffering and loss experienced by others. And, in that case, you have to gradually expand your sympathy for others, and therefore this cultivation of bodhichitta or altruism in general as a motivation is an essential way of making your life meaningful.

The importance of love and compassion is not an idea that is particular to Buddhism. Everyone throughout the world talks about the importance of love and compassion. There's no one who says love and compassion are bad and we should try and get rid of them. However, there is an uncommon element in the method or approach which is taken to

these by Buddhism. In general, when we think of compassion, we think of a natural or spontaneous sympathy or empathy which we experience when we perceive the suffering of someone else. And we generally think of compassion as being a state of pain, of sadness, because you see the suffering of someone else and you see what's causing that suffering and you know you can't do anything to remove the cause of that suffering and therefore the suffering itself. So, whereas before you generated compassion, one person was miserable, after you generate compassion, two people are miserable. And this actually happens.

However, the approach [that the Buddhist tradition takes] to compassion is a little bit different, because it's founded on the recognition that, whether or not you can benefit that being or that person in their immediate situation and circumstances, you can generate the basis for their ultimate benefit. And the confidence in that removes the frustration or the misery which otherwise somehow afflicts ordinary compassion. So, when compassion is cultivated in that way, it is experienced as delightful rather than miserable.

The way that we cultivate compassion is called immeasurable compassion. And, in fact, to be precise, there are four aspects of what we would, in general, call compassion, that are called, therefore, the four immeasurables. Now, normally, when we think of something that's called immeasurable, we mean immeasurably vast. Here, the primary connotation of the term is not vastness but impartiality. And the point of saying immeasurable compassion is compassion that is not going to help one person at the expense of hurting another. It is a compassion that is felt equally for all beings. The basis of the generation of such an impartial compassion is the recognition of the fact that all beings without exception really want and don't want the same things. All beings, without exception, want to be happy and want to avoid suffering. There is no being anywhere who really wants to suffer. And if you understand that, and to the extent that you understand that, you will have the intense wish that all beings be free from suffering. And there is no being anywhere who does not want to be happy; and if you understand that, and to the extent that you understand that,



The only really meaningful result that we can show for our lives is to have helped the world

you will have the intense wish that all beings actually achieve the happiness that they wish to achieve. Now, because the experience of happiness and freedom from suffering depend upon the generation of the causes of these, then the actual form your aspiration takes is that all beings possess not only happiness but the causes of happiness, that they not only be free of suffering but of the causes of suffering.

The causes of suffering are fundamentally the presence in our minds of mental afflictions — ignorance, attachment, aversion, jealousy, arrogance, and so on — and it is through the existence of these that we come to suffer. Now, through recognizing that there is a way to transcend these causes of suffering — fundamentally, through the eradication of these causes through practicing meditation, which may or may not happen immediately but is a definite and workable process — through this confidence, then this love — wishing beings to be happy — and the compassion of wishing beings to be free from suffering, is not hopeless or frustrated at all. And, therefore, the boundless love and boundless compassion generate a boundless joy that is based on the confidence that you can actually help beings free themselves.

So boundless love is the aspiration that beings possess happiness and the causes of happiness. Boundless compassion or immeasurable compassion is the aspiration that beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. And the actual confidence and the delight you take in the confidence that you can actually bring these about is boundless joy. Now, because all of these are boundless or immeasurable or impartial, then they all have a quality, which is equanimity. Which is to say that if these are cultivated properly, you don't have love for one being and not for another, or less for another; you don't have compassion for one being but none for another, and so on. Now, normally, when we experience these qualities, of course, they are partial; they are anything but impartial. In order to eradicate the fixation that causes us to experience compassion only for some and not for others, then you can actually train yourself in cultivating equanimity for beings through recognizing that they all wish for the same thing and wish to avoid the same thing, and through doing so

you can greatly increase or enhance your loving-kindness and compassion.

This has been a brief introduction to the practice of meditation, and how to train in and generate compassion. If you have any questions, please ask them.

Question: Hello. Rinpoche, can you speak a little bit about the difference between pure projection and impure projection, and in particular, where do pure projections actually come from?

Rinpoche: First of all, impure projections are how we experience because of the presence in our minds of *kleshas* or mental afflictions. Because we have *kleshas*, then we experience friend and enemy — that to which we are attached and that towards which we have aversion — we experience delight and disgust and so on. And all of these ways we experience the world — all these ways we experience are fundamentally tinged with, at least tinged with unpleasantness.

Now, what is called pure appearance or pure projection is based on the experience of the true nature or essential purity of what, in confusion, we experience to be five types of mental affliction, or the five *kleshas*. The true nature of these five *kleshas* is what are called five wisdoms. For example, when you let go of fixation or obsession on a self, or with yourself, then

the fundamental nature of the way you experience is a sameness, a lack of preference or partiality, which is called the wisdom of sameness. And, when you recognize the nature of all things, then that recognition which pervades or fills all of your experience is called the wisdom of the dharmadhatu. And so on.

Now, when you experience the five wisdoms rather than the five *kleshas* or five mental afflictions, then instead of projecting all of the impurity which you project on the basis of experiencing the *kleshas*, you project purity, or you experience purity, which is the actual manifestation of these five wisdoms as realms, as forms of buddhas, and these are what are called the pure appearances which are experienced by bodhisattvas and so forth. Now, in order to approach this, in order to cultivate the experience of these wisdoms and the external experiences which go along with the experience of

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themselves

these wisdoms, we meditate upon the bodies of these buddhas, the realms, palaces, and so on. By generating clarity of these visualized appearances and stabilizing that, then gradually we transform how we experience the world.

Question: Hello, Rinpoche. In practicing compassion, there's the practice of *tonglen*, which is the sending and receiving, taking the suffering from all sentient beings and giving them the happiness and merit that we have. And, in this practice, I've practiced it before, and it seems to go well for a while, but then there's a subtle sense of "I" that creeps in that says, "I don't really want to take the suffering," or it's, "I can't deal with too many people having cancer, I just can't take it all on myself," and so one kind of loses a little courage in the practice. So, could you illuminate us on this practice, and how to overcome these obstacles and really develop the heroic mind?

Rinpoche: What you say is very true, especially in the beginning of undertaking this practice. And, in fact, it's okay that it be experienced that way. Even though there is a quality of faking it about the degree to which you actually really are ready to take on the suffering of others in the beginning, there's still benefit in doing the practice, because up until you begin this practice, you've probably been entirely selfish. And, to even attempt to fake altruism is a tremendous improvement. But it doesn't remain insincere like that, because eventually the habit starts to deepen and starts to counteract the habit of selfishness.

Now, if, when you began practicing *tonglen*, you already had one hundred percent concern with the welfare of others and no concern for your own welfare, then you wouldn't need to practice *tonglen* in the first place. So, it is designed to work for a practitioner who's starting from a place of selfishness and to lead them into this place of concern for others. And, gradually, by using the practice, you will actually cultivate the sincere desire to take suffering away from others and experience it yourself; you will cultivate real love and compassion for others. But on the other hand, you don't really do the practice in order to be able to, at that moment, take on the suffering of others and experience it yourself; you're really doing it in order to train your mind. And by training your mind and developing the motivation and the actual wish to free others from suffering, then the long-term result is that you have the ability to directly dispel the suffering

of others.

Question: Rinpoche, you said that we may not be able to — one person may not be able to directly affect or remove short-term unhappiness or suffering of another person, but that we can learn to generate the basis of another's happiness, ultimate happiness. So could you say some more, please, about how one person can generate the basis of ultimate happiness for another person?

Rinpoche: Well, the direct basis of establishing another being in a state of freedom or happiness, long-term or ultimate happiness, is being able to show them how to get rid of their mental afflictions and to teach them how to recognize and therefore abandon causes of suffering. And, through doing so in that way, then you can establish them gradually in ultimate happiness. But even in cases where you can't, for whatever reason, do that, by having the intention to benefit that being, then when you yourself become fully free, then you will be able to actually help them and gradually free and protect them as well.

Question: Rinpoche, can you say a little more about the practice of letting go when the mind is agitated, as you described, as used in mahamudra and dzogchen? I experience my mind when I sit as being agitated. And there's the practice of letting go. And I'm wondering if you can just say more about that in a practical way?

Rinpoche: In general, the main approach that is taken in the mahamudra and dzogchen traditions is applied when you are looking at the nature of your mind. Now, *kleshas* or mental afflictions are thoughts, and thoughts are the natural display of the mind. Thoughts may be pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant, they may be positive or negative, but in any case, whatever type of thought arises, you deal with it in exactly the same way. You simply look directly at it.

Now, looking at the thought, or looking into the thought, or looking at the nature of the thought, is quite different from analyzing it. You don't attempt to analyze the contents of the thought, nor do you attempt to think about the thought. You just simply look directly at it. And when you look directly at a thought, you don't find anything. Now, you may think that you don't find anything because you don't know

To even attempt to fake altruism is a tremendous improvement

how to look or you don't know where to look, but, in fact, that's not the reason. The reason, according to the Buddha, is that thoughts are empty. And this is the basic meaning of all the various teachings on emptiness he gave, such as the sixteen emptinesses and so on.

Now, to use anger as an example of this, if you become angry, and then you look directly at the anger — which doesn't mean analyze the contents of the thoughts of anger, but you look directly at that specific thought of anger — then you won't find anything. And, in that moment of not finding anything, the poisonous quality of the anger will somehow vanish or dissolve. Your mind will relax, and you will, at least to some extent, be free of the anger.

Now, you may or may not, at this point, understand this, but in any case, you'll have opportunity to work with this approach tomorrow and the next day, and over the next couple of days you may come to have some experience of this.

So, we're going to conclude now with a brief dedication. But I would also like to thank you for demonstrating your great interest in dharma, and listening and asking your questions.



Thrangu Rinpoche's 1997 Schedule

Vancouver, BC	May 24-June 14
Karme Thekchen Chöling, Tel & Fax: (604) 264-1383	
Europe	June 15 - July 31
Tel for info:(206) 632-1439	
Far East	Aug 3-Sept 11
Tel for info: (206) 632-1439	
Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia	Sept 25-Oct 5
Gampo Abbey, Tel: (902) 224-2752	
Fax: (902) 224-1521	
Lune Lake, BC	Oct 8-17
Mahamudra Retreat	
c/o Karme Thekchen Chöling	
560 East 26th Ave.	
Vancouver, BC V5V 2H7	
Tel & Fax: (604) 264-1383	
Portland, ME	Oct 17-23
Contact Nancy Phillips, Tel: (207) 773-4154	
Fax: (207) 773-6892	
Austin, TX	Oct 24-27
Austin Dharmadhatu, Tel: (512) 836-2808	
Fax: (512) 836-1412	
Dallas, TX	Oct 28-29
Karma Thegsum Chöling, Tel: (214) 948-3348	
Fax: (214) 941-8488	
San Antonio, TX	Oct 30-Nov 4
Rigpe Dorje Center, Tel: (210) 493-2367	
Fax (210) 614-1172	
e-mail: jsrpuck@texas.net	
Ojai, CA	Nov 5-13
Ojai Valley Dharma Center, Tel:(805) 640-8100	
Fax: (805) 640-8268	
Berkeley, CA	Nov 14-16
Berkeley Dharmadhatu, Tel & Fax: (510) 843-8491	
Idyllwild, CA	Nov 17-20
Karma Mahasiddha Ling, Tel: (909) 659-3401	
Fax: (909) 659-2071	
Big Bear, CA	Nov 21-30
Namo Buddha Fall Seminar	
Mahamudra Retreat	
c/o Karma Mahasiddha Ling	
P.O. Box 655	
Idyllwild, California 92349	
Tel: (909) 659-3401 Fax: (909) 659-2071	



His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche (left) with Kalu Rinpoche

The following is from a series of teachings on the bardo, given by His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche at Toronto, Canada, January 7, 1995.

The Six Aspects of Bardo

By H.E. Tai Situ Rinpoche

This morning, at the request of the Venerable Lama and the Karma Kagyu Dharma Center, I will be explaining briefly the principle of bardo. The definition of bardo in general is an intermediate state of consciousness. This is not limited to the after-death state of mind, but is inclusive of both life and death, and after death and before the next life [into which] we [will be] conceived. So this is a most comprehensive subject. To explore this principle, we practically have to go through everything about life and everything about mind, including the connection between mind and matter. So this is an enormous subject. Having said that, we can also say that the teachings of bardo, most of the time, are summarized in the texts in a comprehensive presentation that could be understood as six stages or the six aspects of bardo. So I will go briefly into this particular teaching of six aspects of bardo.

Now, the first bardo, the first aspect of bardo, actually involves life. For example, right now, we are in this state of bardo. From our birth, or since we are conceived, until we die, we follow one main stream of reality. Right now we are human beings of planet Earth of this galaxy. So this is our reality. And we perceive and we interact with everything, mentally, physically, emotionally, based on this reality. And, until we die, we will be human beings of planet Earth of this galaxy; that's what we will be, and that's what we are. That changes as soon as we die. So, for that, in this state of bardo, what we have to consider as the practice of bardo is to appreciate and accept

the way we are. And any good things that we encounter, we take as opportunity in a positive way, so that those good things will become beneficial for us and for others who are associated with us. Then anything bad and unfavorable that we might encounter in our life, we also have to accept and face and utilize in a way that will be beneficial for us and for others that are associated with us. And we have to prevent potentially unfavorable circumstances from becoming harmful and negative to ourselves and others that are around us.

So that is the first aspect of bardo. The second aspect of bardo is a very short period of bardo, which is dream. As soon as we fall into sleep, we enter into another state of mind, another reality, which is influenced by our human reality, but which goes beyond this human reality's limitations. In dreams what we are experiencing is the subconscious level of our mind, with its emotions and its defilements and all the other things that go with it; so it is the subconscious mind that influences our mind in the sleeping and dreaming state of mind. So the use of this particular state of consciousness, for a vajrayana practitioner — and particularly as a practitioner of bardo — is to recognize that the interdependent manifestation of reality is a reality which is nothing more and nothing less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else. And the greatest example and most immediate example of this is the dream state. While dreaming, when we see good things, we feel happy; when we see bad things, we feel upset; when we see something that is fearful, we get afraid; and so on and so forth. In life, it works the same way; but life is a little bit longer — several tens of thousands of times, maybe several millions times longer — than a dream. I don't know how many times a person dreams in life. In one year a person dreams 365 times, so if a person lives ten years, it should be 3,650 times, isn't it? And if a person lives a hundred years, then their life is 36,500 times longer. That's it. So the only difference is that life is that much longer. But, actually, besides that, life is not anything more or less than quite a long dream. *Relatively* it is only a long dream. *Ultimately* it is not long at all.

We start to dream as humans as soon as we are

conceived, and that dream ends when we die. In the next life we could be a bird, a nice bird in a Canadian forest, and that dream starts as soon as we are conceived. And then we will be hatched et cetera, et cetera, and then we will be a dead bird. So that will be the end of that dream. And then that process will go on and continue from one life to another. And so that is the second aspect of bardo.

Here, in this state of mind, the most important thing is that we appreciate that we are in this world and we are dreaming all of this. We have friends, families, and so on and so forth, and this is wonderful; we appreciate it and we help each other and we respect each other and do our best to make it as meaningful as possible. But don't hold onto it for more than that, don't expect too much from each other, don't expect too much from anything else. Life is like a dream. But when we are dreaming, we should be able to make the best of it and appreciate those who are in our dream and respect them. They are dreaming us; we are dreaming them. You see? So that's what it is. So that is the second aspect of bardo.

The third aspect of bardo is to realize the ultimate potential, the ultimate nature of everything, the ultimate nature of mind itself. Actually, there is a very particular example used in this aspect of bardo. This is about meditation or contemplation. Here, the mind is understood to be beyond any kind of dualistic identity or dualistic limitation. And the only example that is close to the nature of the mind, used here, is space. And there are some sentences which describe it. So I'd like to share this with you.

One can never find the center of space. That means every place in the entirety of space is the center of space. And, in the same way, one can never find the mind in a dualistic way. So that means that the non-dualistic aspect of clarity and profoundness, completeness, limitlessness is the true nature of mind. Therefore, once a person realizes this limitless mind, the center of the space which is everywhere, once one realizes this, then that person recognizes space, that person recognizes mind.

So this is the third aspect of bardo, which is contemplation or meditation. There is nothing that is impos-

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long dream

sible as a manifestation of mind; there is nothing that cannot manifest out of our mind. Right now, we might think that such and such things are impossible, but there is nothing which is not possible. Anything is possible. Buddha said that. He said that human beings here have two eyes, two ears, one nose, and one mouth. You see? And we walk on two feet; we work with two hands. But Buddha also said that human beings can exist who are totally opposite to the way we exist. So I don't exactly know exactly what this could mean, but I think your people in the United States, you know, in Los Angeles, down there, they might have figured out several different ways how humans could be! Actually I am fascinated by them, you know; I think it is very, very profound, that medium. So this, the third aspect of bardo, is to realize the ultimate potential, the ultimate nature of everything, the ultimate nature of mind itself. So this is the third bardo.

And the fourth aspect of bardo is the moment before death. Now, this is actually what most people don't want to think about and what people consider inauspicious to think about, which is incorrect, because death is not something terrible. If death is terrible, then birth also has to be terrible, because birth is the other side of death. If we are not born, we are not going to die. We die because we are born. This is very simple. Death begins the moment we are born. From birth it continues [to be the case that at] any moment we can die. After birth, at any moment we can die. We don't have to be afraid of it, we don't have to look at it in a negative way, we don't have to hate it, we don't have to constantly think of it like some kind of taboo. There is no evil in death.

Life, of course, is precious. This precious human life, which we have right now [is extremely valuable], so we should live as long as we can. We have to do our best to take good care of our health, to take good care of our mind; eat well, live well, do some exercise, breathe well; we should do anything we can to live longer. We should live as long as possible, definitely — but not because death is bad, you see, not because

death is bad. Death is only natural.

We want to live as long as possible because we know we are human; we have our great privileges as human beings. We can learn things, we can do things, we can understand things; we have so much opportunity to improve as sentient beings in the form of a human body, in a human environment. Above all, we humans have done pretty well. Right now, we are the dominant rulers of the planet Earth. You see? It is not really fair, but we are. So there is no reason that we shouldn't appreciate it. We should appreciate it, and we should try to live as long as possible, try to be as healthy as possible, but we should never be afraid of dying when death comes. Death is only natural. So that is the fourth aspect of bardo.

And how to deal with it? In the dharma it is taught always that in our minds and in our deeds we have to prepare for this inevitable moment. After death, our death should not become a suffering for many people. So we do our best to make things clear. Don't leave too much unfinished business, because as soon as you die, everybody will fight over your things, you know? And that is not very nice. So take care of everything.

Don't be too attached; don't be too suspicious of everybody; learn to trust people, learn to trust *someone*, learn to respect others, and *don't magnify the reality [of death] beyond proportion*. Leave reality alone in its place. We have a saying: "Don't hold your thumb against your eye." This is a very small thing (Rinpoche holds up his thumb), but if I hold it against my eye, it can obscure the whole universe, even the whole of space. But if I just keep it at arm's length — I don't have to learn to do it in some kind of tricky way, I just [simply] keep it at arm's length — then it is just a thumb, insignificant; useful, but insignificant. You know? Without a thumb, I cannot write, so I need it. But, it shouldn't be held close to our eye.

So, in the same way we need our ego, we definitely need it; if we don't have ego, we get nowhere. The first step [in dharma study and practice] we have to make with our ego. The next step is to put a short leash on our ego. The third step is to make ego realize that whether to have that leash on or not is up to him or her.

We want to live as long as possible because we know we are human; we have great privileges as human beings

And the fourth step is get rid of that leash. And the fifth step is that ego transforms into limitlessness. These are gradual steps. If we try to get rid of ego before we have anything [in the way of realization], then we get lost; that is the definition of confusion: lost, no confidence, no self-respect. All these things come from that.

So ego is always there. And if we don't acknowledge it, it doesn't mean that it is going to go away. I might say something like this: I will say, "I am Buddha." Then you will say, "I don't think so." And I will say, "I am Buddha!" Then you will say, "I don't think so." Then I will get very mad, and I will say, "If you don't stop, I will call the police. And if you don't believe, I will sue you." So, I mean [by this that] ego can play all kinds of roles. And we have to use the existing self, the ego, to make the first step. So we can't say, "I don't want to be enlightened; I don't want you to think that I want to be enlightened, because that is attachment to enlightenment." That is ridiculous. First we have to have the attachment and desire to be enlightened in order to make the first step. We have to overcome the attachment to serve ourselves in a selfish way. We have to overcome the attachment to fame, fortune, and all those things. We have to have desire for improvement, for betterment, for enlightenment; that is necessary. Then, once that is established, then we can get rid of that desire. Enlightenment in the end is not possible if there is an attachment to it, but that [attachment to enlightenment] is where it [our path] starts. First step is first step. It is as a final result [of traversing the path] that we overcome those kinds of final and most subtle aspects of defilement [e.g., the attachment to enlightenment, the attachment to getting enlightened]; but that final result is not a means. The means is using what we already have.

So the fourth aspect of bardo is to deal with reality [in a way] that acknowledges that we will die one day, at any moment, and we prepare for that moment all the time in a most mindful, aware, and wise, and thoughtful way, so that every moment we treat with greatest respect. If I'm going to die today, then I shouldn't feel, "Oh, I thought I would live



The first clear light is when our body and mind get separated

for some time. I did lots of wrong things. I feel sorry for myself." That [state of mind] shouldn't be there. All of us, when that inevitable moment happens — which can happen at any time — should be ready for it.

So that is number four. The fifth and sixth bardos are, I think, what most people talk about when they talk about "the bardo." People talk about bardo as a kind of after death experience, what happens after death. So that is actually the fifth and the sixth bardo, out of six bardos [all together]. And so I will describe these a little bit.

In this state of mind, as the bardo teachings are transmitted and taught, there are several categories of states of mind, which happen during death, after death and all the way through until you are conceived into the next life. So, during death, after death, and all the way until you are conceived into the next life, into the next physical body [is one bardo]; this bardo ends there. Now, you have heard about clear light, I think. There are books written on this [subject], many, many books, I think. So, when you talk about the clear light, actually two

stages of clear light are described. It is described as clear light one and clear light two, the first stage and the second stage. But, when you talk about the bardo of that stage — the "during death and after death" bardo — there are three stages of bardo there. They're described as first bardo, second bardo, third bardo; and you shouldn't get these three [bardos of the fifth bardo] mixed up with the three bardos of the sixth bardo. They are totally different. These are the three bardos of the fifth and the sixth bardo. There are two clear lights: first clear light, second clear light. And that is the first clear light of the first bardo, the second clear light of the first bardo. So both of them are part of the first bardo, out of three bardos.

Okay, first, second, third bardo: the first bardo has first clear light and second clear light. Very simple. All of that is part, that is, the elaboration of the fifth bardo and sixth bardo, in the sixth bardo. So this is the key for this particular teaching about bardo.

And now, the first clear light is when our body and mind get separated. They separate inward, not outward. They separate inward. Okay. Now, our body then becomes like a house and our mind becomes like a person who lives in it. So that person goes unconscious, because of the separation. So that is the first clear light.

What happens, is because our body and our mind are connected together through energy, and energy through emotion, emotion through different kinds of energy, energy through different kinds of what we call “air” or “wind.” [Sanskrit: *prana*; Tibetan: *lung*; Chinese: *Chi*; New Age English: *energy*; stuffy English, perhaps: *psycho-somatic motility*] This term is something that keeps our bodies alive; a living body does not rot. But as soon as we die, the body starts to decay. This is so because this energy, the wind, the circulation, stops. So the body starts to rot. That is how the connection between mind and body takes place.

So, when the body is broken or the body is damaged by any kind of disease or anything [i.e. by accident or any kind of physical trauma], then the mind and body connection stops. When that happens, then the mind goes back to the center of the body. When we first entered our body, our mind entered at the center of our body. The first thing that developed inside our mother, when we were little, is what you call the embryo. Now, according to vajrayana teachings, a tube develops in the middle of it, which is filled with “air” or energy. That tube is the central channel and out of that central channel then, the different energies are generated that build the hands, legs, eyes, ears, senses, everything [that we are made up of], gradually.

At first we don’t have any of that [those physical parts]. And when we die, we also go back to the same stage; our mind — together with its air, energy, emotions, everything — goes into the center [of our body]. But it is a tremendous shock, because the body and mind have to be separated. And because of that, we fall into an unconscious state of mind. Now, if you’re a great practitioner, if you have realization of the nature of mind, if you are able to maintain the awareness — maintain an awareness of and observe the nature of mind in that state — then you can attain liberation there [in that moment of separation of body and mind], because [at that point] the limitation that the physical body imposes on the mind is gone. So, in that moment, if you can realize your “nature of mind” [the mind’s true nature], then that would be

your first chance [at getting enlightened]. So that is described as the first clear light of the first bardo.

Now, as to the second clear light of the first bardo, after some time, then this unconscious mind wakes up. Now that could be just a moment after [falling unconscious], or that could be as long as three days [after falling unconscious]. So, for this reason, serious vajrayana people try to leave the deceased person’s body alone and not tamper with it for three days. But you can never be sure whether the mind has left the body already, or if it is still there; one cannot be sure.

Great masters, when they pass away — and I myself have seen several masters who passed away in meditation posture — [after death continue to] sit just like living people, and after two days or after three days [sitting like that], then their bodies become like dead bodies; the head falls down, and there are many signs that can happen [that indicate that the mind has left the body]. And in that way we can tell if the mind is in the body or not.

But with an ordinary person, we don’t know, because a few hours after death, the person’s body becomes cold and there is no sign of life in it. So, in that case, it is hard to tell; but in our tradition, in our culture, we don’t take the risk [that the mind might not have left the body]. We leave the person uninterrupted for three days [just in case the mind is still there in the body].

But, of course, one doesn’t have to worry too much [about all of this]. In your culture and your system here, for health [considerations] and many other reasons, there is some kind of formality [or legality concerning the disposition of bodies after death]. So you don’t have to worry too much. But that is the basic principle, actually, according to the bardo teaching.

And now, after this moment after three days, or one day after, then when the mind awakens, the mind has to come out of the body. There is still some karmic connection because of its long association. So there is one thing still left to do, which is that our mind has to come out of the body. That is the last separation; it still has to happen. After that, then the mind becomes limitless, but until that last separation it is still trapped in the body.

Now [it is important to understand that], when that last separation happens, the different channels [and chakras] in the body, such as the crown, eye, ear, and lower chakras, et cetera, represent [entryways into] the different realms. And

Great masters, when they pass away . . . sit just like living people

[the mind of] the [dead] person should be able to leave the body through the higher chakras, hopefully from the crown. That is the highest and most sacred chakra to come out of. So when this happens, then if the person is aware that, “Okay, now I am dead, and now my mind is coming out of my body, I’m going out of my body,” then in that time, if you can manage to do the visualization of a deity, and the visualization of the mandala of a deity, and the practices that you do every day, your sadhana — if you are able to do that — then you will become the embodiment of that deity. So, in that way, we have another great opportunity right there [to attain enlightenment]. So that is the second clear light.

Now, with that, the first bardo is complete.

Now, [we will consider the second bardo]. At this point we are outside of our body. When we reach that state, then, technically speaking, we are totally free. We are not limited by human kinds of limitations. We are not limited to the planet Earth. We are in the universe. So we can have all kinds of experiences and the ability to affect or be affected by everything, as by the human realm, the animal realm, the gods’ realms, asuras, hells, everything. And not only of planet Earth, of the whole universe, so that we have no limitation. Right now, we only can see certain colors; we only can touch certain physical entities; we can only hear certain sounds. And also we look at things like this (indicating that he sees only what is in front of him and to the sides); I can’t see what’s behind me, I can’t see what’s up there. And hearing is also the same thing: I can’t hear what’s happening outside, I can only hear what’s happening in here, my own echo. [But in this newly arrived at disembodied state,] we don’t have this limitation. Instead, we see everything, everywhere; we hear everything, everywhere; and, whatever [location] we think about, we are [instantly] there. You know, you think of something, and you’re there; and we don’t have to be aerodynamic to get somewhere; we don’t have to struggle with gravity to move somewhere. All of these limitations don’t exist [in this disembodied state].

So many texts describe the fear [that the mind experiences in this state]. And that’s so because of this phenomenon. Of course, it would be frightening, you know; there’s nothing, everything becomes everything. And, if we don’t realize we are dead, then this [condition or situation] will be very frightening, of course. It is not that somebody tried to

frighten us; it isn’t like that. Ultimate freedom is quite frightening. If somebody tells you, in a very limited way, “Okay, you have just become the ruler of planet Earth; you have to do [and manage and decide] everything.” I would be devastated if that happened. But comparing [this rather imposing but still limited eventuality] to this state of bardo, then [being world ruler] is nothing. And to be able to have some kind of awareness during that time will be very difficult. I’m not trying to discourage you, but, in reality, it’s difficult, as I understand it.

It is possible [to have awareness at that time]. My example for how it might be possible is something like this: I’m taken in an airplane to 35,000 feet high, and then [someone] puts a paper in my left hand and puts a pen in my right hand, and then throws me out of the airplane with no parachute, and I’m supposed to write the most beautiful poetry before I hit the ground. It would be possible, it would be possible, but very, very difficult. So, to remember that I am dead and to meditate and to realize or be aware of my “nature of mind,” or to have compassion for all sentient beings, or to have devotion to buddhas and bodhisattvas and the lineage, in that state of mind, will be like that [like being thrown out of an airplane and writing poetry on the way down]; it will not be easy.

But, if we practice now, then it becomes easier. If we get acquainted with these states [kinds of meditations and contemplations], and if they become habit, then it will happen that way, because whenever something really terrible happens to somebody [or to us] — some kind of serious accident or something — we will call our mother or call God or call Buddha’s name or the name of our guru. So, similarly, the same thing can happen [after the mind separates from the body]. Because this [disembodied state after the separation of the mind from the body] is the most extreme state of mind, and so one automatically turns to what one believes in most. So, in this way, [if we have a strong daily dharma practice], then in this way it will be possible [for us to experience proper awareness at that time and to attain enlightenment or a favorable rebirth].

But, if we don’t [cultivate these kinds of virtuous mind states in advance of our death], then [whatever we are accustomed or habituated to doing], this might happen. In Buddhism, we consider saying bad words is no good; thinking bad things is no good. Because, if, in your everyday life, when something happens, you say some very bad words, then when you are reaching this [disembodied] state of mind that

Ultimate freedom is quite frightening

kind of negativity is likely to arise and that would not be so good. Therefore, I think, we have to get habitual with good words and good thoughts instead of bad words and bad thoughts. We have to do our best to practice and establish some sense of devotion and compassion and awareness during our lifetime in order for us to encounter those states of mind during this time in the [disembodied state]. So that is the second state of bardo.

The third state of bardo (actually, the second and third states go all the way) is starting from our ordinary form, coming out of our body and encountering this limitless freedom, in one way [or another], up until we get conceived into the next life. So that is the third bardo. So, during the third bardo, what happens is that a human being of planet Earth (that is us), has a maximum of 49 [possible] days in the bardo. This is so because of [the nature of] our body, our mind, the energies [involved], [the nature of] the universe, and the connections and interdependence amongst these. So, we cannot have more than 49 days of bardo. We can have [a bardo experience as] short as one moment; it could be just a moment. If we attain realization during the first clear light, our bardo [experience will be only] one moment. You see? If somebody has really accumulated very, very bad karma — I don't want to mention any names, but there have been quite a few human beings who have done lots of bad things in our history — and what will happen to them, according to the bardo teaching, is that at the very moment they die, they will be born in hell; that very same moment. There will be no bardo. So in the most extremely positive situation, [when a person attains] realization, there will be no bardo; and in the most extremely negative [situations], then there will be no bardo. But, otherwise, there will be different periods of bardo. But a human being of this planet cannot have more than 49 days of bardo.

So, during this time, whatever amount of the time of bardo that you experience, it will be divided by stages into two exactly equal halves. If your bardo experience is going to last two weeks, then one stage will be one week long and the second stage will also be one week long. If your bardo experience is going to be four weeks long, then each stage will last two weeks. If your bardo experience is going to be 49 days long, then each stage will be a little longer than 24

days. During the first part or first stage, the mind will be under the influences of one's past life; one will have the instincts and from time to time occurrences [consonant] with one's past life. We have been humans, so that kind of thing will happen. And then the last period or the second stage will have the periodic occurrence of what you will be in your future life; you could be a bird, you could be a dog, you could be a tiger, you could be a human, whatever. So that will happen. And so during the first half, the previous life's influence will fade away, and then during the second half, the future life's influence will become more apparent. And then finally, you will be conceived wherever you will be born, at the end of this bardo period.

During this time, of course, there's opportunity to attain liberation at any time. Just as in life there is opportunity to attain liberation at any moment, so in the same way in the bardo there is also opportunity to attain liberation at any moment.

Now during this aspect or stage of bardo, you can somehow say you are "in the bardo," what mainstream mentality thinks of as "the bardo," right there. And that bardo will [likely] go on for quite a long time, as long as 49 days.

And during this time the most obvious [way to take advantage of that] opportunity will be that you realize that you have died, and that then [you] try not to be afraid of all the occurrences and try to sincerely supplicate that you want to be born in a family which is positive, where you will have lots of opportunity to be a good human being, and that you will [be born into a] family not too rich, not too poor, kind of well off, and [one with a] positive [atmosphere] (i.e., both parents are happy with each other, they're positive), and that you will be able to learn and develop positively. That would be ideal. You see? [And then you might want to supplicate that] the place where you will be born be not too cold, not too hot — [so you supplicate sincerely for whatever is] positive, whatever is your ideal. Of course, if you can pray for that, that would be wonderful, and the best would be if you can really have the awareness to choose the parents of your conception. That would be the best, but these are only possibilities; it will not be as simple as I speak here.

So this is the last part of the bardo, and then after that we will be conceived. But if we don't have the awareness, then our conceiving will be very natural, and very simple, because all of this total exposure to everything else is frightening.

**If we are being
chased by 10,000
lions, then we will
look for any place
to hide**

And therefore, you're always looking for some way to hide, you're always looking for some kind of refuge. If we are being chased by 10,000 lions, then we will look for any place to hide, if we can find one. So, in the same way, in the bardo, since we have so much exposure to everything else, then [we are constantly] looking for a place. So then we find a kind of shadow, a nice place to hide; and when you find that place to hide, that becomes your next rebirth. So that is the natural way in the bardo, if you're not aware.

But if you have the awareness, then you can choose with your aspiration, with your prayer; and then some people with their kind of greater realization can even choose intentionally and technically [where and to whom] to be conceived. That is a possibility. So this is the third, the last stage of bardo.

I share this with you at the request [of the lama and the dharma center], and I definitely hope that you will be able to get some benefit out of this conversation, this teaching. I hope for that.

One last thing that I want to say is that no matter how much we know about bardo, or no matter how little we know about bardo, whatever karma we have accumulated, whether it is positive or negative, that will [determine what will] happen to us. [We don't have to worry that just] because we don't know [all the details and ins and outs of] the bardo, because we don't realize [what's happening], that, therefore, something wrong will happen to us. We don't have to worry about that. There will be no accidental misfortunate rebirth. There will be no accidental lucky enlightenment. That will never happen. Enlightenment will not happen [just because of] good luck; and being reborn in the lower realms will not happen [simply] out of bad luck. This will not happen, so about that [eventuality] you don't have to worry.

[The purpose of our practice] is realization. Through the realization which you develop through your practice, the negative karmas [you have accumulated] you can transcend. If we were to have to attain enlightenment by working out every negative karma that we have accumulated, one by one (as you say in your terminology, "an eye for an eye"), there would be no way [that anyone would ever get enlightened]. Enlightenment would never happen, because while we would be purifying our [past] karma, we would be accumulating ten

times more karma. You see? So if that were [the set-up], then it would be impossible.

But because none of those karmas are *ultimately* bad karma, because *ultimately* negativity doesn't exist [lacks permanent, substantial, singular existence, independent of causes and conditions that give rise to it], then if we realize

[this directly and experientially in our practice], and if we have realization of our mind's true nature, then all the karma that we have accumulated will be transcended.

Enlightenment is only possible through inner liberation, not by "working out" [the details of our karma]; for example, say we have stolen one penny from somebody, so we [imagine that we] have to give one penny to them; okay, now my job is done. Okay, now that record is straight. If we broke somebody's tooth in our past life, and now we say, "Okay, please break my

tooth;" it doesn't work like that. One has to attain the inner realization that will transcend. There is an example. If this room is dark and [has had] no light for 10,000 years, will it take 10,000 years to light this room up? It will not. A light shines in this room; and even if there have been 10,000,000 years of darkness, the darkness will be lit in a moment. So, in the same way, enlightenment, the realization of your mind's true nature transcends everything. And that happens because negativity is not *ultimate*.

There is also another [line of] reasoning that demonstrates why we can overcome negativity, because it is not ultimate. If negativity were ultimate, then there would be even negative realization. There would be Buddha on one side, who would be the positive enlightenment, and there would be something else [on the other side] that would be the negative enlightenment. And both would be equal and fighting with each other. But that is not the case. The ultimate is perfect, the ultimate is limitless, and all the limitations and negativities are relative [i.e., they depend up causes and conditions for their existence]. Therefore, enlightenment is only possible through inner realization.

So, the thought that I'd like to share with you is that you all do your best to try to develop your inner liberation by doing practices that you receive from profound, pure lineages — not just [practices] made up by somebody — lineages that

If we have realization of our mind's true nature, then all the karma that we have accumulated will be transcended

come from Buddha, that come from Guru Rinpoche, that come from master to disciple. There are many ways by which lineages come; there is not just one way. There are many ways. But it has to be a pure lineage that you follow.

At the same time, also try to be kind to yourself, to others, and try to avoid doing wrong things. You should have some kind of practice that you do, if possible, every day; if not, then periodically. And above all, the most important thing is to have full confidence in the buddha inside you. Your mind is buddha.

We Tibetan Buddhists, and Buddhists all over the world, try to build beautiful shrines for Buddha. Why do we put gold up there? Why do we put diamonds up there? Because they are the most valuable things to us. But nothing can substitute for and nothing can be equal to the buddha that we have inside. So we [must] believe in it; that is our confi-

dence, that is our hope, that is our potential. So [we must] always have respect for, appreciation of, and faith in, our ultimate potential, and then [we must] do our best to uphold and cherish this ultimate potential of ours. If we do this, I think then this human life will be very meaningful, and our bardo definitely will be a beneficial and positive one.

Sometimes, when we talk about bardo, some people get frightened, and that is unnecessary, because you are here; you went through bardo already, in your past life. You're quite okay. So you will be okay in the future, too. Because you're a Buddhist; because of that, this life's bardo will not be terrible. Before you didn't know, so okay; and now you know, it will be terrible? No! You see? We have gone through the bardo countless times. So we're okay, so we *will be* okay. All right?

So now we will make a short, simple dedication.

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His Eminence the Very Venerable Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche was the inspiration for the founding of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling, a dharma center in Seattle

Just Being There Very Simply With Yourself

By Lama Tashi Namgyal

Lama Tashi Namgyal offers teachings at Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling in Seattle. The following excerpts are from a beginner's class that he taught in 1996.

Sometimes people think the function of meditation and the function of spirituality in general is somehow to get to heaven, or to develop some sort of improved state of happiness, some sort of transcendental happiness. Or, it might be regarded as some sort of benevolent way to gain power over others. Or it might be regarded as some way to tune in or click in to some sort of mystical dimension of experience which will enable one to accomplish great things that one had never been able even to conceive of before, to perform miracles, and so forth. And some of these things might actually occur in the long course of one's spiritual path, but the actual process of meditation and the function of meditation and the purpose of meditation is to tune into one's own being, to tune into oneself — to take a certain time-out from the business of one's life and just be there very simply with oneself. And for this reason we sit.

Sitting is a very unpretentious activity, and breathing is a very unpretentious activity. So sitting and developing mindfulness of the breath is a very simple straightforward activity. And we should let it be so. We are not particularly trying to become saints, or check into the cosmic dimension of reality at this point; in shamatha meditation practice we are simply trying to be there as simply and precisely and as alertly as possible.

And so we sit and we breathe, and we sit and we breathe, and we follow our breathing. And then we begin to relate with ourselves. This technique should not be heavy-handed. It should be quite light-handed. That is to say, in the traditional texts it says, perhaps twenty-five percent of one's attention should be on following the outbreath, going out with the breath, dissolving into space, and gap. And then another, maybe twenty-five percent of one's attention should be involved in just relaxing and opening, experiencing oneself sitting there in a very natural way with some sense of relaxation, but at the same time, with some sense of uplift and opening outward. Because we are seated in such a manner and our bottoms are firmly on the ground, and because we are aware that our bottoms are firmly on the ground, and we are aware of our body, and so forth, then it becomes much easier to relax and open. Our minds can then open a bit.

And then, perhaps another twenty-five percent of one's awareness is just environmental awareness, just being aware of what's going on — the sound of the refrigerator, the sound of the drying machine, the sound of cars going by, and so forth; feelings in one's body, visual states, smells, and so forth. All of these seem to present themselves to us more vividly in meditation, but they are nothing more than a more developed awareness of what is.

And then, another twenty-five percent of one's awareness is

involved in some sense of expectation or anticipation. That is to say, some sense of being expectant about what's going on. This doesn't mean that one has a conception or preconception or an agenda about what's going on. But that there is some sense of nonconceptual curiosity about what is constantly coming next. In the process of meditation, the identification with the breath comes, and then we click in for a moment of being aware of where we are, and aware of ourselves. And then we don't try to imprison that. We don't try to use the technique of meditation to try to imprison the mind, or to try to find some particular state of meditation, and then hang onto it. Because that clinging in itself is a source of suffering. That clinging in itself is the opposite of life; it's actually the beginning of death. And it's definitely the death knell of one's meditation. If one tries to cling to any meditation experience it will, in fact, become an obstacle.

So this slight sense of anticipatory curiosity about the next moment of what is constantly arising helps to cut the tendency to cling to meditation states and helps to cut the sense of struggle that often arises in the mind if one does try to cling to any particular meditation state.

It — this sense of anticipation — is also what enables one to develop a state of “perpetual let-go.” With respect to all the negativity that arises in the mind, or the “positivity,” for that matter, the sooner that we recognize that we are “lost in thought,” that we are involved in nourishing and developing the story line of whatever particular gripe we have with the world, the easier it is to let go of the story line and relate directly to the emotional state behind it. And ultimately this sense of anticipation becomes so acute that one can let go of whatever is arising the instant it begins to arise, and at that point one's meditation will proceed very well.

So, the idea is to click into your awareness of being here, of sitting, and of identifying with the outbreath — and then letting go. This doesn't mean that one tries immediately to get distracted again, in the name of not clinging to the meditation state, but it means, not trying to hang onto the meditation state.

And then of course, there are always the thoughts and the memories and the fantasies, and the expectations and the hopes and fears, and everything that goes with them that come up in our meditation. And we don't try to

suppress these, because we are not trying to run away from ourselves. Running away from ourselves is the big problem that we always have. We are always trying to impose a new style, or a new agenda, or a new notion of ourselves on ourselves. And that's what causes tremendous pain. What we are trying to do is be there with ourselves and be fully aware of our state of mind, our state of being. But at the same time, not become lost in the various kinds of hopes and fears and memories and fantasies, and storylines, and so forth — but to be aware that they are just “thinking.” And so, we use the label “thinking” in order to demystify our *kleshas* and our discursiveness. In short, one just goes out with the breath, dissolves into space, and gap.

The process of meditation has a lot to do with unmasking oneself, or unmasking the moment that one is living in. It's said that if one truly and completely and fully understands this moment at this particular moment of here-and-nowness, then one can discover in that moment the past, what has gone before. And one can discover in that moment, also, the future, because, of course, the condition in which we find ourselves in this particular moment comes about as a consequence of our past, of our actions of body, speech, and mind from the past. And what is going to become of us, what our future is going to look like, is based on how we conduct ourselves and how our mind is



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disposed in this particular present moment.

And of course, the past and the future, and the present at some level, are all a kind of a fiction anyway. Because, when we really look we never can find the past. The past is simply a conceptuality about something that doesn't exist. It's a conceptuality that we have in the present. And when we think about the future, of course, the future doesn't exist either. It's just a conceptuality that we have about something that exists in the present. And also, when we look at the present, this present is never there, because the instant you look at it it's gone. So, it's past, but we have already figured out that the past doesn't exist, and where it's coming from we don't know. So, the point is to become more and more fully, completely, properly, unabashedly in this particular experience of the present moment.

And so we sit, because it's really the only way we know how to do it at first. Even though we may understand intellectually that there is no past and there is no future and there is no present, still we live our lives as though there were a very solid past — a very solid past that we have all sorts of resentments about or regrets about, or all sorts of pride in or all sorts of delight in — and a very solid future that we are striving for or that we are afraid of.

And so, if we want to be liberated from all of that, we must sit.

Question: When I teach Buddhism in my philosophy class the students mainly have one problem when I talk about the four noble truths. They have a problem with the first noble truth — the truth of suffering. Their immediate reaction is: Well, maybe your life is so bad, but mine is great. How might I present the four noble truths, or the first noble truth, in such a way, that even though they think it doesn't apply to them, they can understand why someone might say that?

Lama Tashi: Well, there are a number of ways that you can relate to that. One is to say, okay, if you don't think there is any suffering, we will just sit quietly, and just look

at our minds. And you just sit there, sit there fifteen minutes. Every one of them will come to the conclusion that they are suffering. Ask them, do you have a sense of awkwardness? Do you feel totally at ease in all social situations, with new people and so forth? Do you feel totally at ease with your parents or with your loved ones, or with your boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever?

It is very important to present the concept of suffering correctly. The word suffering in the Pali canon is *dukkha*, and it covers everything — beginning with what we regard as abject suffering like being hit by a Mack truck or going to hell and being sawed up into little pieces and instantly reviving to be sawed up again for millions of years, and never having any cessation from it. And of course, if people have an understanding of suffering like that, then they don't think there is much suffering, they don't think that they have much suffering and they certainly won't accept the notion that suffering is the fundamental nature or background-foreground experience of conditioned existence.

But, *dukkha* doesn't cover just abject suffering; it covers everything from those kinds of experiences of abject suffering all the way down to very mild forms of anxiety, frustration, restlessness, lack of fulfillment, etc. — not getting what you want, getting what you don't want, and having what you have and like taken away from you, etc.

Of course, when they think of suffering only as abject suffering, they don't see themselves suffering right now. But they and we do have all kinds of painful anxieties and frustrations, hopes and fears which we have been taught from very early childhood not to acknowledge. That is to say, we have been taught to think positively. We have been taught that we are either successful or we are miserable failures, and that we had better be successful. We have been taught that if we are not feeling like a success, we had better make sure that we present ourselves as a success or about to be a success, otherwise we will be regarded as some sort of lower class being. We have been taught, in fact, to think that we have to succeed. And that if we don't feel as if we are succeeding, internally, we have at least to give the impression that we are succeeding, both to ourselves and to others.

We do have all kinds of painful anxieties and frustrations, hopes and fears which we have been taught from very early childhood not to acknowledge

Ask them, if they don't have any suffering when they turn on the television and see Michael Jordan doing commercials and see all the beautiful people and all the celebrities manifesting their beautiful-people life styles and all of this is presented as the way one will naturally be if one counts for anything in the universe, or if one matters, or if one is to be able to consider one's life a success.

This is the life. If you are a real person, a real *mensch*, this is the way you are going to live. You are going to be driving around in an Infiniti, you are going to be living in a mansion with a ballroom so big that you have to walk a hundred yards to get to breakfast. You are going to be living in total opulence. You are going to be at these cocktail parties where everybody is Clark Gable-handsome, looking like all these beautiful movie stars. That's what is presented to us as the kind of life that one is supposed to lead.

But at the same time, you know that you are not going to lead that life. Some of you may lead that life, but we know statistically, that the standard of living in America is going down. So, you know that you are not going to be living that kind of life. How does that make you feel? Does that make you feel happy when you realize that you are going to be forty years old and living in an apartment — *maybe* with hot and cold running water still?

But the best way to teach suffering is to let them discover suffering themselves. And the best way to let them discover suffering is to make them sit and not say anything. Just sit there and do nothing. Of course you'll be suffering too, because you'll be sitting there thinking, is this going to work or not, and are they going to like this or not. Suffering, on a very minimal level, is that sense of awkwardness and self-preoccupation that one walks around in the world with always, which at some point torments us.

For this purpose and in the beginning, I would actually present the second noble truth much more in terms of thirsting, not that the origin of suffering is self (not at first), but that the origin of suffering is *tanha*, thirsting, craving, longing. The Buddha presented it several ways. He presented it depending on the level of awareness and the level of understanding of the people. He first presented the origin of suffering as thirsting. Life is constantly a thirsting for something: thirsting for sensual pleasures, thirsting for existence, and thirsting for non-existence or annihilation.

First people thirst for the pleasures of the flesh —

delicious food, pleasant smells, beautiful visual experiences, pleasurable touch and blissful feelings in the body, beautiful or pleasing sounds; sex, music, food, perfumes, beautiful clothes, and beautiful and loving mates. Then as they begin to get a sense of their mortality and a fear of death, they long for existence, either in terms of longer life or in terms of eternal life. And then, when people begin to suffer intensely and get fed up with their lives, they long for non-existence; they long for death when they imagine that they will just cease to exist entirely altogether.

The Buddha presented three types of suffering: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering.

The *suffering of suffering* is what we ordinarily think of when we think of suffering, just abject suffering: birth (the suffering of which we have forgotten), old age, sickness, and death, physical pain, torture, etc.

The *suffering of change* is what we ordinarily think of as happiness. We've just bought a new car and we are so happy to be in it and drive around. It's so clean, and smells so fresh, and the engine works so perfectly, and the doors and windows open and shut like silk. And then someone spills their milkshake on our front seat and we suffer. Or someone scratches the brand new paint job in the parking lot, and we suffer. Or we have an accident and the car is totaled, and we suffer.

This is the suffering of change. We are eating delicious food, but we overeat and suffer indigestion. We have just met the ideal mate who is wonderful in every respect and we are totally in love, but then gradually he or she begins to fail to live up to our expectations. We thirst for him or for her to be just a little bit different than they are, and as we go on, perhaps we even begin to thirst for them to be a lot different from what they are. And that's suffering.

But even if we learn to live happily and amicably with our ideal mate for forty or fifty years, we become attached to them, so that when we are finally separated at death or disaster, we suffer. This is the suffering of happiness or the suffering of change.

And *all-pervasive suffering* is the suffering of existence — the suffering attendant upon simply being embodied in the manner that we are — which we generally ignore, or don't notice, because we are too involved in our thirsting.

But these three basic types of thirsting — for sense

The origin of suffering is *tanha*, thirsting, craving, longing

pleasures, for existence, and for non-existence — were at the heart of the Buddha’s presentation of the origin of suffering in his early teachings.

Later, as his students developed, the Buddha broadened the whole notion of the origin of suffering to include all the *kleshas*: passion, aggression, ignorance, pride, jealousy, greed, doubt, and all of the 84,000 styles of afflictive emotions (*kleshas*), that arise as combinations or subtle varieties of these, and included as well the actions that we engage in on the basis of these afflictive emotions as motive, which is what we understand in a popular sense as “karma.” So the origin of suffering at this point was taught as *klesha* and karma.

And then gradually, the Buddha presented an analysis of what these notions of the origin of suffering were based upon. Karma, which is action that always brings a consequence, is action arising out of one or another of the *kleshas* as motive for that action. But why does one have *kleshas*? Why does one get angry? Why does one long for something? Why does one yearn? Why does one feel hurt, or envious? Why does one feel belittled? Why does one want to ignore some people altogether?

Does anyone ever get angry without wanting something first? Doesn’t anger always come from wanting something one can’t get, or from getting something one doesn’t want, or from having something taken away from one that one wants to keep? Doesn’t all anger come from desire? And where does desire come from? Does it not come from the basic dualistic split of self and other — a sense of an isolated self on the one hand that wants to be united with an “other” on the other hand, or wants to be separated from the other and thus gets angry and pushes away, or simply wants to ignore the other? Don’t passion, aggression and ignorance all come from this basic dualistic split? They do, of course.

But the Buddha had discovered that this basic split was an erroneous perception.

Thus, in time, the Buddha taught that sentient beings — all sentient beings suffering under this delusion, not just humans, but all sentient beings, including worldly gods, animals, and hell beings, and all the rest — were involved in a fundamental misperception of reality which we refer to as duality, dualistic perception, or dualistic clinging — clinging to a truly existent and separate self and a truly

existent and separate other.

These two arise in one’s misapprehending perception simultaneously: where there truly isn’t a dualistic split, we project and perceive a dualistic split between self and other. And because we cling to ourselves — to our “me and mine” — and fixate on the other as separate from us and other things and truly existent; and because we are willing, or insist on clinging to ourselves, clinging to our own misperceived self-interest, and at the same time are

willing to neglect others, or to disregard other’s self interest in order to pursue our own, therefore the Buddha sometimes referred to the origin of suffering as “self-clinging” or “self-cherishing.”

So the Buddha presented duality as the source of suffering. And he said if you don’t have a fundamental split between self and other, then you don’t have anything to long for, you don’t have anything to hate. You don’t have anything to be proud about or to ignore. But so long as you have fixation on self and other, then those things automatically occur.

So then the question is, does this “self” actually exist. That’s actually the logic of how it develops. And then of course, at that point, when they have already accepted the analysis of duality, or dualistic clinging as being the problem, then he goes about analytically teaching them how to sit down in their meditation and how to examine the notion of self very, very thoroughly and exhaustively, so that they finally come to the conclusion that, in fact, a singular, permanent, independent self, a self that is independent of causes and conditions for its “temporary existence,” doesn’t truly exist. So he taught that.

But that may be a lot to get through to a teenager. Eighteen years old, wondering how he’s going to do with Sally on Friday night, or how she’s going to do with Joe on Friday night, or whatever. By and large, they have their minds in a completely different space. I think probably trying to teach them non-self is a bit premature — and might even be a bit counterproductive, because if it causes them to reject out of hand the teachings of the Buddha, then that would be sad. We have to use discretion presenting the buddhadharma, because if we present things that people don’t understand, and then they reject them, it’s a little bit like inoculating them against the dharma. It sets up a kind of habit of mind that wants to reject the Buddha’s teachings.

**In fact, a singular,
permanent,
independent self,
a self that is
independent of
causes and
conditions . . .
doesn’t truly exist**

Himalayan Women Need Your Support in Their Pursuit of the Dharma

A portrait of Thrangu Rinpoche's
monastic center near Kathmandu

Himalayan women have the same interest and strength of devotion to dharma as their male counterparts. However, due to cultural attitudes about women and their role in society, women in these regions often lack access to education. Compared with men, they have few chances to formally study and practice the dharma.

For this reason, The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche has begun building Tara Abbey, a monastic center for Himalayan women outside Kathmandu. It is Rinpoche's vision that the abbey will become a leading center of Buddhist practice — a place where Himalayan women can prepare to teach in their native lands, and in the West and Far East. In turn, Western and Far Eastern women lamas will teach at the abbey.

This cultural exchange will be of great spiritual benefit to the West, especially to Western women, and of great spiritual and *social* benefit to Himalayan women. Many prominent Buddhist teachers and lamas recognize the need for and the great inspirational value of women teachers who study, practice, and teach the dharma. Similarly, on a social level, female role models who demonstrate the spiritual and educational equality of women will help to promote equality for women in the East as well as the West.



Tara Abbey presents an opportunity for Western women and men to contribute directly to the spread of dharma, and also to the cause of social uplift in the Himalayan area. Even a small monetary contribution (by Western standards) can help enormously. For example, the cost of supporting a nun at the abbey for a full year is only \$250. During the Nammo Buddha Seminar last year, \$600 was collected to supply a new medical clinic at the abbey for a year. The entire cost of Tara Abbey itself, which will eventually house and provide for more than 100 Himalayan women, is projected to be \$200,000.

Construction of the abbey began in the spring of 1994 in a peaceful valley near Swayambunath, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal. The nuns participated fully, carrying heavy loads of bricks, and assisting in bricklaying and in general construction. The three-wing building will eventually include a large meditation hall, library, smaller shrine rooms, guest quarters, and bedrooms. All work is closely supervised by the Dorje Loppon, the head of Tara Abbey, Ani Tsomo.

As of spring 1997, one wing of the abbey has been completed. Currently, 60 nuns are housed there, in quarters designed for half that many. At present, there aren't enough funds to begin construction of the second wing, which will include a permanent shrine room (pujas are now held in the future dining room).

The youngest nuns at Tara Abbey are in their teens; the oldest are in their 40s. The nuns are up at 5:00 a.m. for Green Tara puja, when they pray, chant, and play music together. Pujas also take place in the afternoon and evening. Daily study includes training in four languages — Tibetan, Sanskrit, Nepali, and English — as well as the study of dharma texts (sutras). At present, all 60 nuns share a single copy of their text. During the day, all nuns contribute to the running of the abbey by cooking, cleaning, gardening, and maintaining the building.

Upon reaching adulthood, young women may either leave the abbey to pursue a secular lifestyle, or enter fully into the monastic life. Older women receive monastic ordination as nuns when they are ready, and are trained in meditation and in Buddhist philosophy. In the future, those who are qualified will enter into a five-year monastic

program (or shedra) at the abbey itself for training, leading to the degree of khenpo. Most nuns will enter into the traditional three-year retreat, either after or instead of completion of the shedra program, depending on their interest and abilities. Upon completion of retreat, some of these lamas will be sent to centers in the West and Far East to teach.

Recently, Tara Abbey sent two nuns to the shedra at Sarnath to study for their khenpo degree. The nuns will train for nine years and then return to Tara Abbey and inaugurate the training program there, which will require the construction of a shedra facility at Tara Abbey.

It is the good fortune of dharma students in the Pacific Northwest that the Dorje Loppon of Tara Abbey, Ani Tsono, will be visiting in the spring of 1998 to give teachings. Already, Westerners are beginning to benefit from these new women teachers of the dharma.

Although there is still much work to do, Thrangu Rinpoche plans to make available to the nuns at Tara Abbey the full range of monastic, liturgical, philosophical, and meditation training currently available to monks. Now is the time for Westerners to show their support for this work.



Opportunities to Practice Generosity

Any donation, large or small, will be of great benefit to the women at Tara Abbey.

- **Donate money to Tara Abbey**

The needs of the center are many. These include basic health provisions (for example, a water filter was recently purchased to reduce water-borne infectious diseases), as well as basic teaching supplies.

You can send checks to: Tara Abbey, Thrangu Nunnery Fund, Attn: Sylvia Bercovici, P.O. Box 2356, Idyllwild, CA 92549.

For more information, call Sylvia Bercovici at (310) 470-6698.

For donations from Europe contact: Wolfgang Schmidt, Rheinlandstrasse 65, 87437 Kempten, Germany. Tel: (0831) 77403

- **Sponsor a nun (a full year costs \$250)**

Since the exodus from Tibet until recently, the opportunity for serious study presented by Tara Abbey has not been available to most Himalayan women. Himalayan women who are not born into wealthy families typically receive no schooling whatsoever. Most girls can expect to work in a factory, or in the fields, or as a domestic servant, seven days a week. If they marry, they will have children and work at home. Thus, Tara Abbey represents a rare opportunity, at the very least, for girls from poor families to receive a good education. But Tara Abbey also provides for women, in the same way monasteries do for men, full access to the extraordinary richness of the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual tradition.

For information on sponsoring personal costs for a nun, contact: Deborah Ann Robinson, Himalayan Children's Fund, 283 Colombine, Suite 111, Denver, CO 80206. Tel: (303) 399-6824

- **Donate money or supplies to the new medical clinic**

Last year saw the addition of a medical clinic at the abbey. Sherab Drolma, a nun, was trained to be a health assistant, and a government-trained health assistant employed by the Himalayan Medical Foundation visits the abbey once a week.

In addition to monetary contributions, current needs include contributions of Pepto Bismol, Ibuprofen, Tiger Balm, medical instruments (scissors, clamps, tweezers, otoscopes, etc.), alcohol wipes, 2 x 2 gauze bandages, ace wrap, cotton swabs, tape, and vitamins.

For information on the medical clinic, contact: Sherrill Whatley (Ani Tsultrim Lhamo), 624 N. Desert Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85701. Tel: (520) 795-9096

Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche's Schedule for 1997

Honolulu until June 3
Kagyü Thegchen Ling, Tel: (808) 595-8989
Los Angeles June 3 - 5
Karma Thegsum Chöling, Tel: (818) 282-7286
Fax: (818) 798-6885
Palo Alto, CA June 7 - 8
Palo Alto KTC, Tel: (415) 327-1307
Fax: (415) 327-3253
e-mail: chet@dewachen.paloalto.ca.usa
Santa Cruz, CA June 10-15
Karma Thegsum Chöling, Tel: (408) 423-5539
Fax: (408) 479-4156
Seattle, WA June 17-25
Kagyü Shenpen Ösel Chöling,
Tel: (206) 632 -1439
e-mail: Itashi@worldnet.att.net
San Antonio, TX June 27 - 29
Rigpe Dorje Centre, Tel&Fax: (210) 493-2367
email: jrspuck@texas.net
Santa Fe, NM July 3, 6-7
Kagyü Shenpen Kunchab, Tel: (505) 982-4763
email: fcooper@lanl.gov
Albuquerque, NM July 4
Kagyü Thegsum Chöling, Tel: (505) 345-1059
Taos, NM July 4
Kagyü Mila Guru Stupa, Tel: (505) 586-2001
Fax: (505) 586-1123
Crestone, CO July 11-15
Karma Thegsum Tashi Gomang,
Tel: (719) 256-4695
Fax: (719) 256-4694
Red Feather Lakes, CO July 18 - 26
Rocky Mountain Shambala Center,
Tel: (303) 881-2184
Fax: (303) 881-2909
email: 75347.52@compuserve.com
New York July 28 -29
Shambala Center, Tel: (718) 389-5796
Fax: (212) 477-1808
e-mail: Bklynbodhi@aol.com
Barnet, VT Aug 1-17
Karme Chöling, Tel: (802) 633-2384
Fax: (802) 633-3012
email: KarmeCholing@shambala.org



Yangsi Kalu Rinpoche is the reincarnation of Kalu Rinpoche

Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling is a center for the study and practice of vajrayana Buddhism, founded through the inspiration of His Eminence The Very Venerable Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche by The Venerable Lama Tashi Namgyal, who serves as its resident lama and director.

The center’s derivation, purpose, and methodology can be understood from its name. “Kagyü” denotes that the center is of the tradition of oral transmission of the Dakpo Kagyu in general, which derives from

Vajradhara, through the Indian mahasiddhas, Tilopa and Naropa, to the Tibetan mahasiddhas, Marpa, Milarepa,

and Gampopa. From Gampopa, these teachings divided among a number of Kagyu lineages, the largest of which, headed by a succession of 17 Gyalwa Karmapas down to the present day, is known as the Karma Kamtsang Kagyu. His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche, The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche, and The Very Venerable Khandro Rinpoche — all of whom have visited Seattle in the last two years — are holders of this lineage, which is often referred to as the “practice lineage.”

In addition, the center is of the tradition of oral transmission of the Shangpa Kagyu, deriving from Vajradhara, through the female mahasiddhas, Niguma and Sukhasiddhi, who in turn passed it to the Tibetan mahasiddha, Chungpo Naljor. It then passed through a succession of accomplished Tibetan masters to The Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche, who in turn transmitted the teachings of this lineage and of the Dakpo Kagyu lineage, to over five hundred lamas and tens of thousands of students world-wide.

“Shenpen,” which means “benefit to others,” says that the center shares the vast and expansive motivation of all mahayana Buddhists to liberate all sentient beings from the ocean of frustration, anxiety, lack of fulfillment, malaise, disease, neurosis, psychosis, and all other forms of abject suffering, and thereby establish them in the state of permanent happiness.

“Ösel,” meaning “clear light,” refers to the natural luminosity and cognitive potential of the mind, in which are inherent all the positive qualities of affection, compassion, devotion, primordial confidence, primordial intelligence, omniscience, etc., without the necessity of cultivation. This luminosity is fully manifest in buddhas, but exists equally as potential in all sentient beings—the only difference between buddhas and other beings is that buddhas have fully eliminated the emotional and cognitive obscurations to the “clear-light” nature of mind, and ordinary beings have not yet done so. “Ösel” in the name of the center refers to the fact that the essence of the transmission of the center is this unobscured, totally pure true nature of mind, and that the means to the end of benefiting and liberating all beings is to transmit and create paths for the students of the center, which will lead progressively to the uncovering of their own “clear light” nature.

“Chöling,” which means, “dharma center,” denotes that “Kagyü Shenpen Ösel Chöling” is a center for the study and practice of the principles and truths about phenomena as presented by Lord Buddha and the many enlightened lineage masters who have followed in his footsteps.

**Kagyü
Shenpen
Ösel
Chöling:
A Center
for the
Practice
Lineage**

In the Next Issue of Shenpen Ösel

The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche on Meditation

- Relative and absolute bodhicitta
Meditations on affection and compassion
Exchanging self for others: tonglen
(taking and sending)
Tantric means of enhancing compassion
- On recognizing dharmata (the true nature of things)
- Tranquility meditation and the seven point posture of Vairochana
- Machik Labdrön's teachings on the relaxation of body, speech, and mind
- Various meditation techniques and general advice
- Hope and fear in meditation
- Mindfulness and alertness in meditation

The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche on the Samsaric Structure of the Mind and Transformation

- Mind and mental arisings
- The eight consciousnesses
- Projection and conceptuality
- Transformation of the eight consciousnesses into the five wisdoms
- The sixth consciousness and meditation
- Remedies in meditation for torpor and excitedness

His Eminence The Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche on the Four Levels of Refuge

KSOC Schedule

Saturdays

- 9-10 a.m. Guru Rinpoche practice
10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Chenrezig practice

Sundays

- 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sitting meditation practice and teaching
2:30 p.m. Beginner's meditation class

Other classes during the week. People may attend these with permission of the lama. Free meditation instruction is available upon request from the lama.

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THE NUNS IN RESIDENCE AT TARA ABBEY OUTSIDE KATHMANDU PARTICIPATED FULLY IN CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONASTERY FOR HIMALAYAN WOMEN. SEE STORY INSIDE ON PAGE 27.

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