



Shenpen Ösel

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

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The entire practice, starting from the very beginning of the generation of the deity and culminating with the dissolution or withdrawal of the deity and mandala into the clear light, corresponds to all the events of one life. The very beginning of the generation corresponds to the entrance of the consciousness into the womb, for example, in the case of a human life. As the practice goes on there are specific elements that correspond to the birth, to all the experiences of this life, and finally, in the case of the withdrawal phase, to death.

—From the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's
Commentary on Jamgön Kontrul's text, *Creation and
Completion: Essential Points of Tantric Meditation*

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This issue of Shenpen Ösel is devoted to a commentary on Jamgön Kontrul's text, *Creation and Completion*, given by the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche at Rigpe Dorje Center in San Antonio, Texas, between October 31 and November 3, 1997. Copyright © 2001 Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche.

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


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Introduction

All spiritual paths leading to buddhahood include three essential stages in meditation: the development of the ability of the mind to abide calmly in a single frame of reference (shamatha); the generation of limitless impartial affection, compassion, and bodhicitta through the practice of taking and sending (tong len); and the development of the recognition of and the ability to abide uninterruptedly in the true nature of mind, the clear light nature of intrinsic awareness (vipashyana, mahamudra, dzogchen). In the beginning these stages are generally practiced one after the other. In the middle, they tend to be practiced in a mixed way, sometimes emphasizing one, at other times another. In the end, there is simply the recognition of the clear light nature of intrinsic awareness, which, by its very nature, is free of all faults and embodies all positive qualities.

In order to hasten the development of these stages, the various traditions of vajrayana Buddhism also emphasize the creation and completion stages of the many various vehicles of tantra. This issue of *Shenpen Ösel* features a commentary by the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche on Jamgön Kongtrul's text, *Creation and Completion, Essential Points of Tantric Meditation*, given at the Rigpe Dorje Center in San Antonio, Texas, in 1997. Rinpoche's teaching was occasioned by Wisdom Publication's publication of Sarah Harding's excellent translation of the same text under the same title the year before, which is accompanied by Harding's excellent introduction and notes. Although Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary stands on its own, it will enhance the reader's understanding, especially the understanding of budding Tibetan scholars, to obtain and read this root text, which is published in both Tibetan and English.

We would like to thank Thrangu Rinpoche and the Rigpe Dorje Foundation for permission to reprint Rinpoche's commentary here.

Also included in this issue is a teaching on the generation of affection, compassion, and bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment, which is based largely on a teaching by His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama on *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path to Supreme Enlightenment* by Je Tsong Khapa, given in Los Angeles in 1984. 

—Lama Tashi Namgyal

Creation and Completion
Essential Points
For Approaching the Path
Of Tantric Meditation



The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

At the Rigpe Dorje Center in San Antonio, Texas, in 1997, the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave a commentary on Jamgön Kongtrul's text, Creation and Completion, Essential Points of Tantric Meditation. Rinpoche gave his commentary in Tibetan; it was orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso. The following is an edited transcript.

I would like to begin by expressing my delight in being able to present this teaching and my appreciation for being given the opportunity to do so. Having said that, I would like to begin by chanting the lineage supplication. This particular lineage supplication is the one that is most commonly used and may, in fact, be the single piece of liturgy most commonly used in Kagyu monastic foundations, retreat centers, dharma centers, as well as for individual practice. The reason why we regard this particular supplication as so important is that it was composed by Pengar Jampel Zangpo, who was a great master. It was composed by him after his completion of eighteen years of solitary retreat practice meditating on mahamudra on an island in the middle of a lake known as Sky Lake in northern Tibet. Because this lineage supplication is held to contain the essence of his realization gained through those eighteen years of practice, it is considered very great in blessing. Therefore, we always recite it at the beginning of practice and instruction sessions.

In addition, one of the significances of doing so is that when you are practicing the creation or generation stage and the completion stage of the vajrayana, one of the primary conditions for the effectiveness of the practice is the presence of faith and devotion within you. If you practice the generation stage with faith and devotion,

then your practice will be stable and vivid. If you practice the completion stage with faith and devotion, there will be a stable and authentic recognition of your mind's nature. So in that spirit, please recite the lineage supplication with utmost faith and devotion.

I am going to talk about the generation and completion stages according to the text, *The Essence of Creation and Completion*, which was composed by Jamgön Kongtrul the Great. In particular, from among the two topics of the creation or generation stage and the completion stage, we are concerned primarily with the generation stage. Although in a sense our main practice is the completion stage, the practice of the completion stage depends entirely upon the stability and blessing of the generation stage, just as, for example, the practice of vipashyana depends upon the attainment of stable shamatha.

This is a very appropriate topic to be studying. It is very easy to talk about shamatha and vipashyana and very easy to listen to explanations of mahamudra and other explanations that are entirely concerned only with the completion stage. Although these things sound very good and are very easily explained in theory, it is not important to choose the topic that is the easiest to listen to, but instead to choose the one that is going to be of the most practical benefit, that is, the one that will actually enable students to progress in their practice of meditation. Therefore, it is appropriate to address subjects that are more difficult to understand, because it is these, especially, that definitely need the most complete explanation. The function of teaching, of course, is to provide what students need for their ultimate benefit. Therefore, when dharma is taught, it is important to discuss not only the completion stage but also the generation stage.

When you examine your mind, the types of impure motivations for study and practice you might discover are competitiveness, arrogance,

or selfishness. In a sense this is not that big a deal, but at the same time these are impure motivations, and it is necessary to let go of them and replace them with a pure motivation. A pure motivation is the wish to study and practice in order to be able to benefit both yourself and others. Especially given that we are normally mostly concerned with benefiting only ourselves,

it is important to emphasize the wish to benefit others. Normally, even when we wish to benefit others, we restrict that wish to a few others such as our family and friends and so on. The wish to benefit a few others is not an impure motivation; it is a pure motivation, but among pure motivations it is a fairly limited one. Here we are trying to develop the motivation of practicing and studying in order to benefit

all beings who fill space, since all beings without exception equally wish to be happy and wish to be free from suffering and yet lack the knowledge necessary to enable them to achieve these goals. So if you have the motivation for both study and practice in order to establish all beings without exception in a state of happiness, this motivation is not only pure but also vast in scope.

The first topic addressed in our text is where beginners need to start. This is explained quite fully in the text, and covers eight main points: gaining certainty in the dharma; renunciation; understanding what dharma is—view, meditation, conduct, and fruition; definition of generation and completion; faith and devotion; sacred outlook; the two truths; and understanding the qualities of the path.

The first point is that in order to practice dharma you need to have certainty about the validity of dharma. The generation of that certainty has to be a three-step process, which is the cultivation of the wisdom or knowledge of hearing, the wisdom of thinking of what has been heard, and then finally the wisdom which comes

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from meditation. It is pointed out that those of the highest faculties, which means extremely rare and highly gifted individuals, do not necessarily need to go through the preliminary stages of hearing and thinking about the dharma. An example of this type of person is King Indrabhuti of Uddiyana, who, upon receiving instruction from the Buddha, was liberated on the spot. Most of us, however, need first to hear instructions, then to think about them very carefully, and, only thereafter, to implement them in meditation practice.

Why do we have to begin by hearing the dharma? Because dharma practice is something that is not primarily concerned with or limited to the experiences of this life. Therefore, since it is sufficiently different from what we are used to, before we have heard it explained, we really have no idea what it is, let alone how to go about practicing it. We, therefore, require instruction. What do we take as the sources of our instruction? What dharma do we try to hear? Generally speaking, there are two classes of scripture or texts used in buddhadharma. One is what is called “the dictates of the Buddha,” which means the teachings that the Buddha gave when he taught in India. The other are called the “commentaries” or “shastras,” which are commentaries on these teachings composed by the great masters of India and other countries. The custom in the vajrayana tradition is to emphasize the study of the commentaries rather than the study of the Buddha’s original teachings. Casually considering this, you would think or expect that we would emphasize the Buddha’s teachings themselves in our study, because, after all, is not the Buddha the most important teacher in the Buddhist tradition? Nevertheless, the tradition is to emphasize the commentaries upon these teachings by other great masters. This has been objected to historically by some scholars who have said, “Why study the commentaries rather than the Buddha’s original statements?” The

It is really through the commentaries that we approach the Buddha’s teachings themselves

reason is that the Buddha’s original statements are extremely vast in extent and number. Also they are not necessarily organized for easy study or reference. They are organized on the basis of the occasions on which these various statements were made. In addition, because these statements of the Buddha or teachings given by the Buddha were made on different occasions at the request of and for the needs of specific different individuals, they represent different styles of teaching. They are principally classed as belonging to either the indicative meaning or the definitive meaning.* Simply by studying these original texts themselves, it is impossible for a beginner to determine what is an indicative statement and what is a definitive statement. On the other hand, the function of the shastras or commentaries is to distinguish clearly between indicative and definitive statements of the Buddha, to collect similar teachings or those that need to be used together in one place for easy reference, to explain the hidden meanings or subtleties of the Buddha’s teachings, and to summarize especially long treatments of topics that can be understood with a briefer explanation. In short, it is really through the commentaries that we approach the Buddha’s teachings themselves.

Although we study the commentaries, there are within the general class of commentaries on the Buddha’s teachings two types of treatment or two types of texts. Some commentaries are elaborate explanations employing a great deal of logical reasoning which are intended to be guides for the acquisition of tremendous amounts of

***Editor’s note:** Teachings that embody the definitive meaning are those that describe the ultimate and most profound understanding of the Buddha, and that are not regarded as conditional in any other way than to understand that the ultimate truth can never be expressed in words. The indicative meaning, sometimes called the provisional meaning, includes all those teachings which suit various individuals at their various stages of mental development and which will lead them by stages in the direction of understanding the ultimate truth, but are not themselves the expression of this definitive meaning.

learning about the teachings. Some commentaries, on the other hand, do not have such elaborate presentations of logical reasoning but are fairly straightforward guides on how to practice the Buddha's teachings. These tend to include references to the Buddha's statements and also contain a great deal of reference to the actual practical experiences of those texts that give practical instructions. It is principally these that we emphasize in our study.

Within the general class of texts that give practical instructions, again there are two varieties. Some of these texts are elaborate explanations of the methods of practice and some are very brief, very pithy statements of the essence of practice. These latter tend to be in the form of songs and are referred to in Sanskrit as "doha." These are the most important types of texts to emphasize in your study, because given how they are formed and expressed, they are easy to remember. Being easy to keep in mind, they are easy to make use of in actual practice. They combine the two virtues of profundity and brevity. Therefore, we study from among the Indian dohas those of the Indian mahasiddhas such as Tilopa and Naropa. From the country of Tibet we study the songs of all the masters of the Kagyu lineage and especially those of Jetsun Milarepa. These types of songs of instruction and realization are easy to understand and, therefore, very easy to use to actually benefit and affect your mind. Whether you read them or hear them, they are still used as the most important base or principal base for study.

Through hearing the dharma, through either literally hearing it or through studying it, you come to an idea or an understanding of what it means on a very basic level. You come to think, "Things are like this, this is how things are." That is the first level of prajna or knowledge—the knowledge that comes from hearing. But you cannot stop there. In general there are two kinds

Songs of instruction and realization are easy to understand and, therefore, very easy to use to actually benefit and affect your mind

of practitioners. One kind of practitioner is called a "follower of faith," which means someone who believes what they are told simply because they have been told it. The other type of practitioner is a "follower of dharma," which is someone who does not take anything, no matter who was supposed to have said it, on authority but tries to figure out why they said it, what it really means. Taking the second approach of looking for the real meaning of a statement, you go beyond the knowledge of hearing. Whether you are studying the Buddha's teachings or the commentaries upon them, texts of instruction, or dohas [the songs of realization], when you study them you are concerned with the question, "What does this really mean? What is this really trying to say to me? Why did the person

who wrote this or sang this, say this in this way?" Through that type of thinking or analysis, you generate a much greater certainty or understanding than you would by simply taking the statement at its face value. This greater certainty is called the "prajna or knowledge of thinking." If you meditate after having generated this knowledge of thinking, then your practice will go much better because you will actually know how to meditate. You will also understand why you are meditating, why it is beneficial and why it will work, which will give you much more confidence to go on with the practice. It is principally for this reason that the practice of meditation needs to be preceded by the practice of hearing and thinking.

The next topic in our text is again, how to begin. It deals with the importance of renunciation. There are really two things that you need at the very inception of your practice. One of them is trust in the validity of the dharma. The other is renunciation, revulsion for samsara. In order to generate these, in order to generate true certainty about dharma and revulsion for

samsara, it is necessary to begin by contemplating “the four thoughts that turn the mind:” the difficulty of acquiring the freedom and resources of a precious human life, death and impermanence, the results of actions, and the defects of samsara. The generation of this type of renunciation and certainty in the dharma is what is called “your mind going to the dharma” and is the first step in your practice.

The next step is to come to an understanding of what dharma is, an understanding of the view, the meditation, the conduct, and the fruition, which are the topics that make up buddhadharma. The root of all of this is taming the mind. As we know, the Buddha’s 84,000 teachings are concerned with the taming of the 84,000 types of mental afflictions or kleshas which afflict our minds, but the root of all of these teachings is simply taming your mind. As was said by the Buddha, “To completely tame your mind is the Buddha’s teaching.” When we say “taming the mind,” it means taming the kleshas, because your mind is sometimes very rough, very wild, full of kleshas, full of selfishness, afflicted by all kinds of coarse and negative thoughts and so on. Whether we succeed in taming this mind of ours, taming the mind is the topic about which all dharma is concerned. Everything depends upon your mind. Any qualities that you attain through the path, you attain through your mind. Any defects that you remove through the path are removed from your mind. Therefore, what is called “the recognition or realization of the view” is taming your mind. What is called “the cultivation of meditative absorption” or “meditation” is taming your mind. You engage in the conduct, certain modes of behavior of body and speech, in order to tame your mind. The fruition, the result of all of this, is totally taming your mind. If you understand this, then you understand that the view, meditation, conduct, and

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fruition are all founded upon the mind.

A casual look at Buddhist teachings will give you the idea that according to buddhadharma, a person consists of the three faculties of body, speech, and mind. How do we think about these three? The body is composed of physical substances such as flesh and blood. What we regard as our body, from the top of the head to the tip of the toes, seems very powerful. Speech, which is all of our talk, seems much less substantial. Speech consists of all of the positive things and all the negative things that we say. But the root of all of the deeds of body and speech is our mind. If you are asked to say which of these three, body, speech, or mind, is the main one, you might say the body because the body seems the strongest. The body seems the most active or effective. Then you might say, well speech is number two because speech after all can communicate. It is communication, but it is not as strong or as stable as the body. And mind is the weakest because mind does not achieve anything except that it thinks. It does not really do anything. However, in fact, mind is in charge of body and speech. Body and speech do not do anything at all without mind telling them to do it. So mind is the root. It is, therefore, said by the siddhas of our tradition that your body and speech are like servants who perform the virtue and wrongdoing that the mind, which is like a boss, instigates. So of these three, in fact, mind is most important. Therefore, it is of the greatest importance that we take hold of our mind, that we fix our mind. All of the Buddhist practices, including view, meditation, and conduct, are concerned with fixing or taming the mind.

Taming the mind or fixing the mind means abandoning the kleshas, abandoning the mental afflictions. Everyone’s mind has two aspects. There is a pure aspect of your mind, and there is an impure aspect to your mind. The impure

aspect to your mind is called klesha or mental affliction. If you abandon mental afflictions, then all of your actions of body and speech will automatically become dharmic or pure. As long as you have not abandoned mental afflictions, then no matter how good your actions of body and speech may appear, you will still never be happy. Abandoning kleshas is the aim of dharma, but for this to succeed, it is necessary that the remedy, the practice, actually meet or encounter the problem, the kleshas. In order for this to occur, you need to take an honest look at your own mind. You need to see which klesha is really your biggest problem. For some people anger is the biggest problem, for others jealousy; for some attachment, for others bewilderment; and for some it is pride. It can be any one of the five main kleshas, which are usually called the “five poisons.” In fact, it is in order to tame these that wisdom deities manifest as the buddhas of the five families. In any case, you begin by looking at your mind to determine which klesha is the strongest. When you discover what your biggest problem is, you dedicate your practice to the amelioration of that. For example, if you are meditating on the four reminders, such as the difficulty of acquiring a precious human existence, you think, “I am doing the mediation in order to abandon such and such klesha.” Or if you are practicing the uncommon preliminaries such as the refuge and bodhicitta practice, the Vajrasattva practice, mandala practice, or guru yoga practice, then you think, “I am doing this in order to tame this klesha which afflicts my mind.” This is especially effective in the Vajrasattva practice. When you visualize the ambrosia coming from his heart, entering the top of your head, and purifying you, you can think: “Especially such and such klesha (whichever one it is) is being purified by this.” In that way, by specifically directing the intention of your practice to your biggest problem, then dharma does become an effective remedy for your kleshas, and

When you discover what your biggest problem is, you dedicate your practice to the amelioration of that

your kleshas will weaken over time.

Some people do not have any particularly preponderant klesha and are not particularly involved with anything overtly unvirtuous. They are more afflicted by the basic fundamental fixation on their own existence. Or, they might be afflicted by doubt and hesitation. They may always wonder whether “such and such is like this, or like that.” Or you might be afflicted by meaningless regret, constantly regretting things, constantly questioning your own actions. Or you might be mostly afflicted by a state of neutral sleepiness, or simply by the presence of a great deal of thoughts that are not particularly kleshas or negative in themselves. If any of these is your principal problem, then in the same way, you aim your practice at that. You dedicate all of your practice—whether it is the visualization of deities, the recitation of mantras, the practice of meditation—to the eradication of that problem, whatever it is. By directing your practice in that kind of focused way, it will actually have an effect and you will weaken and eventually eradicate these problems.

The next topic addressed in the text is a basic definition of the generation stage and completion stage, which is by extension, making a distinction between them. The term “generation” or “generation stage” refers to the generation of something, the creation or origination of something. “Completion” refers in general to carrying that which has been generated to its completion, or to its perfection. In

practice, generation or generation stage refers to the visualizations of the deities, including the radiating out and gathering in of rays of light, the visualization and recitation of mantras, and so forth. Completion or the completion stage refers to the dissolution of such visualizations into emptiness. However, in another sense the meaning of the term generation and generation stage is “something that is fabricated.” In generation stage practice you are thinking that

things are such and such, you think, “Things are like this.” Completion stage, by contrast refers to something that is natural or unfabricated, because in completion stage, rather than thinking that things are like such and such, you discover them as they are. The statement that the generation stage is the cultivation of some kind of fabrication, as true as it is, is really only true of the beginning of generation stage practice. Nevertheless, as fabricated as generation stage may appear to be for a beginning practitioner, it is still necessary. In practicing we are trying to purify the traces of our previous wrongdoing, especially our obscurations, which consist of the cognitive obscurations and the afflictive obscurations. Because of the presence of these obscurations, we experience the world in an incorrect and deluded way, in that our experience of what we call samsara consists of deluded projections. What we are trying to do in our practice is to transcend these deluded projections and experience the pure reality or pure appearances which lie behind them. It is not sufficient, in order to transcend these deluded projections to simply tell yourself, “I know that what I am experiencing is adulterated by delusion,” and then simply stay with these deluded projections. As long as you continue to invest energy in these deluded projections, they will continue, even though you recognize them, at least theoretically, to be invalid. What needs to be done is to cast aside our involvement with delusion and to actually consciously attend to and cultivate attention to pure appearance. By doing so you can gradually transcend and abandon delusion and deluded projections. It is in order to do this that we make use of iconography, in other words, deities.

In the vajrayana the deity is something very different from what we normally mean by that term. Normally when we say “deity,” “lha,” or

“deva” or “devi,” we get the idea of some kind of external protector or higher power, something that is superior to us, outside of us, that somehow can lift us up out of where we are and bring us to where we want to be. Therefore, what goes along with our conventional idea of deity is the assumption of our own inferiority to deities. In comparison to the deity, we consider ourselves as some kind of inferior, benighted being that has to be held up by something outside of ourselves. But the vajrayana notion of deity is not in any way like that, because the vajrayana way of working with the iconography of deities is that the practitioner visualizes himself or herself as the deity with which they are working.

What needs to be done is to cast aside our involvement with delusion and to actually consciously attend to and cultivate attention to pure appearance

This body that you now consider to be so impure and afflicted is in its nature an extension of the nature of your mind. Therefore, in practice you consider this apparently impure body to be the body of your yidam, the deity upon whom you are meditating. Since buddha nature is the most fundamental essence or nature of your mind and since your body is the projection of that mind, then your body is pure in nature. You acknowledge that in practice by imagining it to be or visualizing it to be pure, not only in nature, but in appearance. Through cultivat-

ing this method, then eventually the actual appearance or experience of your body comes to arise in purity. It is for this reason, in order to work with the deluded projections in this way, that the generation stage is necessary.

In order to practice the generation and completion stages, it is essential to have devotion, to have faith, and to have pure or sacred outlook. Devotion consists of two things. One is interest or enthusiasm and the other aspect is respect. This means being interested in and being enthusiastic about the dharma, and having the respect that comes from understanding its validity and its importance. Then by extension,

it means having the same attitude towards your root guru and for the gurus of the lineage, being interested in them, having enthusiasm for them, and also having respect for them.

Another thing that is very important is the attitude of sacred outlook. Sacred outlook is one of two contrasting ways we always have of seeing the world. You can look at anything in a way that sees what is good about it, that sees the purity of it, and you can look at anything in a way that sees what is wrong with it, in a way that sees it as impure. Any action can be conducted with a basic attitude of purity or an attitude of impurity. For example, if you consider the simple act of generosity—giving something to someone—it could be done mindlessly, simply to get rid of something that you do not need, or it could be given without checking to see whether it actually is appropriate for that person. That attitude is not a state of sacred outlook but a state of carelessness, an impure outlook. Or you could give consciously. You could have carefully evaluated the situation and determined that the thing you are giving is actually what the person to whom you are giving needs. The same thing is true of any action, or any other situation such as the practice of patience. You could be very patient with a situation simply by thinking, “Well, this person who is abusing me is pathetic anyway, and there is not much I can do about it, so I might as well be patient with it,” which is not a situation of sacred outlook. Or you could have an attitude of courage, thinking, “Even if there were some way I could get back at this person, I would never do it,” which is an attitude of purity. The point of sacred outlook is to emphasize good qualities and not defects, and especially to be free from the type of projection that causes you to see others’ qualities as defects. If you have this kind of sacred outlook, then devotion will arise through and from this. If you possess devotion, then devotion itself will bring you to the results of practice.

You are not practicing the guru’s foibles. You are practicing the guru’s teachings, the dharma

When we say devotion and faith are necessary, we are not just saying it because it is a customary thing to say. The reason why devotion is necessary is that fundamentally what we need to do is to practice dharma, and if you have one hundred percent confidence in dharma, then your practice will be one hundred percent. If you have less confidence, then your practice will be less intense. The less intense your practice, of course the less complete the result. Therefore, it is essential to have confidence in, and, therefore, devotion for, dharma itself. For that to occur, there has to be trust in the individuals who teach you dharma. There has to be trust in the guru. Because if you trust the guru, then you will trust the dharma, and if you trust the dharma, then you will practice.

However, faith in one’s guru is not supposed to be blind faith. It is not the attitude, “My guru is perfect,” even though your guru is not perfect. It is not pretending that your guru’s defects are qualities. It is not rationalizing every foible of the guru into being some kind of superhuman virtue, because after all most gurus are going to have defects. You do not have to pretend that your guru’s defects are qualities. That is not devotion. The object of your devotion is not the foibles, quirks, or defects of your guru, but it is the dharma which your guru teaches you. As long as the dharma is authentic and pure, then that guru is a fit object for your devotion. You are not practicing the guru’s foibles. You are practicing the guru’s teachings, the dharma. The result which you will get, you will get from the dharma that you practice. Therefore, your devotion is principally to the dharma, which is the teaching of the guru. You need to recognize the defects of your guru as defects. You do not need to pretend that they are anything other than that. But you also need to recognize that the guru’s defects will not hurt you because it is not the guru’s defects that you are creating or cultivating. You are following the teachings of the guru, and so “trust” means

trust in the teachings, trust in the validity, purity and authenticity of the dharma that you receive from your guru. You do not need to pretend that defects are qualities. You just need to recognize the validity of the teachings themselves. So that is the importance of devotion and sacred outlook.

The next thing the text addresses is the two truths, the relative truth and the absolute truth. The basic understanding of the two truths is that in their nature all things are empty and like magical illusions. This should not be misunderstood to mean that, therefore, nothing has any moral value, that nothing has any meaning. Within the context of relative appearances themselves, because of their consistencies within that context, they do have a moral value, but ultimately their nature is emptiness.

Finally, the last of the eight topics which are presented in this text of the things a beginner needs to know in order to start the path is the understanding of the gradual qualities of the path itself and the fact that you will know how to practice based upon an honest assessment of your own spiritual state. You might be a beginner or you might be an advanced practitioner, someone who has grasped the very exalted level of view. If you look at yourself and you feel like a beginner, then you are a beginner. If you look at your mind and you discover that you have a very high view, then you have to accept that you should do those practices which are appropriate for someone with a very high view. To force yourself to do the practices appropriate for a beginner would be inappropriate.

That completes the eight topics which are

You will know
how to practice
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your own
spiritual state

the things one needs to know in the beginning in order to approach this path. If you have any questions, please, go ahead.

Question: Regarding this last point, number eight, to assess one's own self in terms of one's development, what if you think you have a high view but you are actually very stupid and just arrogant? How can you determine this?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It is possible that you could deceive yourself in the way you describe, but if you really look at your own situation, completely, then you will be able to detect that self-deception. This situation of considering yourself to possess qualities that you do not have,

from among the types of pride, is what is called "full-blown pride." Fully manifest, full-blown pride. Full-blown pride is not that difficult to detect. If you look to see if in your way of thinking and in your motivation this pride is present, then you can usually spot it very easily.

Question: What are some examples of beginner's practices, middle practices, and advanced practices?

Thrangu Rinpoche: One begins with shamatha practice and meditation on the four reminders and the cultivation of the preliminary practices in order to accumulate merit. Then one undertakes the meditation of the generation and completion stages. Then finally one engages in the conduct of a siddha in order to attain full awakening. ॐ

Creation and Completion

Essential Points for Traversing the Path



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Creation and Completion.

Now, following the text, we are going to look at what is necessary when you actually have entered into the path. First of all, all of the Buddha's teachings are included within two paths. They are the stable and gradual path of the sutras and the quick and especially effective path of the vajrayana, or the tantras. Both of these take as their root the taming of the mind, which is to say the pacification of all of the agitation of thoughts and

kleshas that afflict our minds. That being their aim, the paths of sutra and tantra are the same, but they differ in the methods by which this agitation is pacified. The methods of the pacification of thoughts and kleshas can be divided into the techniques of abandonment, transformation, and taking onto the path.

The sutras in general teach the path of the renunciation or abandonment of the kleshas, which is based on seeing the kleshas as a problem and, therefore, being motivated to let go of them. Exactly how you let go of the kleshas is taught in the sutras. Now there are many kleshas, but principal among them, like the roots of all other kleshas, are what are called the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and bewilderment. If we use attachment or desire as an example, in this path of abandoning the kleshas you determine that you must abandon or relinquish attachments. The way you actually go about doing so is by meditating upon impermanence. Our attachments and our craving come from a mistaken assumption that the things to which we become attached will be around for a long time and that they are stable in retaining lasting characteristics. In order to remove this attachment, you meditate on the impermanence of things and come to recognize that they are constantly changing and that they are ultimately destructible and impermanent. As well, one also performs meditation on the unpleasant nature of all the things that one assumes are so pleasant.

The third root klesha is bewilderment, which essentially refers to ignorance itself. Ignorance occurs in two forms, “mixed ignorance” and “unmixed ignorance.” Mixed ignorance is the ignorance that always accompanies any klesha; it is called mixed ignorance because it is the arising of ignorance mixed with the arising of another klesha. No klesha can arise in the absence of ignorance; therefore, for example, when

The methods of the pacification of thoughts and kleshas can be divided into the techniques of abandonment, transformation, and taking onto the path

attachment arises, it is based upon some ignorance, some fundamental mistake about the characteristics of the object of attachment. When anger arises, it never arises alone, because anger by itself in the absence of ignorance would be powerless. The same is true of pride and jealousy. There is always some fundamental confusion that is the condition for the arising of that particular klesha.*

Unmixed ignorance is ignorance in itself, not knowing or not being aware of the nature of things. That unknowing is the most fundamental aspect of ignorance. The unknowing becomes a misconception or a mistaken understanding when on the basis of unknowing we cultivate a mistaken view through incorrect reasoning or prajna. Therefore, while bewilderment in itself is not as vivid or as immediately unpleasant as the other kleshas, it nevertheless is the root of all kleshas and of all suffering. It is the root of all depression and all misery.

The reason that bewilderment feeds, nourishes, and reinforces the kleshas in the way that it does is that bewilderment is a situation of

***Editor’s note:** For example, When “Mr. Right,” “Mr. Dream Boat,” “Mr. Knight in Shining Armor” is first standing in front of one, he is seen as solid or material in nature, singular, other than oneself, permanently the way he is (handsome, agreeable, kind, exclusively devoted to oneself, intelligent, etc. etc.) and a reliable source of pleasure and happiness. Later when he is seen as a canine Lothario and the bane of one’s existence, he is thought to be solid or material in nature, singular, other than oneself, permanently the way he is (thoughtless, cruel, unfaithful, uncaring, egocentric, stupid, and unreliable), and a source of pain and unhappiness. At such a point, one usually condemns oneself for having been so stupid, while congratulating oneself on having finally woken up and seen the light. But in both cases one’s mind is cloaked in ignorance. In both cases, regarding what you experience as being objectively existent rather than as the mere radiance or light of the mind, as being of one singular nature with permanent characteristics rather than an impermanent and ever-changing kaleidoscope of mere appearances dependently arising based on an ever-changing variety of causes and conditions, and as being the source of one’s happiness or sorrow in life as opposed to being a mere reflection of the happiness and sorrow arising from causes in one’s own mind, are all aspects of ignorance based on which the kleshas of attachment and aversion arise.

fixation, whether it is fixation on the perceived characteristics of objects as being pleasant or as being unpleasant. When you perceive an object upon which you fixate as being pleasant, you generate attachment. When you perceive an object that you fixate upon as being unpleasant, you generate aversion. When you experience something that you fixate upon as being extremely unpleasant, you generate suffering. In order to abandon this fixation, one meditates upon interdependence. Through the recognition that all things lack independent existence and are but interdependent arisings, one's fixations on their perceived characteristics diminish. Through the diminishment of that fixation, one's ignorance diminishes, and through that the kleshas are pacified. That is the path of abandonment of the kleshas. This type of meditation, which leads to the abandonment of the kleshas, is used whenever kleshas arise and whenever there is a problem of mental misery or physical discomfort or pain.

The second approach, that of transformation, is characteristic of the path of secret mantra or vajrayana. In this approach whenever a klesha arises, or whenever difficulties, pain, or problems arise, instead of attempting to abandon them you visualize yourself as a deity. The idea here is that you stop conceiving of yourself as yourself, and instead think of yourself as the deity. In general it could be any deity, or it could be a particular deity that is connected to the particular klesha or problem with which you are dealing. For example, it could be one of the five male buddhas of the buddha families: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, or Amogasiddhi. Or, for example, in the case of dealing with desire, it could be a deity shown in sexual union. If dealing with anger, it could be a deity shown in the wrathful form. In any case, by using the basic technique of

Anger in its nature is empty of any kind of true existence. When you see this directly in experience, then in the midst of the emergence or arising of anger, it is naturally pacified

visualizing yourself as the deity, the emotional state is no longer a klesha. It no longer has the characteristics of a klesha because your attitude has been changed. The emotion itself is transformed into something pure.

The third approach to the kleshas is the path of recognition, which means the recognition of the nature of whatever klesha arises. In this approach, when a klesha arises in your mind, it is recognized to be merely a relative and dependent thing. Of course, we experience the arising of kleshas and all kinds of suffering, sadness, misery, and depression, but if you actually look at the nature of what is arising, you will see that what actually is occurring is not what you normally consider to be occurring. For example, when I become angry, then I generate a thought of anger that has a particular object. I think, "This person is my enemy," and I am aware of the thought of being angry. When I do not look directly at the anger, the intensity of the anger and its attendant suffering seem intolerable. But while this thought of anger is arising and while it is present, if you look straight at it, look to see how it arises, where it comes from, where it is while it is present and exactly what it is in substance, you find that there is nothing you can point to. There is nothing in your mind anywhere that you can point to and say, "This is my anger." Anger in its nature is empty of any kind of true existence. When you see this directly in experience, then in the midst of the emergence or arising of the anger, it is naturally pacified. This also works with any kind of suffering or with any of the other kleshas. It is simply the recognition that there is really nothing there. This is the path of the recognition of the nature of kleshas.

According to the teachings given by the Buddha in the sutras, the beginning of the path of abandonment of the kleshas is a process called

“distancing,” which means to distance yourself from the kleshas. Normally when all of the various thoughts and kleshas that arise in our minds arise, we generate a further fixation on them. We become attached to them and we become addicted to them. The first step in letting go of the kleshas is, therefore, letting go of the fixation upon them. The fixation upon them is based upon thinking of them as something valuable and identifying with them. The first step is to recognize that kleshas are problems, that kleshas are useless and harmful. The recognition of this is not simply being aware of this theoretically, but cultivating the habit of thinking like this all the time. Thinking like this will not immediately eradicate the kleshas. You will not immediately be able to let go of them, but gradually by not identifying with them and not valuing them, you will become distant from them in the sense that you will have less fixation on them when they arise, and this will make them easy to abandon.

Having cultivated distancing, then you can actually go on to employ the various methods of transcending the kleshas: abandonment, transformation, and recognition. According to the great teacher Gyalwang Yongdrupa, it is best to combine these three methods rather than selecting one among the three as a method. For example, he taught that when a klesha arises, first recognize it as a problem, recognize it as something you do not wish to cultivate. Then generate the aspiration, “May I never again generate this klesha from this moment until my attainment of buddhahood.” As much as possible generate this commitment. That is the first of the three methods, which is abandonment.

Then you go on to employ transformation. Whatever the klesha may be, you transform it into altruism by changing your attitude. You think, “May all of the kleshas that are present in the minds of all sentient beings, and espe-

Principally important in our practice is self-generation. This involves visualizing yourself as the deity as vividly as possible

cially this klesha, be absent from their minds and be added on to this klesha of mine. May whatever suffering all beings, especially practitioners of dharma, have through the affliction of this klesha be experienced only by me. May this klesha of mine serve instead of all of their kleshas.” In that way the presence of the klesha itself becomes an occasion for the generation of an especially good intention. Then, having generated that intention with the attitude that you are doing so in order to pacify or remove this particular klesha, you then visualize yourself as a deity. Those two steps of accepting the kleshas of others and visualizing yourself as a deity are the second process, the process of transformation.

Next you practice the recognition of the klesha’s nature. Continuing to visualize yourself as whichever deity you have been, you then think that in the center of your body, at the level of your heart, is your root guru, who is majestic and beautiful in appearance. Visualizing the root guru there as vividly as possible, then you supplicate, asking that you be granted the blessing of the nature of whatever klesha it is to arise as wisdom, that you may actually see the nature of that klesha, which is wisdom. Then after supplicating in that way, you look at the single nature of three aspects of the meditation: the deity which you are visualizing as yourself, the guru visualized in your heart, the klesha which has arisen and is the occasion for the meditation or practice. Through looking at the single or unified nature of these three things, you come to recognize the nature of the klesha, which causes it to be naturally pacified. That is the third practice; the approach or path of recognition. In that way the text presents the combined instructions or practice of sutra and tantra.

Next the text turns to the issues surrounding vajrayana practice in particular. These are the practice of the generation and completion

stages in general and especially the practice of the tradition of uncommon or special instructions. The text first goes through the generation stage, then the completion stage, and then the tradition of uncommon instruction.

Beginning with the generation stage, it is important to remember that while we practice what is called self-generation (visualization of oneself as the deity) and front generation (visualization of the deity in front of oneself), and so on, principally important in our practice is self-generation. This involves visualizing yourself as the deity as vividly as possible, including the deity's color, costume, scepters, and so forth. The details of each specific deity practice are explained in the liturgy and commentaries of that particular practice, so in this text no specific instruction is given. This text is concerned with the background and theory surrounding the practice of the generation stage in general; therefore, the generation stage is presented in four topics: the basis of purification; that which is to be purified; that which purifies it, the methods of the generation stage; the result of this process of purification.

In order to understand the difference between the ground of purification and that which is to be purified or removed, you need to understand that there are in a sense two aspects to your mind. There is how your mind is, in its nature, and how it appears or manifests in your experience. From the point of view of the appearance of your mind, you could say that your mind is full of kleshas, full of suffering, full of all kinds of confused or deluded projections. But from the point of view of how your mind really is, there is nothing of all of this confusion that cannot be abandoned because all of this confusion is secondary to the nature of

When you begin the practice of the generation stage as an ordinary individual, the approach to practice is called 'taking aspiration as the path,' which means that rather than actually seeing things as pure, you are aspiring to see them as pure

mind itself. Therefore, confusion can be gotten rid of, and the innate wisdom of your mind can be revealed and expanded in your experience. The nature of your mind, what your mind really is, even the nature of what appear as kleshas, is called "sugatagarbha" or "buddha nature," the seed of all of the qualities of buddhas, the seed of all wisdom. This is always present but is obscured by the presence of the kleshas and other obscurations. The process of the path consists of revealing just this. It does not need to be created but to be revealed. Therefore, the basis or

ground of purification is buddha nature, which is the innate presence of the qualities and wisdoms of buddhas and, therefore, of yidams. That which is to be purified are the kleshas and the cognitive obscurations, which obscure this ground of purification. These can be purified or removed because they are adventitious or secondary to the nature of the mind itself.

That which purifies these obscurations is the generation stage of the yidam. All of these confused projections which make up samsara, including the kleshas, can be abandoned because they are secondary to the fundamental nature itself. But in order to abandon them, there has to be a shift in your attitude towards them. As long as you invest energy in the impurity of the projections, and as long as you view these appearances and experiences as impure, then you maintain them.

If you change your attitude and view them as pure, actually meditate upon them as pure, then you are no longer maintaining them.

When you begin the practice of the generation stage as an ordinary individual, the approach to practice is called "taking aspiration as path," which means that rather than actually seeing things as pure, you are aspiring to see

them as pure. Through this process of taking aspiration as path then eventually you generate what is called the “clarity of appearance.” This means the vivid direct experience of the purity of phenomena. When you do this, this will naturally purify the delusion. The technique consists essentially of visualizing yourself as the yidam and visualizing the place in which you find yourself as the mandala or abode of that yidam. When one begins this practice, the thought will arise, “I am pretending to be other than what I am.” You may even know—through your study of dharma, your understanding of buddha nature, and your confidence in the theory of the practice—that this is not really true, that in fact, you are not pretending to be other than you really are. However, because we have a strong habit of conceiving of ourselves and everything around us as impure, these thoughts may continue to arise. In order to counteract that thought, there are specific techniques built into the practices that serve as remedies. For example, in order to counteract the thought, “Okay, I am visualizing myself as the deity, but I am not really the deity; the deity is really something or somewhere else,” you invite this real deity into yourself.* As well, there are the techniques of repetition of mantra, the radiation and gathering of light rays, and so on, all of which are aspects of the generation stage. As you practice the generation stage, over time you approach the result or fruition, which is the experience of the innate purity of both body and mind. That is essentially an outline of the practice of the generation stage.

The practice of the generation stage consists of the cultivation of three elements. These are clarity, stability, and purity. Clarity means the clarity of the image, the visualized image, which is the technique of the generation stage. This

The practice of the generation stage consists of the cultivation of three elements. These are clarity, stability, and purity

element consists simply of visualizing the deity as clearly as you can. How easy this is, is different for everyone. Some people, because of the constitution of their channels and so forth, find it very easy to generate a very clear image. Other people do not. In any case the technique is the same. In a very relaxed way with a mind that is not particularly tense you visualize the form of the deity. In doing so it is natural to develop hope that it will be intensely vivid. In fact, we would like the image of the deity to be as vivid as what we see with our eyes. In practicing

visualization you are not using the eye consciousness, you are using the mental consciousness, and the mental consciousness is conceptual. Unlike the eye consciousness, which experiences the individual characteristics of forms, the mental consciousness generates an abstraction or a generalization; therefore, the visualization will tend to remain something vague and general. However, if you continue the practice with a relaxed mind, then gradually the

image will increase in stability and in clarity or vividness. To rest within this continued clear visualization of the deity—the deity’s form, color, position, costume, ornaments, scepters, and so forth—is the practice of the first element of the generation stage, the clarity of image or clear visualization.

When you are cultivating clarity in the visualization, sometimes you will find that the visualization is less clear, vivid, or stable than usual. There are things you can do to correct this. For example, one thing that is suggested in the text is to concentrate for awhile in your visualization on one specific detail, such as the vajra held in the hand, or a scepter of the deity, or a specific detail such as the jewel on top of the deity’s topknot, and so on. Depending upon the nature of what is preventing clear visualization, there are some choices to make in what you direct your attention to. In general, if you are afflicted by agitation, and there are many thoughts run-

***Editor’s note:** Here Rinpoche is referring to the invitation stage in generation practice.

ning through your mind which prevent you from concentrating on the visualization, then it is recommended that you direct your attention to something towards the bottom of the visualization, such as the lotus seat on which the deity is seated or standing. If on the other hand it is a kind of torpor or depression which is preventing the emergence of clarity or vividness in the visualization, then it is generally recommended that you direct your attention to something towards the top of the visualization, such as the top of the deity's head, the jewel, or the topknot, and so on.

The second element of generation stage practice is purity, which refers to the recollection of purity. This can be and often is explained as the enumeration in your mind of the symbolic significance of each aspect of the deity's appearance—what each aspect of the appearance represents. But it is pointed out in our text that if you do this, it can become too conceptual and can actually disturb your mind and harm the meditation. What is recommended as the implementation of the recollection of purity is to keep in mind that this appearance of the deity is vivid or clear appearance that is without any existence, that it is the unity of clarity and emptiness, like the appearance of a rainbow in its vividness and insubstantiality.

The third element in the practice of the generation stage is stability, which means the stable pride of being the deity. This is the practice of identification with the deity, actually thinking, "I am this deity." This is very important, as it is this aspect of the generation stage that actually serves as a remedy for our ordinary fixation on a self. The practice or cultivation of stable pride consists of abandoning the sense of being different from or other than the deity which you are meditating on as yourself.

That was a presentation of the outline and

elements of generation stage practice. If you have any questions, please ask them.

Question: I have been working through the meditations in the book *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*, and in that process you view emotional reactions as evidence of fixation on self. Specifically, I am examining my grief over the death of a loved one as an emotional reaction. One can view grief as something like physical pain in the form of suffering, or on the other hand view it as a klesha such as anger based on attachment, duality, and fixation on self. In examining it, I've come to some level of understanding the nature of interdependence and impermanence and how they are an antidote to the attachment and duality that leads to grief. But I just find some small level of understand-

ing. The pain and the suffering are very clearly still there. I am wondering if this process is the same as that in which one examines something like anger. The anger dissipates, it goes away. I guess my question is, in the context of something like extreme grief, what does it mean to abandon it? Does it mean that it goes away or that it is still there as a matter of relative truth but understood to be empty?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Grief is not a klesha. It is not considered a cause of suffering but rather as suffering. One does not need to abandon it in the way that one

abandons kleshas because they will cause future suffering. One abandons grief in the sense of allowing it to be pacified, because maintaining it can cause suffering upon suffering. But whether grief can be transcended depends upon the power of your mediation. When you look directly at the nature of your grief, it will probably not disappear. However, through seeing its nature, while the grief will remain present, it will be less overwhelming. In a sense the heaviness of it

The practice or cultivation of stable pride consists of abandoning the sense of being different from or other than the deity which you are meditating on as yourself

will be somewhat pacified, so that although you will still be grieving, your position with respect to your grief will be different from that of an untrained person. Theoretically, when you see the nature of grief, it can be totally abandoned, but practically speaking this does not happen. When we look at the nature of grief, because our minds are not habituated enough with seeing the nature of whatever arises to abandon it, it will just be somewhat lessened in its heaviness, but the grief and the sadness will still be there.

Question: With regard to abandoning the klesha of bewilderment, Rinpoche said that the remedy is meditation on interdependence. I want to see how that actually works. Say, for example, I perceive that I am fixated on the sound of the birds and the trees' rustling as being pleasant. If there were twenty motorcycles running around I would perceive that as unpleasant, and yet the nature of the sound is just sound, movement and vibration. I understand that, but I still have the experience of one being pleasant and one being unpleasant. How, practically speaking would one meditate on interdependence?

Thrangu Rinpoche: The perception of things as pleasant and unpleasant itself is not a problem. The problem only occurs for example, when in thinking of something as unpleasant, we develop aversion for it, which is the point at which we actively wish to get rid of it. Or, thinking of something as pleasant, we develop attachment for it, which means we actively wish to acquire it or prolong it. It is those things that cause us suffering. Simply the perception of things as pleasant and unpleasant is not a problem. The reason why meditation on interdependence is beneficial in this instance is that interdependence is at the same time relativity. By recognizing the relative nature of these perceived or imputed characteristics, one becomes free from fixation upon them. For example, if you were to become actually tormented by the sound of twenty motorcycles, thinking how awful and disturbing that sound is, then you would in that context reflect upon worse sounds. And there

are indeed worse sounds that you could be hearing. By thinking about worse sounds such as screaming and so on, you would then no longer be fixating on the unpleasantness of the motorcycles. Or, if you were tormented by being attached to the pleasant sound of birds, then you could reflect upon the fact that there are far more pleasant sounds you could be hearing, and in that way let go of your fixation on hearing the birds.

Question: What is meant by the marks and signs of the body of reality?

Thrangu Rinpoche: First of all the dharmakaya is what is referred to here in the root text as the "body of reality." It does not in itself possess any physical characteristics, but the quality of the dharmakaya manifests as the rupakaya or form bodies, and they do possess physical characteristics, which are normally enumerated as thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of physical perfection. The thirty-two major marks of physical perfection refer to the fact that the bodies of buddhas are always beautiful, have certain very specific types of features, and have certain extraordinary characteristics, such as the fact that the clothing or robes worn by a buddha will never actually touch their body but will always be four finger widths away from the body. The body of a buddha always has an extensive halo, and so on. The eighty minor marks of physical perfection are less pronounced wonderful physical characteristics that are similar to the thirty-two major ones.

Question: I have a friend who gets very angry, and to him his anger has value. If someone harms him, he feels he can win or he can get back at them. He seems to feel a kind of satisfaction in just being angry. I cannot debate him. It is not enough to just say, "You're going to cause yourself more suffering." He thinks he is out for revenge and really angry. How can I talk with him?

Thrangu Rinpoche: A distinction can be made

between anger itself and holding a grudge. Holding a grudge comes about from anger having been invested in and anger having been cultivated. If you continually invest in anger then anger will develop into this tendency to hold grudges, which is the next step or the next development of it. It basically consists of never letting go of anger. Whenever you get angry, it becomes somehow deeply entrenched, and you hold on to it because you are so used to being angry. The remedy for this is to cultivate the remedies for anger in general. That will prevent this entrenchment of anger from occurring.

One thing you can say to the person is that he is better off being patient than seeking revenge, because revenge becomes perpetual. If he succeeds in getting back at someone who has hurt him, then chances are that his way of getting back at that person will probably not only be exacting the debt but some interest as well. When that happens, the person at whom he has gotten back will feel victimized, because what he did will seem to them to be more than what they deserve. They then will have to get back at him and they will also try to do more than what he did to them. He will in turn feel victimized and will have to get back at them. In that way vengeance becomes perpetual. It is self-maintaining, simply because the act of vengeance itself usually involves doing more than what the other person did to you. This is an instance of the fact that kleshas such as anger always include ignorance. In this case, the ignorance is in part that, when you are seeking revenge, you do not stop to think about the fact that the person on whom you are exacting revenge will probably want to exact revenge upon you for exacting revenge upon them. If this goes on long enough eventually both people will come to regret the whole thing, because they will have harmed each other without either really ever being satisfied by what they have done.

Whenever you get angry, it becomes somehow deeply entrenched, and you hold on to it because you are so used to being angry

Question: Rinpoche I have a question about two lines from the root text. The first line reads, “Do not meditate on pride; cut through the root of ego clinging.” The second line, “When ego clinging is destroyed, wherever one’s mind focuses, its essence arises vividly.” Could you comment on the phrase “wherever one’s mind focuses, its essence arises vividly.”

Thrangu Rinpoche: It means that, when there is the eradication of a fixation on a self, wherever the mind is directed, that selflessness which is the mind’s nature, that absence of a self, arises vividly in your direct experience.

Question: In the root text in the section that begins, “In some of the highest yoga tantras of secret mantra,” can you discuss the emanation from the organs in union?

Thrangu Rinpoche: This is in a section of the text which is going through the very technical details of different types of deity practice. Within those different types of deity practice sometimes in order to purify the same things, there can be more or less elaborate procedures. Here the text is talking about a specific type of generation stage, a gradual development of the visualization of the deity which occurs in some practices where the deity is actually generated twice. First, through whatever gradual process, you generate yourself as the deity. Then that deity dissolves and melts into a sphere of light, and then from that sphere of light you re-emerge as the deity. When that is done, it is called the “causal vajra holder” and the “resultant vajra holder.” The deity here is referred to as the vajra holder. Part of the meaning of that is that it corresponds to the mind of luminosity or clear light that occurs at the death of the previous life and the subsequent emergence from the bardo into the conception and birth in the next life. In a sadhana or practice in

which the text says that “from the secret space . . .” the deity who is generated in this dual way has a retinue before the causal vajra holder. In that case there will be a father and mother in union, and before they melt into light, from the secret space of the mother the other members of the mandala will have emerged and taken their places in the palace. Then the father and mother causal vajra holder, the central figures, will melt into light and then re-arise. The basic idea here is that you are purifying the way you are conceived and come into the world. At the end of the previous life you are alone and then you die. Before you are reborn there are already the parents and so on. The body that you have is a mixture of three things: the white constituent, which is the sperm from the father; the red constituent, which is the ovum from the mother; and the wind element, which is the mount for your consciousness as it actually enters the womb and combines with those other two. The function of all of these visualizations is to correspond to and, therefore, purify fixation on the mixing or combination of these three elements.

Question: What does it mean that “the vital drops purify the white and red appearances”?

Thrangu Rinpoche: In this section he is giving a list of different things, not all of which are likely to be present in the same practice. For example, when he says that “through the gradual disappearance of the three syllables appearance, increase, and attainment are purified,” he is talking about something that occurs in some practices in which you visualize the three syllables and then they disappear and then the

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visualization goes on from there. When he says, “through the drops, the appearances of white and red are purified,” he is referring to the visualization of the sphere of light when the causal vajra holder has dissolved before the resultant vajra holder arises. What you are purifying there is your attitude about the white and red constituents, the sperm and the ovum, which are the substantial or physical basis for the emergence of your own body.


Question: Are the vital drops the same thing as the white and red appearances?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It is not so much that the drops are the same. It is that they correspond. The visualization of this white and red sphere intermingled, which then becomes the resultant vajra holder, is a way of representing and, therefore, purifying your fixation on the white and red drops which you received from your parents.

Question: So the vital drops are the causal vajra holder?

Thrangu Rinpoche: No, when the causal vajra holder melts into light, he or they or she, depending upon what the deity is, become a sphere of mixed white and red light.

Question: And those are the vital drops?

Thrangu Rinpoche: That is what is referred to here as the “drop,” and it represents the vital drops, but here the visualization is of a sphere or drop. The word “tiple,” which the translator here translated as “vital drop,” can also mean sphere. 

Creation and Completion

Using the Generation Stage To Purify the Habit of Birth

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen
Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Creation
and Completion.*

Because it seems that you are interested in knowing about it, I am going to go into more detail about the generation stage, specifically from among the four topics of the generation stage, the methods which purify and that which is purified by the generation stage.

Essentially the structure and format of the generation stage practice is connected with, or corresponds to, the way we are born. The idea of being born is the acquisition of a new body. New body of course does not mean your first body, just your latest body, your most recently acquired body. There are four different ways that sentient beings can be born. The first is womb birth, through which, as in the case of humans and other mammals, you are born from the womb of your mother. The second, which is very similar, is egg birth, by which you are hatched from an egg that has issued forth from the womb, as is the case with birds, reptiles, and

so on. Those two types are fairly coarse in the manner of birth. Then there is one that is a little more subtle, and although this form is often presented as a separate type of birth, it can also be understood as another aspect of either womb or egg generation, which is birth from heat and moisture.

These first three types of birth correspond to three types of generation stage visualization that

are principally designed to purify the habit of these types of birth. Womb birth is purified by the style of generation called “five-fold manifest awakening,” egg birth by that which is called the “four vajras,” birth from heat and moisture by that which is called the “three procedures” or “three rituals.”

The fourth type of birth is that through which beings appear in certain realms with particularly subtle bodies. It is an instantaneous birth occurring in the absence of womb, egg, or even

heat and moisture as conditions for birth. This type of instantaneous birth is purified by what is called “instantaneous generation,” which is also known as “generation that is complete in an instant of recollection.” In this case the medita-



tion of the deity does not begin with the establishment of the mandala and the seat of the deity, and then the placement of the seed syllable on the seat, its transformation into a scepter, and then the scepter into the deity, as is usual in other visualizations. In this case, in an instant of recollection you simply visualize yourself as the deity without the many preliminary steps. Although these four types of visualization—five-fold manifest awakening, four vajras, three procedures, and complete in an instant of recollection—do correspond individually to the four types of birth, it is not the case that practicing any one of these does not purify all four. It does. Even though there is a correspondence, any one of these is sufficient in order to purify the four types of birth.

Once one has generated the deity's form through one or another of these four procedures, then one visualizes that deity with their particular posture, color, costume, ornamentation, scepters, the father, the mother, the retinue, the mandala in which they abide, and so on. From that point onwards the practices will vary quite a bit. Depending upon what specific practice it is, there may be many other steps and stages along the way. In any case it will conclude with what is called the "withdrawal procedure." Withdrawal refers to the dissolution or withdrawal of the mandala into the clear light, or into emptiness. The entire practice can consist of a great deal of elaboration and many steps or can be very simple and concise. In any case the entire practice, starting from the very beginning of the generation of the deity and culminating with the dissolution or withdrawal of the deity and mandala into the clear light, corresponds to all the events of one life. The very beginning of the generation corresponds to the entrance of the

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consciousness into the womb, for example, in the case of a human life. As the practice goes on there are specific elements that correspond to the birth, to all the experiences of this life, and finally, in the case of the withdrawal phase, to death.

There are many variations in the procedure, style, and content of these generation stage practices. For example, in Tibet there were two periods of the introduction of Buddhism. The initial or earlier spread of the teachings in the eighth and ninth centuries led to what is called the old or Nyingma tradition. The subsequent renewal of the doctrine with the introduction of new translations from India in the eleventh century by various translators led to what is called the new or Sarma tradition* The procedures and style of the practices of the generation stage in the Nyingma and Sarma traditions vary somewhat, at least in appearance and in method, but there is no difference in their effectiveness in the actual

purification of the kleshas. If one had an illness of the eyes, one might treat it with a surgical procedure or one might treat it with a medicine consumed by mouth. In either case, one could remove whatever is obstructing or obscuring one's vision. In the same way, although the actual methods vary slightly, the focus of both the Sarma and the Nyingma generation stage practices is identical.

Next the text gives a description of how a generation stage practice would work. The type of generation stage practice that is used as an example is basically a Nyingma model, but it will give you an idea of how a generation stage procedure works. The characteristic of a Nyingma approach to generation stage is the cultivation of

***Editor's note:** The core practices of the Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug were all introduced into Tibet during this later phase so are considered Sarma.

what are called the “three samadhis” or “three meditative absorptions.” These correspond to the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya. The first samadhi, connected with the dharmakaya, is called the “samadhi of thatness or suchness.” It essentially consists of meditation on emptiness. With regard to what it purifies, it corresponds to one’s death in the preceding life up to the point at which the appearances of the preceding life have vanished and there is an experience of nothing whatsoever, which is like emptiness.

Following this meditation on emptiness, which is the samadhi of thatness and corresponds to the dharmakaya, is the meditation on the compassion that has the characteristics of being like a magical illusion. This is called the “samadhi or meditative absorption which appears everywhere.” It corresponds to the sambhogakaya and it purifies the subsequent experience of the bardo, one’s experience after one’s previous death and before one’s conception in this life. The function of this second samadhi, which corresponds to the sambhogakaya, is to form a link between the dharmakaya and the coarse or full manifestation of the nirmanakaya. Therefore, it forms the basis or prelude to the generation of the mandala.

The third samadhi, which is connected to the nirmanakaya, is called the “samadhi of cause” and is the initial visualization of the seed syllable of the deity. This corresponds to the emergence of your consciousness from the bardo and its actual entrance into the womb. Therefore, along with visualizing the seed-syllable, one visualizes the seat or pedestal of the deity, which will consist of either a lotus with sun and moon discs or a lotus with either just a moon or just a sun. Initially, one begins the visualization by imagining this lotus, sun, and moon pedestal; this corresponds to and purifies the white and red elements, the sperm and ovum

When the scepter, together with the seed syllable, is transformed into the complete body of the deity, this corresponds to and purifies the moment of birth

which come from the parents and are the physical or substantial basis for your physical body. Then you visualize on top of this the seed-syllable of the deity. This corresponds to and purifies the entrance of your consciousness from the bardo into the womb at the time of conception. Then when you visualize that the seed-syllable changes into the deity’s characteristic scepter, which is marked at its center by the seed-syllable, this corresponds to the period of gestation in the womb. When the scepter, together with the seed-syllable, is transformed into the complete body of the deity, this corresponds to and purifies the moment of birth. Having visualized yourself as the deity, you imagine the three syllables OM, AH, HUNG in the three places of the deity’s body. This purifies the habits from this life of body, speech, and

mind. This procedure is essentially characteristic of the Nyingma school, beginning with the three samadhis and then culminating in the gradual generation of the deity from syllable, scepter and the entire body.

In the tantras of the Sarma or New Translation school, there is often the generation of the causal vajra holder and resultant vajra holder, which is a different way of generating the deity. In the more elaborate practices of the New Translation school, there tend to be two generations of the deity. First, there is the generation through whatever gradual procedure by which the deity is generated. At that point the deity is called the causal vajra holder. This first form of the deity is generated in order to purify the process of death of one’s previous life. The causal vajra holder form of the deity which has been generated will then melt into light, becoming a sphere of light. From that sphere of light the deity is generated a second time. This is called the resultant vajra holder. This corresponds to and purifies the arising of the mental body in

the bardo or interval between lives as well as the entrance of that consciousness, which has arisen as a mental body, into the womb, the process of gestation, and birth.

In their details these practices can vary quite a bit. For example, in some practices with causal and resultant vajra holders, at the time of visualization of the causal vajra holder the other deities of the mandala will be emanated from the secret space of the mother, the consort of the principal deity. Then the causal vajra holder, father and mother, will melt into light and become a sphere of light. At that point, the dakinis and other deities of the retinue who have been emanated, will request the central deity, who is now in the form of a sphere of light, to arise from emptiness for the benefit of beings, in response to which that sphere of light will turn into the resultant vajra holder. Also, in some other practices, rather than having the causal and resultant vajra holder, the end of one's previous life is purified by visualizing the gradual dissolution of the three syllables OM, AH, HUNG, corresponding to the stages of death called appearance, increase, and attainment. So within the general category of the New Translation school generation stage practices, there are many variations.

Whether the practice is of the Nyingma style or of the Sarma style, once the deity has been generated completely, usually you will visualize that from the heart of yourself as the deity rays of light shoot out and invite the wisdom beings or the jnanasattvas, which are the actual deity. You think that these are invited and dissolve into you, at which point you rest in the confidence that the jnanasattvas have actually entered into your being. This corresponds to and purifies the learning process you go through after birth. Following that, again usually you will invite the five male and female buddhas and so forth, who will bestow empowerment upon you

as the deity. This is done in order to purify your family inheritance, everything that you in any sense inherit from your parents. Following that there will be homage to yourself as the deity, offerings, and praises. The function of these stages of the practice is to purify all of your interactions throughout this life with the various objects of experience, including your possessions and so on. In short, every stage of the generation stage practice is designed to correspond to and purify something upon which we project impurity.

Following that comes the repetition of the mantra. The mantra repetition purifies all of your talk and conversation throughout your life, especially talk connected to attachment, aversion, and bewilderment. Following that comes the withdrawal or dissolution of the visualization into emptiness and finally the re-arising of yourself as the deity. These correspond to your death at the end of this life and to your re-arising in a mental body in the bardo or interval after death. In that way the procedure of any one generation stage practice contains a complete correspondence to all of the events of one life cycle, starting with the bardo and the entrance of the bardo consciousness into the womb, going through your whole life, ending with your death, and again your entrance into the bardo.

Invariably such practices are preceded by going for refuge and generating bodhicitta and followed by the dedication of merit and the making of aspirations. These are essential for the practice to be a mahayana practice. At the very beginning, therefore, is the going for refuge and the generation of bodhicitta as your intention for the practice and the making of aspirations for the benefit of beings, and at the end is your dedication of the merit to all beings. These are the principal practices of the mahayana and, therefore, are used to embrace the technique of

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the generation stage practice thereby making it a proper mahayana practice.

In many generation stage practices there will be additional elements, such as the consecration of the offerings and sometimes a feast offering. The purpose of the consecration of offerings and the making of feast offerings is to gather the two accumulations, which are the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Although the text says “to gather the two accumulations,” principally these lead to the accumulation of merit. In the general context of mahayana, merit is accumulated by means of the first five paramitas: generosity, morality, patience, diligence, and meditation. In the specific context of vajrayana, the methods by which merit is accumulated emphasize the practice of meditation, by means of which a small thing can be magnified or multiplied in its power so that one accumulates vast amounts of merit without much difficulty. For example, in feast practice you use a very small offering as a basis for meditation, and in samadhi you multiply it extensively. It, therefore, becomes a basis for an accumulation of merit that is far, far greater than the thing in itself. The idea here is that through perfecting or completing the accumulation of merit, you come to accumulate the second accumulation, that of wisdom. But in the direct effect, these feast offerings and offering consecrations lead principally to the accumulation of merit.

The fourth topic about the generation stage is the result of purification—the result of the full removal of obscurations of the basis or ground of purification. When that sugatagarbha or buddha nature, which is itself the ground of purification, is fully revealed, when everything that obscures it is removed, that is the result. The view of the generation stage is that this buddha nature itself contains all of the qualities of the deities. So when you visualize yourself as a deity, you are visualizing yourself as some-

The result or fruition does not come from outside; it is revealed from within

thing that is a similitude of your own buddha nature, something that has the same characteristics as your own buddha nature. The reason you do this is that by so doing you familiarize yourself with buddha nature and thereby allow buddha nature to reveal itself. It is not that through the generation stage you are creating a result. You are revealing the ground as a result. The result is that through this process of familiarization,

taking the appearance of the ground as the path, you come to fully reveal that ground. When everything that obscures it has been removed, then that ground fully revealed is itself the fruition or result. In other words, the result or fruition does not come from outside; it is revealed from within.

The generation stage is the practice of a yidam, and you do that specific yidam practice exactly as it is prescribed in the liturgy for that practice. If the liturgy is elaborate and long and prescribes an elaborate series of steps to the visualization, that is what you visualize. If it is concise and prescribes that the deity is visualized complete in an instant of recollection, then that is what you visualize. In either case, in the principal or main practice of a yidam, the main thing is to visualize yourself as that deity, as that yidam.

We also do other practices where the emphasis is not on visualizing yourself as a deity but on visualizing deities external to yourself. For example, when we visualize the sources of refuge in the refuge and prostration practice, we visualize them in front of ourselves. When we visualize Vajrasattva in the preliminary practice of Vajrasattva, we visualize Vajrasattva seated above our head. When we do the Chenrezig practice, we commence the practice with the visualization of Chenrezig above our head. The reason why in these three types of practices the visualization is different from a conventional generation stage practice of self-visualization is that these practices are designed for those who

are beginning vajrayana practice. In the very beginning you cannot simply start with revealing your own inner wisdom. You cannot begin with the discovery of wisdom within yourself, which is the principal reason for self-visualization.

There is something that needs to be made clear about the nature of the deities in the vajrayana, because it seems in some contexts we almost externalize them as in the preliminary practices. Primarily we view them as something internal, something that is within us. First of all, a distinction needs to be made between the use of a deity in a nontheistic tradition, such as Buddhism, and in a theistic tradition, such as Hinduism. In the Hindu practices which work with the iconography of deities, the deities are considered to be external and essentially to have the role of being creators of the universe. It is understood that these deities have the power to make you happy and to make you suffer. These deities if pleased have the power to bring you to liberation, have the power to grant you all kinds of attainments, supreme and common attainments. Therefore, the practice in such a tradition consists of praying to deities with the greatest faith and devotion, making offerings to them with the understanding that if they are pleased they will grant you attainments, and that if they are not pleased and become angry they can actually cast you into the lower realms.

The Buddhist view of deities is entirely different. First of all, it is held by the Buddhist tradition that your happiness and suffering come about because of your own previous actions, and that no other being can actually cause you to experience what you have not caused yourself karmically. What you experience comes about because of your own previous actions and because of your habits of perception. Ultimately speaking, from a Buddhist point of view, no deity can grant you siddhi or attainment. You receive attainment through your removal of obscurations of mind which otherwise obscure

your innate wisdom. In the Buddhist tradition attainment is the revelation of that wisdom that is innate. Therefore, in the Buddhist tradition we do not assert that attainment is actually given to you by the whim of any external being.

On the other hand, there also exist traditions that say that there is no help whatsoever from outside, that the path consists entirely of one's own internal work, and that any supplication of

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any awakened being is meaningless. But this is not exactly the Buddhist view either, because, while it is true that no buddha can hand you or give you the result or fruition of this path, they can help. For example, consider this life. Up to a certain point in your life you had no knowledge of dharma whatsoever. Then, through whatever series of circumstances, you approached a guru and received instruction

from the guru, who became your root guru, and something changed, which is called the blessing of dharma. Before you did not know what dharma was and then you did. Before you did not know how to practice and then you did. Many things changed as a result. Maybe you had no confidence in dharma and then came to have confidence. You had no devotion and then you came to have devotion. You came to have more compassion than you did before. Your meditation improved and so on. Now none of these things was precisely given to you by your root guru, but nevertheless something happens in the context of or because of your relationship with the root guru, and this is what we call the blessing of the guru. This is all easy to understand because it is concerned with your relationship or interaction with someone you have met, someone who is another human being. But you also supplicate gurus of the past, gurus you have not met, gurus who are not visible to you at the present. So supplicating them, even though, like your root guru, they also cannot hand you attainment or the fruition, like your root guru, they can influence you. They can help you.

It is not particularly that by your supplicating them, they are pleased and, therefore, decide to share their spiritual wealth with you. It is rather that the devotion you generate in your supplication of them causes this blessing simply to occur. Therefore, the guru can still grant blessing even when he or she is not physically present in your perception. That is the first of the three roots or three sources of vajrayana practice, the guru, which is the root of blessing.

The second root is the yidam, the deity, which is the root of attainment. Essentially, yidams are the forms of the sambhogakaya that buddhas take in order to communicate with and train beings. It is not the case that literally speaking your yidam can give you or hand you supreme attainment, but like gurus, yidams can influence you. They grant you their blessing in the sense that through practicing yidam meditation, a new clarity dawns in your meditative absorption, and you come to gradually realize something or attain something. To be precise, we would say that in saying that yidams are the root of siddhi, we do not mean that they grant it, but that they facilitate it.

The third root is the dharmapalas or dharma protectors, who are the root of activity. Now the function of dharmapalas is to help you free yourself from anything that impedes your practice and path. They help to encourage your exertion and to encourage your devotion. They help you find ways to purify your obscurations and your wrongdoing. Dharmapalas are basically buddhas who take this type of position or role for the aid of practitioners. So while it is not the case that any external being can grant you supreme siddhi, these three roots, the gurus, yidams, and dharmapalas, if you supplicate them, can bestow blessing and can help remove obstacles on your path.

For these reasons as you will discover when you do the intensive practice of the generation stage in retreat, most generation stage practice

The function of dharmapalas is to help you free yourself from anything that impedes your practice and path

consists of visualizing yourself as the deity, because the most essential thing in our practice of the generation stage is to reveal and expand our own innate wisdom. While that is the principal practice, in the special circumstances of feast practice, particularly of self-empowerment, in which you give yourself the empowerment of that specific practice upon its completion, you not only do the visualization of yourself as the deity, but you also visualize the deity in front. You do so because making offerings to the deity visualized in front of you, as it is in the context of feast practice, is a great way to accumulate

merit. By receiving the blessing or empowerment from the deity visualized in front of you, you will be especially confident that you actually received that blessing or received that empowerment.

So this is the generation stage, which is necessary and very helpful. If you have any questions please go ahead.

Question: How important is it to visualize the deity exactly as the liturgy says? For example, if some of the icons of the culture I was raised in come into the visualization, is that something that I should make sure to not let happen? Is doing so causing a problem?

Translator: Could you give a specific example of what you mean?

Question: An example is Saint Francis of Assisi as a sort of compassion and so some of the ideas of him as well as of Avalokiteshvara. If I slip into a visualization of Saint Francis of Assisi am I taking away from the power of the visualization of Avalokiteshvara?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It is okay from time to time to remember Saint Francis of Assisi if it gives you more of an idea of compassion, but at the same time, when you are doing a formal practice of visualization, everything in the visualization

is there for a reason. The details, and there are so many details in any of these practices, are there because by working with them exactly as they are set out, they will enhance the stability of your mind. In other words, the generation stage will become a practice of shamatha and also of clarity, not only of the visualization but also of the revelation of the mind's characteristic of clarity itself. Ultimately there is more benefit in working with the practice exactly as it is set out.

We find a reference to this topic in the autobiography of Mipham Rinpoche from the nineteenth century. He says in his autobiography that he had had some degree of recognition of the mind's nature, which is what is called the "clear appearance of the completion stage," since he was a small child. But he felt that in order to stabilize this and to expand its clarity he would have to use the methods of the generation stage. He felt that the technique of the generation stage with all of its otherwise troublesome details was actually an ideal method leading to the clarification of whatever recognition you might have of your mind's nature. In his autobiography Mipham Rinpoche said that he was unable to generate enough of a practice of generation stage to achieve his wish. But he felt that the most important method in order to generate stable completion stage realization was the intense practice of the clear visualization of the generation stage.

Question: When it is said that the white and red elements in the form of the vital drops in the head and the navel descend and ascend and dissolve together when one dies, are these something other than egg and sperm.

Thrangu Rinpoche: Actually, the original

sperm and ovum have grown to form your whole body. The drops are not so much the original sperm and ovum as they are the essence or

There are specific deities connected with the wisdom which lies at the root of each klesha. For example, in the text you will see that it suggests, if afflicted by desire, you visualize yourself as Amitabha

kernel of them, or you could say the kernel or essence of what has grown out of them. During your life, according to tantric physiology, the kernel of the white aspect, which you received from your father, is housed inside your head, close to the top. The kernel or essence of the red aspect, which you received from your mother, is seated below your navel, in the abdomen. In between these two is the basic prana that keeps you alive. These two actually keep the prana from escaping. When you die, this prana collapses in on itself into the heart. While these two keep the prana from escaping, the prana itself keeps the one up and the other down. When the prana withdraws into the heart they then go in with

it. The white drop comes down from the head and the red drop comes up from the abdomen and they meet at the heart.

Question: So the prana is going between the two?

Translator: That specific prana. It is called the life wind.

Question: My question goes back to something you were saying earlier about using a particular practice to combat desire. It was, I think, to use Chakrasamvara to combat desire. Are there particular deities that one uses to combat, for instance, pride or some of the other kleshas? Or is it the case that any one of them will overcome all of the kleshas?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Both are true. There are specific deities connected with the wisdom which lies at the root of each of the klesha. For

example, in the text you will see that it suggests, if afflicted by desire, you visualize yourself as Amitabha. By extension we would say, therefore, if afflicted by bewilderment, Vairochana; by anger, Aksobhya; by pride, Ratnasambhava; by jealousy, Amogasiddhi. When it mentions Chakrasamvara, that is an example. It does not mean that you specifically need to use the deity Chakrasamvara. Visualizing yourself as Chakrasamvara with his consort will serve not only as a remedy for the afflictions of desire but for any other affliction as well.

Question: I have a question about the relationship between the different types of purifications and the Chenrezig practice. Since the yidam is initially visualized outside of yourself and only very late in the practice do you become the deity, does that mean that all the various purifications of womb birth and prior bardos and prior death occur at the time of the visualization of the external Chenrezig?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Basically, it is not very specific in that practice. Through the power of your faith directed to the Chenrezig visualized above you, at a certain point in the practice you and all beings take the form Chenrezig. In that case the visualization of yourself is in the form of the deity complete in an instant of recollection. So there is no specific correlation here with the point at which the practice is purified, what event or moment, and so on. But basically you could say that when you become the deity that is purifying this birth.

Question: Rinpoche, at what level does supplication work? When we talk about supplicating gurus, teachers of the lineage that have died, and dharmapalas, how is that working?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Supplication produces blessing, and although the blessing is understood as something that is given to you, something that somehow engulfs you from outside, in fact blessing really is not given to you at all. When you supplicate, you generate faith and devotion. That faith and devotion cause the appearance of what we call blessing.

Question: Rinpoche, in terms of generation practice itself, it seems to be dealing with body, speech and mind. I am curious as to what part of the generation stage practice actually purifies relationships with our world and the inhabitants in it, family and friends and those around us?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Because your connection to others, whether it is a positive or a negative one, is a part of your interaction with the world in general, your interactions are all purified by the homage, offering, and praise sections of the sadhana, whatever it is.

Question: Could one person settle on one deity and try to do this completely, or do you try to practice with as many deities as possible?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It does not matter. It is a question of individual taste and interest. Some people naturally find themselves utterly devoted to the practice of one deity. Then it is perfectly possible under those circumstances to pursue that one practice until through it you attain the final result. Other people find that they are naturally attracted to combining the practices of different deities. They might practice two or three or even more than that. There is nothing wrong with that either. By combining the practice of these different deities, they will achieve the same result as

Some people naturally find themselves utterly devoted to the practice of one deity. Then it is perfectly possible under those circumstances to pursue that one practice until through it you attain the final result

the other person does with one.

Question: Could I ask a follow up question, Rinpoche? It occurred to me in what you said about purifying relationships with others by paying homage and making offerings that that has to do with sacred outlook, the way one looks at other beings. It is something I find personally difficult to do when seeing the suffering that we inflict upon each other sometimes in this life. It is hard to maintain a sacred outlook towards others in that way. Is there a key to that in some sense?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Sacred outlook is something you cultivate in order to remove your own confusion. It is not really a method for helping others directly. In any case, whatever arises in your ordinary deluded perception is equally deluded perception. Negative situations are not more difficult to purify than others are. Normally, whatever you experience is a deluded projection, and has to be acknowledged as such and transcended or transformed with the application of sacred outlook. This is no more or less true of any one type of deluded perception than any other.

Question: I haven't had much exposure to dharmapalas, and I would like to understand more. You said that basically they help us with our activities and that is very intriguing, but it wasn't enough to really give me a clear sense. Could you say more or refer me to another text in which I could find out more about this?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Dharmapalas are what we would call great beings who sometimes manifest as humans and sometimes, especially when we refer to them as dharmapalas or dharma protectors, manifest as nonhuman. In their manifestation as nonhuman, which is a kind of a demon-

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stration of their wisdom or manifestation in external form of their wisdom, they are in a position to actively assist us. So if you ask for their assistance, for their help in the removal of impediments to your practice and in similar areas, then they can actually provide some help or assistance. However, for this process to occur there has to be some kind of a connection made between you and the dharmapalas. Principally this connection is made by your involvement with dharma itself. Through practicing dharma you become in some sense their responsibility and then they will be responsive to your requests for assistance.

Question: Are they what we call devas?

Thrangu Rinpoche: The terms deva and devi are just the Sanskrit for male deity and female deity, or god and goddess. They are used to refer to two types of things. The one type of thing is a being, a mundane being called a deva or devi. They can be gods of the desire realm, gods of the form realm, or gods of the formless realm. They are mundane, samsaric beings. The other type of being that is referred to as "lha" or deva or devi or deity is supermundane, beyond the world. These are beings who have such wisdom and especially such stable bodhicitta—commitment to the welfare of others and to the benefiting of the teachings—that they are entirely unlike a mundane being. Dharmapalas can be thought of as beings who are completely and utterly committed to the welfare of others and, therefore, are very active in accomplishing their welfare.

You could say that dharmapalas are included within the class of phenomena that we could call devas or devis, just as some awakened people are included within the class of what we could call humans. But not all humans are awakened

and not all devas or devis are dharmapalas. There are all different sorts of people. Some people are wonderful, some people are horrific, and there is everything in between. It is the same way with devas and devis. There are wonderful devas and devis, horrific devas and devis, and everything in between. Dharmapalas are a kind of wonderful deva or devi.

Question: I keep thinking about science and DNA and how we are working with and altering things, such as cloning. In a clone, would the clone be the same being since the clone has the same DNA?

Thrangu Rinpoche: In the case of cloning, the clone would be a different being. The clone would not be the same sentient being. You do not have to go as far as cloning. It is really the same process of what happens when someone is conceived as a human being. The substances come from their parents but the child is a different being from the parents. In the same way, if you clone somebody, then the substance would come from one body but that does not mean that the person that develops as the clone is the same person. It is a different person.

Translator: Rinpoche also gave the example of

There are all different sorts of people. Some people are wonderful, some people are horrific, and there is everything in between. It is the same way with devas and devis


what is considered to be the emergence of insects from trees, in which an insect, before it is an insect, starts out as part of a tree and actually becomes an insect. I am not sure what he is referring to. It is like a branch of the tree that breaks off, gets up, and walks away.

Question: When the buddha is visualized and reappears from the drop, is the buddha an adult or a child or an infant?

Thrangu Rinpoche: In the generation stage, even though it corresponds to the different stages of life, you do not visualize the deity first as a little baby deity and then as a child deity, an adolescent deity, and finally a mature deity. You only take it so far. You do not take it *that* far. You're trying to purify all of those appearances. In order to do that, there has to be some degree of correspondence, but not to that

degree.

Question: Now they are capable of fertilizing eggs and keeping them in frozen state for a long time. I was wondering what becomes of the mental consciousness in that state?

Thrangu Rinpoche: I do not know. You'd have to ask the scientists who are doing that. 

Creation and Completion

The Eight Consciousnesses as Deluded Aspects Of Mind and as Buddha Nature Itself



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Creation and Completion.

Our most common practice is tranquillity meditation or shamatha. As is well known, the need for shamatha practice is based on the fact that our minds are normally quite agitated by thoughts. We practice shamatha in order to generate a state of mental stability. While the technique of shamatha and the technique of the generation stage are distinct—in that in the one your mind is resting on something very simple and neutral as an object, and in the other your mind is immersed in the elaborate visualization of the form of the deity—the function of these two techniques is the same. In the practice of shamatha, you cultivate a state of attention which transcends the two defects of excessive tension and excessive relaxation, and you do the same thing in the practice of the generation stage. In the visualization of the form of the deity, or the visualization of the syllables of the mantra, and so forth, you cultivate the same type of attention as is cultivated in shamatha practice. In the generation stage, if your mind is too tight, too tense, then the natural clarity of the visualization will be dimin-

ished; and if your mind is too relaxed, you will then become distracted from the visualization. So while the techniques are distinct, the function of shamatha and the function of the generation stage are fundamentally the same.

However, the generation stage does have a characteristic or feature which is not overtly present in shamatha practice.

Through the practice of the generation stage, you not only generate the ability to rest the mind at will, but, because of the technique of the generation stage, you also bring out the mind's innate clarity or capacity for lucidity. This is especially brought out in the generation stage, not only by the technique or visualization itself, which obviously uses and augments the mind's clarity, but also by the constant variation in the visualization. In generation-stage practice you move from one thing to another. For example, at one point you visualize the invitation of the *jnanasattvas*, and at another point you visualize the radiating out and gathering in of light rays, and so on. This change of focus or object in the visualization actually produces new *samadhis* or new meditative absorptions at each step. These enhance the development of mental clarity and the stability of *samadhi* in general. So the generation stage not only is a technique which can generate a state of shamatha, but it also assists in the development of mental clarity. For that and other reasons it is absolutely necessary to practice the generation stage.

However, the generation stage is never practiced by itself or in isolation. It always has to be combined with and succeeded by the practice of the completion stage. The relationship between the generation and completion stages in the vajrayana is very similar to the relationship between shamatha and vipashyana in the sutrayana. In fact, we would have to say that the completion stage in vajrayana is in some respect

The relationship between the generation and completion stages in the vajrayana is very similar to the relationship between shamatha and vipashyana in the sutrayana

identical to the vipashyana that is taught in the sutrayana. "In some respect" means that the techniques can be quite different. The techniques of the completion stage are not necessarily identical with the techniques of vipashyana, but the function of the completion stage and the function of vipashyana are the same. Therefore,

we can consider the completion stage to be a variety of vipashyana or insight meditation. In that context what we mean by vipashyana and what we mean by the completion stage is meditation on the nature of one's mind. When we use this term to refer to the completion stage we are talking about that style of meditation that is characteristic of the tradition of uncommon instruction.

To make this clear, there are two types of vipashyana practice. One takes inferential valid cognition as the path and the other takes direct valid cognition as the path. Generally speaking, characteristic of the sutras is the practice of taking inferential valid cognition as one's technique. This consists of thinking about emptiness and using logical reasoning to determine the emptiness of all things. Starting with the fact that all relative truths are interdependent, one reasons the validity of emptiness. In that type of practice, emptiness is not an object of direct experience. One examines things, and gradually through one's examination one comes to a conviction that everything is empty. One then cultivates and stabilizes that conviction until gradually—although after a very long time—it becomes a clear and definite recognition of emptiness. Sometimes this practice of taking inferential valid cognition as the path is also called "analytic meditation." Analytic mediation is very stable and helpful and very good, but it is not very quick. It takes a very long time. Therefore, in vajrayana practice one does not do analytic meditation. One emphasizes the practice of

direct valid cognition.

If one takes direct valid cognition as the path, one does not emphasize thinking about the nature of external things. From the point of view of vajrayana meditation, it is okay if external things are empty and it is okay if they are not. We do not particularly worry about it because the source of all of our experience—all of our happiness and suffering—that which we use in practice and that which experiences all pleasant and unpleasant things, is our mind. Therefore, in vajrayana practice we are concerned principally with the mind itself. In fact, not only is it more important to ascertain the nature of the mind, but it is also easier, because, while external things are not that easy to realize as empty, the mind, just as it is, is an obvious embodiment or demonstration of dharmata, an obvious embodiment of emptiness. What this means is that, while you cannot in the beginning directly see the emptiness of external things, you can from the beginning directly see the emptiness of your own mind. When you take the path of direct valid cognition as a practice, the view, the emptiness of mind, is not determined through some kind of analysis or logical reasoning but by looking directly at your own mind. This is the characteristic approach of all vajrayana meditation. Therefore, it is said that if you know the nature of your mind, this alone will accomplish your aim and practice. As long as you do not, no other practice and no other knowledge will be of any significant help. The many renowned traditions of this type of meditation, such as mahamudra, the great perfection, and the great middle way, and other terms pertinent to these traditions, such as simplicity, freedom from elaboration, and so on, all refer to the practice or cultivation of meditation on this nature. The meditation on the nature of mind is essential.

If you know the nature of your mind, this alone will accomplish your aim and practice. As long as you do not, no other practice and no other knowledge will be of any significant help

In this context and up to this point, the text makes no distinction between what we could call pure mind or the pure aspect of mind and the impure aspect of mind. It is pointed out at this point that there are some individuals who, because of their great or intense devotion, have a recognition or realization of the mind's nature that occurs spontaneously, that arises from within. Such a person, once they have attained that recognition, has no need to worry about learning the difference between the pure aspect of mind and the impure aspect of mind, how they work, how they manifest, and so on. Since they have already realized the point which understanding those things is supposed to lead to, they have no need to go back and learn those things.

However, for most people it is difficult to generate a realization spontaneously through devotion alone. Most practitioners have the need to learn at least a little bit about how mind works. If you do not, then there is a danger that your meditation will not be a recognition of the nature of mind, but will consist simply of immersing yourself in some kind of blank neutrality or mental abstraction. While that is not particularly harmful, it is also not particularly helpful and is somewhat of a shame, a waste of time. Therefore, the text next explains a little bit about how mind works.

What we could call the impure or deluded aspect of mind is referred to as "consciousness." Generally speaking, consciousness is enumerated as being of eight classes or groups. Before going into the details of the consciousness, it is necessary to understand the basic view of cognition that is characteristic of buddhadharma. The term cognition in Sanskrit is "jnana." Jnana just means cognition, the capacity to cognize, an awareness. Literally speaking, in Tibetan one would translate "jnana" as

“shepa,” or “knowing.” However it is interesting to observe that when the teachings were translated into Tibetan, “jnana” was usually translated not as “shepa,” but as “yeshe.” “Ye” means primordial. The prefix “ye” was added by the Tibetan translators to point out that cognition, that mere clarity, cognitive clarity itself, in and of itself, has been there from the very beginning. Therefore they translated “cognition” as “primordial cognition.” But the term “jnana” in itself does not have this word “primordial,” so it refers simply to cognition.

The term for “consciousness,” which is a specific type of cognition, is “vijñana.” It is the term for “cognition,” “jnana,” with the prefix “vi,” which means complete or fully developed. This is a more specific term than cognition, and although it may sound like a positive thing to say “fully developed cognition,” in this context it is actually somewhat pejorative, because it refers to cognition that has become developed in the sense of becoming coarsened. This type of cognition, full cognition, or consciousness is what is divided into eight groups or eight classes. All of these eight classes, groups, or types of consciousnesses are considered manifestations of the mind’s impurity. They are eight types of consciousnesses that arise when a mind does not recognize its own nature. The basic idea of the development of consciousness is that, when a mind does not recognize its own nature, its inherent lucidity, which is just a mere cognition, it runs wild. And running wild, it becomes coarse or develops into deluded cognition or consciousness, which is characteristic of samsara. Nevertheless, in the midst of all of this confusion, the nature of these consciousnesses, the nature of this deluded mind, is unchanged. This unchanging nature of the mind is called “the pure all-basis,” as opposed to the “all-basis consciousness,” which is one of the eight consciousnesses. That pure all-basis is mere cognition, fundamental jnana itself. Therefore,

All of these eight types of consciousness are considered manifestations of the mind’s impurity

when you wish to make a distinction between the mind in its impure manifestations and the nature of the mind, mind itself, then mind [impure] will be called “sem,” and the mind itself, that mere cognition itself, will be called “sem nyi,” mind in itself.

With regard to the eight consciousnesses, the first five are called the “consciousnesses of the five gates.” The gates are the five senses. They are called gates because they seem to be the

gates through which your mind encounters that which is outside your body. So they are like gates through which your mind can project itself or expand itself beyond the body. The first of the five gates is the eyes. The eyes are the organic basis for the eye consciousness. The eyes encounter as their object visible form, color, and shape. When the eyes encounter such an object, what is generated is called the “eye or visual consciousness.” That is the

first of the eight consciousnesses. The other four are similar to that. The second consciousness is connected with the ears. When the ears encounter their object, which are sounds of all types, what is generated is called the “ear consciousness” or “auditory consciousness.” The third is connected with the nose. When the nose encounters its object, which are smells of all types, what is generated is called the “nose or olfactory consciousness.” The fourth is the tongue. When the tongue encounters its object, tastes of all types, such as sweet and sour, bitter and so on, what is generated is called the “tongue or taste consciousness.” The fifth one is the whole body as an organ of tactile sensation. When the whole body encounters its object, tactile sensation, what is generated is called the “body or tactile consciousness.” These five consciousnesses operating through the five senses or five gates experience their objects directly. The eye consciousness actually sees shapes and colors, the ear consciousness actually detects or experiences sounds, the olfactory consciousness actu-

ally smells, and so on. It is direct experience. Therefore, these consciousnesses are nonconceptual. These consciousnesses themselves do not generate any thought about the characteristics of what they experience. The five sense consciousnesses experience external objects directly and do so in a way that is nonconceptual. "Nonconceptual" means that they do not have any thought about the characteristics of what they experience. They do not conceptually recognize the things that they perceive or experience.

That which thinks about what is experienced by the five senses, that which conceptually

recognizes them as such and such, that which conceives of them as good and bad, in short, that which thinks in any way whatsoever, is the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness. The mental consciousness does not work with or appear on the basis of a specific sense organ like the other five. It inhabits the body in a general way and it is that which thinks. Its function is thinking. It is normally enumerated as the sixth consciousness when you go through them one by one. In general, you start with the eye consciousness, you go through the five senses, and the mental consciousness is called the sixth. The fundamental distinction between it and the others is that the five sense

consciousnesses, since they engage only in the direct experience of their objects, can only experience the present. For example, the eye consciousness only sees what is there now. It does not see what was there in the past. It does not see what will be there in the future. This is also true of the ear consciousness, and so on. The five sense consciousnesses are not capable of thinking about their objects. Not only can they not think about the past or the future, they do not even conceptualize or think about the present.

The sixth consciousness on the other hand can and does think about things. The sixth consciousness thinks of the past, both the distant and recent past. It thinks about the present, and it thinks about the future, both the proximate and distant future. But while it is capable of thinking, it is not capable of directly experiencing things the way that the sense consciousnesses do. The sixth consciousness does not directly experience things. It generates a generality or abstraction on the basis of the things that are experienced by the five sense consciousnesses. This means that when the five sense consciousnesses experience something, it

becomes an object of thought for the sixth consciousness, not in the form of what is actually experienced but in the form of a conceptual generality or generalization or abstraction that is created by the sixth consciousness as a duplicate or replica of what was experienced by that particular sense consciousness. For example, when I look at the glass that is on the table in front of me, my eyes directly see that glass, but my sixth consciousness, my mental consciousness does not directly see it. It generates a generality or abstraction based upon what my eyes have seen, that it recognizes, that it thinks about, thinks of as good or bad, or having such and such shape and

The sixth consciousness does not directly experience things. It generates a generality or abstraction on the basis of the things that are experienced by the five sense consciousnesses

so on.

Those six consciousnesses are relatively easy to detect or observe because they are vivid in their manifestation or function. The other two consciousnesses are less easy to observe. For one thing the six consciousnesses start and stop in their operation. They are generated by certain conditions and when those conditions are no longer present they temporarily stop functioning. Therefore the six consciousnesses are called "inconstant" consciousnesses. They are not constantly there. They are generated as they

arise. The other two consciousnesses are called “constant” consciousnesses. Not only are they constant, which means that they are always operating, but they are also much less observable.

The seventh consciousness is called the “afflicted consciousness.” This refers to the subtle or most basic level of mental affliction or klesha. This does not refer to coarse kleshas. This refers to the root of kleshas. Specifically, the afflicted consciousness is the most subtle level of fixation on a self. Again this is not coarse fixation on a self. This is the subtle level of fixation on a self that is unfluctuatingly present even when one is asleep. When sometimes you have a sense of self and you think “I,” that is not an operation of the seventh consciousness. That is the sixth consciousness thinking. The seventh consciousness is present until you attain the levels of an arya, or superior, such as the first bodhisattva level and so on. Although it is not directly observable itself, it is the basis for all coarse fixation on a self and, therefore, for all coarse kleshas.

The eighth consciousness is called the “alaya vijnana” or “all-basis consciousness.” It is called the all-basis because it is the basis or ground for the arising of all other types of consciousness. It is that fundamental clarity of consciousness or cognitive lucidity of consciousness which has been there from the beginning. Being the capacity for conscious experience, it is the ground for the arising of eye consciousness, ear consciousness, etc. It is, like the seventh, constantly present, constantly operating, and it persists until the attainment of final awakening or buddhahood.

Along with the eight consciousnesses there is something else that is often mentioned. This is

called the “immediate mind.” The immediate mind is not a separate consciousness. It is the function of the impure mind that links the operations of one consciousness to another. It is that impulse or force of habit that causes the six consciousnesses to arise from the ground of the all basis and the afflicted consciousness. It is that which causes the mental consciousness to

arise on the basis of a sense perception, and so on. It is an identifiable function of the impure mind, but is not in itself a separate consciousness. Therefore, there are only eight types of impure consciousness. It is not considered to be a ninth.

In regard to the immediate mind, many texts present it as that which is generated by the cessation of a previous instant of consciousness and which links one type of consciousness to another. In the particular presentation found in the *Profound Inner Meaning* by the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Ranjung Dorje, the immediate mind is presented as that which causes the lack of recognition of dharmata or lack of recognition of the nature of things, in which case it would be considered an aspect of the seventh consciousness. The seventh consciousness in that way of understanding has an inward-directed aspect to it, which is the

aspect of the seventh consciousness that causes the other consciousnesses to arise and function. That is the immediate mind.

In certain sutras you will see the use of the term “receptive consciousness.” Receptive consciousness refers to the capacity of the all-basis consciousness to receive and store impressions. Therefore, it is synonymous with the all-basis consciousness. In short, all of the functions or manifestations of the impure or deluded mind are included in the eight consciousnesses.

The seventh consciousness is called the ‘afflicted consciousness.’ This refers to the subtle or most basic level of mental affliction or klesha. . . . This is the subtle level of fixation on a self that is unfluctuatingly present even when one is asleep

There are different ways that these eight consciousnesses can be explained. In this text the style of explanation follows that of the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, especially that of his book, *The Profound Inner Meaning*, which was written as an explanation of the theoretical underpinning of the Six Dharmas of Naropa and as clarification of certain points in that, called “Distinguishing Between Consciousness and Wisdom.”

What is it that performs meditation? Well, the first five sense consciousnesses are nonconceptual, so they neither require nor are capable of meditation. From among the two types of meditation in general, in the case of shamatha practice, that which mediates is the sixth consciousness. Shamatha practice is concerned with the pacification of thoughts and that which thinks is the sixth consciousness. The process of shamatha consists of a mindful relaxation of the thinking process of the six consciousness. In the case of vipashyana however, meditation is performed by and involves the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses.

From the point of view of meditation, one would have to say that although one can distinguish the sixth, seventh, and eighth as distinct in their degrees of manifestation or obvious cognitive clarity, from their own point of view they are internally basically the same. The practice of vipashyana consists of keeping or protecting the sixth, seventh and eighth consciousnesses from delusion and rather than running wild in delusion allowing them to rest in their natural or basic state. Through doing this you come to experience or know the nature of all three, i.e., the mental consciousness, the afflicted consciousness, and the all-basis consciousness. For that reason, in vipashyana practice the most important thing is

the recognition of the nature of mind or the nature of things. Therefore, the object of meditation in vipashyana is the nature of those consciousnesses.

The eight consciousnesses are impure in how they appear or manifest, since they manifest as delusion based upon the mind’s projection of objects. But in how they are, in their nature,

they are unchanging. The basic nature of the mind, of which they are the permutations or manifestations, is pure in and of itself. Therefore, we find the often repeated phrase, “the all-basis is virtuous or good in its nature.” This idea of the fundamental goodness of the all-basis refers not to the deluded all-basis consciousness but to the all-basis wisdom, which is the pure aspect of what in the context of delusion, is the all-basis consciousness. This pure aspect has never been lost in delusion, which simply means that the nature of the mind has been mistaken, but that that nature itself has never been changed or corrupted by the mistake. While the manifestation of your mind as a variety within cognitive clarity seems to be deluded, if you look for this delusion you will not find it anywhere. If you look for some

actual substantial presence of this deluded clarity, there is nothing there. Yet you cannot say that your mind is a dead or static nothingness, because there is the experience and presence of cognitive clarity. This basic way the mind really is—the fact that it is a cognitive lucidity that is free of any kind of substantial existence—is what is called “buddha nature,” and that, of course, is pure. That is what we attempt to realize or fully experience through the practice of meditation.

The eight consciousnesses are the deluded aspect of mind, yet their nature is buddha nature itself. This is the reason why in practice it

In the case of shamatha practice, that which meditates is the sixth consciousness.

... In the case of vipashyana, however, meditation is performed by and involves the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses

is important not to follow confused or deluded projections but to look at the nature of the mind instead. If you attend to the delusion of mind, then that delusion will be reinforced; but if you look at the nature of that delusion, the nature of that deluded mind, then you see through it. By means of this, you gradually become free from this delusion, leading both to extraordinary attainment of samadhi and eventually to buddhahood. In the case of either extraordinary samadhi or buddhahood, because of the recognition of the mind's nature, the thoughts and kleshas and so on that arise have no effect; they do not in any way obscure or prevent the recognition of that nature.

This does not mean that the lucidity that is manifested as delusion is going to cease, because it is not the case that by seeing the emptiness of mind, the manifestation of mind disappears or stops. It has always been empty; it is not by seeing it that it becomes more empty. What is recognized is that while mind is empty of any substantial existence, it is a cognitive lucidity. While being lucid, it is empty, and while being empty, it is lucid. That is how it remains.

You might ask, "Since the mind's nature is always pure and since it does not change, why then does the confusion of the eight consciousnesses arise in the first place?" The confusion or delusion of the mind is like mistaking a mottled rope to be a snake. From the point of view of confusion, we would say that at the moment at which you first mistake that rope to be a snake, confusion starts, and at the moment at which you come to recognize that the mottled rope is merely a mottled rope and not a snake, you are liberated from confusion. From the point of view of your delusion or your confusion, there is a period of delusion and there is the possibility of liberation. Nevertheless, as strongly as you might believe that that mottled rope is a snake, the mottled rope itself has never been turned

Not experiencing
the mind as it is,
we look out or
away from it.
Looking away
from mind, we
generate
delusions

into a snake by your delusion about it. It is unchanging. Whether or not you recognize it as a rope, whether or not you mistake it to be a snake, that rope has always been a rope. It has never become and never will become a snake.

In this image, one would say that the rope was never a snake at all. In what this image represents, then one would say that although we mistake mind to be the eight consciousnesses and in that way generate the appearance or experience of these eight consciousnesses and their delusion, the mind has always been empty. Therefore, the nature of the mind, that emptiness, is what we call buddha nature. Even though we do not experience that and instead experience the mind as the eight consciousnesses, in fact the mind has always been that emptiness or buddha nature. Not experiencing the mind as it is, we look out or away from it. Looking away from mind, we generate delusion.

As for when this began, it is beginningless. The delusion has always been there along with the fundamental nature of the mind. To use another image as an example: The mind in itself, the mind as not inherently deluded cognition, is like a mirror. The nature of that mirror is to reflect. It is not the nature of that mirror to be obscured. Nevertheless, this mirror, from the very beginning has been covered by some kind of rust or grime, which is there along with it even though it is not in itself the mirror's fundamental nature or characteristic. The grime is like the all-basis consciousness. Because there is a little bit of tarnish, then over time the tarnish increases or grows and that becomes the placement of further habits in the all-basis and the generation of the obscurations that are the mental afflictions, which is like the afflictive obscurations developing out of the cognitive obscuration. Nevertheless, the nature, not only of the ground itself but of the all-basis consciousness is always emptiness. What occurs in the absence of recognition, in the absence of

awareness of the true nature of one's mind, is that the emptiness of mind, not being recognized as what it is, is mistaken to be a self. So the emptiness aspect, or the empty essence of mind, is the basis for designation of the imputed self. But mind is not just empty. It is cognitive lucidity that is empty. The cognitive lucidity, in its intensity, is mistaken to be an object, is mistaken to be external to this imputed self. On the basis of the two main characteristics of mind, emptiness and lucidity, there is the designation of self and other, or subject and object.

The way in which we generate the presence or assume the existence of objects on the basis of the lucidity of mind is like what happens to us when we go to sleep. When you go to sleep there is a state which in English I think is called "hypnogogic." Before you start to dream, the images that will eventually arise as dream images are still thoughts. During the period when they are thoughts, they are simply things that are arising in your mind. But as you become more and more asleep, you mistake these thoughts that are arising for actually occurring events. In other words, the thoughts themselves become images that are experienced as objects; this is how thoughts become dreams. This is very similar to the way in which, under the sway of ignorance, we mistake the lucidity or clarity of mind to be an object external to ourselves. On the basis of the presence of that dualism, that imputation of self and other, the six consciousnesses are brought up or caused to become active through the function of the immediate mind.

When in that way the six consciousnesses arise, then there occurs the appearance of the sense organs encountering their objects. As far as the way things appear to function, there is definitely the appearance in our experience of external objects which are encountered by the sense organs, producing consciousness or aware-

ness of that object. According to how things really are, in fact what we perceive as external objects and what we perceive as the internal faculties are really aspects of the consciousnesses themselves. For example, when your eyes see form, then what we would normally say is occurring is that there is an external object which your eyes are capable of encountering. Through the encounter between the eye and the object, there is generated a visual consciousness.

From the point of view of the way things are, what you perceive as external form is the objective or lucidity aspect of the visual consciousness itself; i.e., the eye consciousness itself appears as form. The emptiness aspect of the eye consciousness is what you experience as, or presume to be the subject experiencing that imputed object. The way a consciousness actually manifests as its apparent object, is like, for example, when you dream of mountains and beings and react to them with fear and happiness and joy and boredom and everything else. In our normal daytime experience these things do seem external to us. We really think and really believe that this lucidity aspect of the mind really is out there, really is external form and so on. We really believe and really experience it in this way—that the emptiness aspect of mind really is in here and really is the experiencer, that which experiences the object.

The interaction of all of this, the emergence of the six consciousnesses and, therefore, the appearance of the subjects and objects in those six consciousnesses, is all arranged or brought about by the immediate mind. Nevertheless, the experience of the five sense consciousnesses is direct and nonconceptual. As I explained earlier, it has no connection with past or future. On the basis of the experience, some sensation is generated. The sensation causes the emergence of the sixth consciousness, which then generates

On the basis of the two main characteristics of mind, emptiness and lucidity, there is the designation of self and other, or subject and object

conceptuality about the experience. The sensation is labeled as pleasant, unpleasant, good, bad, and so on, and then there is a recognition of the characteristics of the object. That is how confusion happens.

Question: In the root text, it states that “the instantaneous mind moves the six consciousness groups and causes the meeting of object and organ,” and then further down it talks about mistaking the luminous aspect for form and the empty aspect for the organ. What is the meaning of organ?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It means the sense organs themselves. The projection of the existence of sense organs is based upon the mistaken apprehension of the emptiness aspect of consciousness as a subject and, therefore, as a sense organ. As far as how things appear, we do have sense organs. For example, the eye is said to be like a flax flower in the structure of the eye, the optic nerve, I think it is called. Then the ears are like a pattern in birch bark, and so on. There is an image for each one of the sense organs. This is how they appear. We have functioning senses. So the organs in that case are the organic basis for sense perception. But as far as how things are, the development and experience of sense organs, like the development and experience of sense objects, is a projection based upon the mistaken apprehension of the emptiness of consciousness as a self.

Question: I was wondering if you could go over the point about mistaking luminosity for an external object. That is thinking that phenomena are real? That is not denying, for example, that there is a tree outside, if there is really a tree outside?

Thrangu Rinpoche: There appears to be a tree,

but the reason there appears to be a tree is that we have a strong habit of the appearance of trees. Therefore we experience the appearance of trees. For example, in a dream there also appears to be a tree. The tree in a dream might be just as vivid as a tree we experience during a waking state, but we know that there is no tree in the dream. It is possible that the tree we experience in the waking state might be a projection also, because we experience what it is our habit to experience.

Question: Is it true that the person who knows dream yoga can approach the real world in the same way as one would in a dream? For instance, could one make the tree disappear?

Thrangu Rinpoche: I have no experience of this, but they say so. [laughter]

There appears to be a tree, but the reason there appears to be a tree is that we have a strong habit of the appearance of trees

Question: How is it that we all see the tree in the same place?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Common experience is the experience by different individuals of a similar thing which they can agree upon as a shared experience. It is like having a vase in the middle of a table surrounded by one hundred mirrors. Each of those mirrors is reflecting the same vase but the image contained in each mirror is particular or individual to that mirror. In the same way, even though different people may see

the same thing, what I experience in my mind is particular to my mind, as it is my experience, and what you experience in your mind is particular to your mind, as it is your experience.

Question: Rinpoche, what is the relationship of compassion to the eight consciousnesses? Can the function of immediate mind be used to liberate oneself?

Thrangu Rinpoche: With regard to compassion,

manifest compassion arises in the sixth consciousness. The habit of compassion resides in the eighth consciousness. In a sense, one could say that even the seventh consciousness has some kind of compassion present within it. The five sense consciousnesses are nonconceptual and have no connection to compassion particularly. With regard to the role of the immediate mind in the path, it cannot be used for the accumulation of wisdom because the accumulation of wisdom is done through the meditative state, in which all of the processes of delusion are, at least temporarily, shut down, revealing one's innate wisdom. So the manner of the accumulation of wisdom, the manner of liberation itself, is the antithesis of the linking process that is the immediate mind.

On the other hand, the other aspect of the path, the accumulation of merit, does make use of the immediate mind. The immediate mind is used in the accumulation of positive karma, as in the accumulation of merit, where one makes offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas, just as it is used in the accumulation of negative karma. The reason why the immediate mind has its place in the merit aspect of the path but not in the wisdom aspect is that the merit aspect is concerned with the appearances of relative truth, not with the realities of absolute truth. Since the immediate mind is part of the workings of relative truth, it can still be used in that context.

Question: Is it possible to have direct experience through all five of the senses in the same instant?

Thrangu Rinpoche: The five sense consciousnesses, when they are functioning, are all functioning simultaneously. What is not functioning simultaneously is the apprehension of the experience of the sense consciousnesses

by the sixth consciousness, which tends to apprehend them only one at a time.

Question: I have a question about the instantaneous mind or the immediate mind. Is its presence the cause for the experiences of the five sense consciousnesses? Is the instantaneous mind always present?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Yes, because in the case of sensory experience, what the immediate mind does is produce the experiences, bringing them out of the all-basis like a messenger and then also returning the further habit produced by that reoccurrence of experience back into the all-basis. It is like when you go to the bank. The person who brings out or puts in your money for you is like the immediate mind.

Question: Also, in the root text the statement, "When the afflictive mind functions with the instantaneous mind, directed inwards, it leaves habitual patterns in the foundation," seems to refute the earlier statement when it was said that just the arising of anger does not create an imprint.

Thrangu Rinpoche: When you simply have a thought of a klesha, then it does not place a habit in the all-basis. The immediate mind does kind of grab it and stick it into the all-basis, but it is not a karmic habit. There are several types of habit. One type, karmic habit, is the imprint of an action; this will manifest as external experience. From among the various results of an action, this is a result of complete maturation. Klesha habit itself becomes kind of an obscuration, but it does not manifest as karma.

Question: Does that just make it easier for anger to arise again?

Accumulation of wisdom is done through the meditative state, in which all of the processes of delusion are, at least temporarily, shut down, revealing one's innate wisdom

Thrangu Rinpoche: When the thought of anger arises and is recognized, then the type of habit that it places is very subtle and does not even particularly promote further arising of thoughts of anger and certainly does not promote the arising of spite, which normally, unrecognized, anger would produce. When the term “the thought is liberated” is used, it basically means that that particular thought is not leading to further thoughts, not that it does not place any habit whatsoever.

Question: Going back to the discussion about the tree. Rinpoche, if we leave aside language and habit and look at things without our known concepts or our known way of looking at things, just seeing it for what it is, it does not have to be a tree. Is that what happens? Or are you saying that all things are imagined?

Thrangu Rinpoche: There are two ways to understand this. It depends on whether you are emphasizing the way things are or the way things appear. According to the way things appear, we would say that the imputation of the tree is a projection of your mind and that the basis for the imputation is not your mind, it is out there. According to how things appear that distinction would be made. But viewing it from the point of how things really are, we would say they are both your mind.

Question: Of the eight different kinds of consciousness, I am wondering if the seventh and

the eighth are those which move on into the bardo?

Thrangu Rinpoche: No, all of them do. In the bardo you have a mental body, and that mental body has its own mental forms of the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness as well. In the bardo you still sometimes see the things from your previous life, the places and people and so on, all kinds of different stuff.

To be more precise, there are several stages to the interval or the bardo. First, what happens as you die is that there is a dissolution process where the appearances of this life dissolve and then temporarily cease. Really there are two dissolutions: There is the physical dissolution, and there is a mental dissolution. At the end of these, at the end of the coarse and subtle dissolutions, immediately after death, there is the appearance of dharmata, the direct experience of the nature of things. However, if the person has not cultivated a recognition of dharmata in the preceding life, then they will not recognize it.

The mere appearance of it will not produce liberation. Nevertheless, in that phase of the bardo at which the dissolution process is complete and the appearance of the dharmata occurs, the six consciousnesses temporarily cease, and only the seventh and the eighth are still functioning. However, after that when they re-arise from that bardo of dharmata into a mental body, then all eight are back again. ㊦

In the bardo you have a mental body, and that mental body has its own mental forms of the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness as well



Creation and Completion

How to Work With the Emergence Of Confusion in Practice

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Creation and Completion.

Next the text deals with how to work with the emergence of confusion in practice. Practitioners—people practicing shamatha, vipashyana, the generation stage, and the completion stage—when the immediate mind first arises from the all-basis consciousness, attempt to rest in the practice, to rest in the samadhi that they have cultivated in practice. If they do so, then the progressive development or emergence of

confusion or delusion which begins with the arising of the immediate mind will not go any further than the immediate mind's arising itself. Essentially what you attempt to do here is rest in an awareness of buddha nature, which means to rest in the recognition of the empty nature and manifest lucidity of your mind. In the beginning, this has to be done mostly as an aspiration. Then as one gains experience, what are called the "example wisdom" and the "actual wisdom" will arise. The wisdom of example is not a full or direct recognition of buddha nature; it is a recognition of something that is similar to or is like buddha nature. When you are resting in a basic recognition of the emptiness-lucidity of your mind, that is the example wisdom. Through cultivating that, eventually you come to a decisive, direct insight into buddha nature; this is the actual wisdom. In any case, through resting in the meditative state when the immediate mind arises from the all-basis consciousness, it is possible for there to be some liberation from the process of delusion, simply because it will not go on and will not degenerate into coarse or fully manifest delusion.

For this to occur there has to be the maintenance of mindfulness and alertness. But at the same time, thoughts are the natural display of the mind, so this does not mean that thoughts will cease, that thoughts of attachment, aversion and bewilderment will not continue to arise. They will continue to arise, but if there is sufficient mindfulness and alertness, then upon their arising, their nature will be recognized, and so they will not be a cause for the accumulation of karma. The initial thought, being liberated through recognition, will not produce a second thought and a third thought and so on. In other words, thoughts continue to arise as the display, but they do not become the cause of the accumulation of further habits. The image given for this state of mind is that of a vase that has a hole in the bottom. Although you can still pour water into the vase you will never be able to fill it. Everything that is poured in just flows right back out again. In the same way, when there is the maintenance of this kind of mindfulness and

alertness, although thoughts come into the mind, they go right back out of it. If you can practice in this way, then gradually experience and realization will occur. The text goes into some detail about all of this but the essential point is what I have explained.

Next the text talks about how actually to practice. First of all, the essence of the completion stage practice is to rest in that natural lucidity or awareness which is the mind's characteristic. If you rest in that without fabrication, even though external appearances will still appear to you, they will appear as appearances that are without any substantiality, as appearance that is empty. This is really the fundamental or essential practice of the completion stage according to the vajrayana.

Within vajrayana there are many levels. There are, broadly speaking, four classes or levels of tantra in the Sarma tradition. Within the highest level there are three subdivisions, which are sometimes called the father tantra of method, the mother tantra of knowledge, and the nondual tantra of the essential meaning. It says in this text that from the father tantra on upwards and from the mahayoga on upwards—i.e., including the three higher tantras among the six levels or divisions in the Nyingma tradition—there is a recognition characterizing the view of those vehicles that everything that appears, even samsaric appearances, is the natural display of the mind and, therefore, partakes of its essential purity. It is fundamentally this view that distinguishes what are called the higher tantras from the lower.*

How do you actually meditate in this way? I

***Editor's note:** The lineages of the New Translation school (Kagyü, Sakya, and Gelug) enumerate four divisions of tantra or four tantric yantras: kriya yoga tantra, upa yoga tantra, yoga tantra, and anutarayoga tantra, the latter of which in turn is divided into father tantra, mother tantra, and nondual tantra. The Old Translation school (the Nyingma) enumerates six tantric yantras, which in turn are divided into three lower or outer tantras—kriya, upa, and yoga tantras—and three higher or inner tantras—maha yoga tantra, anu yoga tantra, and ati yoga tantra. Here, though the practices and the styles of practice are different, Rinpoche is indicating the equation of father tantra with maha yoga, the mother tantra with anu yoga, and the nondual tantra with ati yoga.

have explained how the eight consciousnesses function. The arising of thoughts within the mind is continuous and inexhaustible because of this functioning. Thoughts of past, present, and future continually arise in your mind like waves on the surface of a body of water. While mind in itself has no substance or substantiality whatsoever, it manifests as inexhaustible appearances, especially as the inexhaustible appearance or emergence of thoughts. The practice consists simply of not following thoughts but of resting your mind in whatever the technique is, whether it is shamatha or vipashyana, the generation stage visualization, or the completion stage itself. As for how you rest your mind, it needs to be in a way that is appropriate to your specific situation at that time, and this concerns the issue of effort—how much effort, how much relaxation.

Sometimes you will find that you have a problem with fatigue in meditation. Typically, if fatigue is a problem, you will find that at the beginning of a meditation session the practice will go well and by the end it will be difficult. That indicates that your mind is too tight and you are becoming exhausted by it. The solution in that case is to relax. At other times you will find that the meditation session will begin badly but will go well towards the end. In that case it indicates lack of effort. You

***Editor's note:** One's meditation goes "badly" at first because one's mindfulness is lazy, so that rather than being on the spot with whatever technique one is employing as the immediate mind produces or is about to produce the ever-changing display of confusion that arises in the mind, one allows oneself to become distracted, to drift off and get lost in thought. With slightly tighter mindfulness, one can "intercept" that tendency to distraction, thereby producing "good" meditation evenly throughout the session. This is not to imply that, if one's mind at the beginning of the session is terribly conflicted and turbulent and that by the end of the session the turbulence and conflict have subsided and/or their true nature has been seen, that this is erroneous meditation. It is merely to suggest that with tighter mindfulness the turbulence and conflict would subside or be seen through much earlier in the meditation session, and in the best case, from the very onset of the session.

The undercurrent is in fact a greater problem for meditation than either torpor or excitement and cannot be allowed to just continue on its own

are not trying hard enough. The solution is to try a little bit harder, to put more effort into it.* At other times you'll find that it is fine throughout the session. It is pretty even. In this case no adjustments should be made. The key to being able to do this properly is the application of mindfulness. Mindfulness is essentially the faculty of mind which we all possess that keeps us from forgetting what we are doing. When you lack mindfulness, you become distracted and you forget the object of meditation. When you apply mindfulness, this forgetfulness does not occur. Mindfulness in general is simply the faculty of memory, which is a normal mental arising. However, in this case it is applied in a very specific and conscious way. By applying the faculty of memory as mindfulness, one's meditation remains free from error or deviation. The manner of application is to establish a gentle watchful mindful-

ness. A mindfulness that is gentle and watchful means an alert mindfulness that is just enough. In other words, there is just enough intentional effort of mindfulness so that you do not become distracted. If you are able to maintain that level of mindfulness, then over time experience will occur.

However, a subtle problem can arise called "the dregs of mind" or the "dregs of awareness." This is the presence of subtle thoughts running through your mind even though your mind is basically at rest and there are no fully conscious thoughts present. These subtle thoughts are also called the "undercurrent," because they are an almost undetected current of thought that runs barely conscious. The undercurrent is in fact a greater problem for meditation than either torpor or excitement and cannot be allowed to just continue on its own. The solution to the problem of the undercurrent is to tighten up your mind a little bit, to bring out or enhance the lucidity of your mind, to strengthen or toughen

the edge of your awareness.

As important as being undistracted is, it is very difficult to develop a state of meditation in which for long periods of time you are never distracted. The reason why this is difficult is that we are untrained. We are unpracticed in meditation. It is not particularly that we are doing it wrong, it is that we need to practice a great deal in order to develop this level of freedom from distraction. So if you find that you still become distracted, do not be discouraged, you need to continue.

Typically your practice of meditation begins with shamatha; this is true particularly in the Kagyu tradition of mahamudra. We find in all texts of mahamudra instruction that one is to begin with establishing a stability or tranquillity of mind as a basis for the emergence of the recognition of the mind's nature. However, in the uncommon tradition of the great perfection—which means not all of the great perfection but within it, the uncommon aspect or tradition of it—there is a slightly different approach, wherein, instead of taking mind as the path, one takes awareness as the path. If one takes awareness as path, if at the beginning one succeeds in correctly identifying or recognizing rigpa or awareness, then it is not, strictly speaking, necessary to begin with the practice of shamatha, because the recognition itself has already been gained. One can simply rest in that and cultivate that. However, if there is no decisive and correct recognition of awareness, there is no way to go on with a path that takes awareness as a path. So, for most practitioners it is essential to begin with shamatha as is done in the mahamudra tradition so that there is a basis of tranquillity in the mind facilitating the emergence of that recognition.

The text advises at this point that when you are alone, when you are practicing in solitude, you should relax the mind and allow it to naturally come to rest in its own nature. When you

Essentially the tough edge or sharp edge of awareness is the same thing as what is meant by effort in meditation

are in company, when you are around others, which is a time at which you would tend more to become distracted, you should put more effort into it and strengthen the lucidity and alertness of your mindfulness. It is not really the case that mindfulness and alertness are actual things that are present within the mind; they are more faculties or processes of mind. Nevertheless, although they are faculties or processes of the mind, they do affect very much the state of the mind in meditation.

Question: Rinpoche, you mentioned tightening up our minds and toughening the edge of our awareness. Could you please say more to us about how we can do that?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Essentially the tough edge or sharp edge of awareness is the same thing as

what is meant by effort in meditation. Sometimes when we meditate, we practice it and experience it as conscious relaxation of the mind into the meditative state. At other times meditation involves a conscious and hard-headed refusal not to become distracted, as in the attitude, "I must not become distracted." At different times one should emphasize one or the other of these. In the situation where one needs to emphasize more effort, then one emphasizes a kind of a sharpness of one's awareness, which is produced by this hard-headed intention, which is the refusal to space out.

Question: Is there any reason why one gate would provide the undercurrent, the dregs of mind? My undercurrent is music. There is always music going on in my mind, and I do not even know it. It is very strange to be meditating for several minutes and then discover you are listening to "ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall."

Thrangu Rinpoche: It is probably happening

either because of a strong, deeply placed habit or because you like music a lot. The solution in either case is to generate the strong resolution, “I am meditating now, not listening to music. I refuse to listen to this.” In that way you resolve to cut your attachment to it. If you actually do not want it to be there, then you can stop it.

Question: It goes on before I am aware of its going on. The only thing I have found is to maintain a kind of steady sound in my head as I am meditating, to tie up that faculty so it does not produce music.

Thrangu Rinpoche: In that case it is because you are very attached to the experience of sound. Your mind is habituated to producing a replica of sound so that you can remember sound, so that you can think about it. Therefore, it does it even when you have not particularly told it to.

Question: In the root text it says, “It is impossible for thoughts of attachment and aversion not to arise. However, if you rely on mindful awareness, discursive thoughts cannot accumulate karma.” Could you explain that?

Thrangu Rinpoche: The idea is that even as you maintain mindfulness and alertness, thoughts of attachment, aversion, and bewilderment will still continue to arise because the habits that produce their arising have not been completely eradicated yet. Nevertheless, if you have some recognition of your mind’s nature, then when any one of those thoughts arises, you will experience the mind’s nature in that thought, because the mind’s nature is also the nature of that thought. The thought is the display of that mind. Therefore, when you experience that, whatever the initial content of that thought may be, it is liberated. It will not produce a second thought that is connected with it.

In that way the karmic chain of thoughts is broken. That thought does not accumulate karma because its nature is recognized. The phrase, “although it is impossible for thoughts of attachment and aversion not to arise,” refers to that time in one’s training, the point at which one has some recognition of the mind’s nature but has not yet reached the ultimate state of liberation. When one reaches the ultimate state of liberation, then the kleshas are exhausted and will not arise at all. For a beginner—someone who has some recognition of the mind’s nature

but is not yet fully liberated—these thoughts will still arise, but they need not be allowed to accumulate karma.

Question: If the thought is an angry thought, what happens?

Thrangu Rinpoche: You do not accumulate karma just through one thought of anger. You accumulate karma when anger ripens and festers into spitefulness. For example, when you just see someone that bothers you and you experience a thought of aversion, if you do not carry it any further,

you do not accumulate karma. You accumulate karma when that thought of aversion leads to the actual thought, “Boy, I would really like to beat that person up. I would like to kill them. I would like to abuse them. I would like to harm them in all kinds of ways.” Then you really accumulate karma! [laughter]

Question: The normal or the conventional method of distinguishing sentient beings is by their physical basis, the bodies of sentient beings. If what we take as a physical object is merely lucidity and emptiness, what is it that distinguishes different sentient beings?

Thrangu Rinpoche: What distinguishes sentient beings are their individual minds, which are not objects of your experience and, therefore,

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are not projections of your mind. The bodies of sentient beings are things you can see and are, therefore, projections of your mind.

Question: Is there a space that minds exist in?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Basically what happens is that beings who have performed enough similar actions or actions performed in common with other beings will come to experience the world in a way that is similar enough that it can be an agreed upon reality. For example, you and I basically are likely to agree upon what we see in this room because we have gathered the types of karma which cause us to have similar types of physical perceptions.

Question: Sometimes when I am meditating, how I perceive it is as a major denseness. It does not necessarily feel like fatigue, and I even feel it on the top of my head. It is just a denseness. I'll conk out and then I'll come back. Eventually, by just persisting, it leaves. Right now there is a residue of denseness, and I call it a fog, and I want to know what is that?

Thrangu Rinpoche: This is really not uncommon, which is why it was so easy for me [the translator] to ask the question, because it is a one-word explanation. That kind of a feeling of denseness is one of a class of meditation experiences that is under the general category of torpor.

It is not so important to make a heroic effort on a given day when you are exhausted, to force yourself to practice, as it is to practice steadily over a long time

Question: If I do not have time during the day to meditate, and during the evening after I help my wife put the children to bed, although I am feeling a little tired, is it better to go ahead and rest or to try to work through that feeling of tiredness and try to practice at least for fifteen or twenty minutes?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It depends on exactly how tired you are. If you are just slightly exhausted then try to meditate. But if you are utterly exhausted then go to sleep. [laughter]

Question: That was my main question, where is the . . . ?

Translator: Where's the dividing line? [laughter]

Thrangu Rinpoche: When you try and it is hopeless, it is time to go to sleep. [laughter]

Question: I had read that one should not exhaust oneself with things that are not going to be of benefit, but to me practice is of great benefit, so that was the point of my question.

Rinpoche: The most important thing to understand about exertion in practice is that the long term is more important than the short term. It is not so important to make a heroic effort on a given day when you are exhausted, to force yourself to practice, as it is to practice steadily over a long time. 67

Creation and Completion

Cultivating Lucidity: No Meditation And No Distraction

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Creation and Completion.

So far, in discussing the completion stage, I have talked principally about one aspect of it. We could say that there are two aspects to the completion stage, two things we are trying to accomplish in it. One is to discover or generate some tranquility or stability in the mind. The other is to generate clarity or lucidity in the mind. The practice of generating stability in the mind is shamatha or tranquillity meditation and the practice of generating clarity or lucidity in the mind is vipashyana or insight meditation. The significance of shamatha is that for as long as your mind is not at rest there will be no clarity. There will be no lucidity. Therefore, it seems necessary to practice shamatha before one engages in the practice of vipashyana. As I have explained however, in certain traditions, especially in certain aspects of dzogchen or great perfection practice, because in

that approach one takes awareness rather than mind as the path, there is the notion that it is not, strictly speaking, necessary to precede the practice of dzogchen with the practice of shamatha. However, in that case the practice depends entirely upon an authentic recognition of the mind's nature. Although the instructions for generating that recognition in the dzogchen

tradition are especially profound, they will not necessarily work for someone who has not yet produced a stable state of shamatha. Therefore, while it is theoretically not necessary to precede the practice of dzogchen with the practice of shamatha, practically speaking, for most people it is helpful to begin with shamatha practice, which will enable one to generate a clear recognition.

Now I am going to talk about the other aspect of the completion stage, which is the vipashyana aspect, the cultivation of lucidity. In this text, the practice of cultivating lucidity is said to have two main points: no meditation and no distraction. By "no meditation," we mean that there is no fabrication in the



practice. One is not thinking, “I am meditating on this.” One is not attempting to determine what one discovers in meditation. One does not tell oneself that the mind is empty and that, therefore, one will discover emptiness. One does not tell oneself that the mind is lucid and that, therefore, one will discover lucidity. In this practice you simply see your mind as it is, and in that way you come to know it as it is. This lack of fabrication in the practice is what is meant by no meditation. On the other hand, it is possible that this might be misunderstood. When we say no meditation, you might understand this to mean allowing the state of ordinary distraction to continue. Therefore, along with no meditation one has to say no distraction. “No distraction” means that, although there is no fabrication of some kind of meditative state or realization, there is a maintenance of mindfulness and alertness. The function of mindfulness and alertness in this context is to protect one from being distracted from the recognition of the mind’s nature. In that state one simply stays with the direct experience of whatever arises in the mind.

There are two ways that this meditation can be presented. One way is through a sudden pointing-out of the nature of the mind to the students. In this, one attempts to directly point out to students the nature of their minds. This could be in the context of, for example, pointing out the nature of thought. When this is done, then some students have a recognition of the mind’s nature and some do not. Those who have a recognition are recognizing the mind’s nature as it is, to some extent. But the recognition, as authentic as it is, is in some ways adulterated by conceptualization and, therefore, remains an experience rather than a realization. The problem with this is that, because the recognition is incomplete and imperfect, while, as far as it goes, it is authentic, it will at some point vanish. Vanishing like that, the student does not know how to bring it back, because their initial recog-

This lack of fabrication in practice is what is meant by no meditation

nition was experienced under the dramatic circumstances of receiving the pointing out from their guru. Therefore, we take a slightly different approach in the Kagyu tradition. We use two situations of mind—stillness (the mind at rest) and occurrence (the presence of thought within the mind)—to enable students through their own exploration to come to a decisive recognition of the mind’s nature. In this way, students are taught first to look at the mind when it is still, and to see how it is, then to look at the mind when there is the occurrence of thought, and to see how it is then. In that way the students through their own exploration come to really know what the mind is like when it is at rest and what the mind is like when it is moving, when there is the occurrence of thought. This leads to a more stable recognition of the mind’s nature. It is one which will not disappear, or even if it does, one which can be easily brought back by the student because they gained it through their own exploration. In the Kagyu tradition, the basic format of presentation of the mind’s nature is called “stillness, occurrence, and awareness.” Given this approach or method, some students will recognize the mind’s nature and some will not, but it is still the most stable and best way to proceed. The basic idea of this approach is expressed in this text when it says, “To stay with whatever arises is the path of all siddhas,” which means that resting in an unfabricated way, an awareness of what arises in your mind is the key point. That is the path by means of which all have attained siddhi.

There is one root or one point behind all of these different approaches to meditation. Historically, in Tibet the vajrayana spread at different times. Therefore there arose different lineages, each having their own specific emphasis and instruction. For example, there is the Middle Way school, which also teaches this approach to meditation that arose both during the earlier and subsequent propagations of the dharma. Then there is the school called “pacifi-

cation,” which is the school of Padampa Sangye, who came to Tibet from India three times and each time taught something slightly different from the last time. So even within the school of pacification, there are three different approaches taught. Then, connected with that there is the approach called “severance,” which was taught by the great female disciple of Padampa Sangye, Machig Labdron, who was Tibetan. Based on the instructions she had received from him, and even more so by her own spontaneous correct understanding of the prajnaparamita sutras, she started her own school, which has its distinct approach to meditation. Then there is the mahamudra tradition, which was taught most typically by the Lords Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa. Then there is the dzogchen tradition, which was taught principally by Guru Rinpoche and by Vimalamitra. Within dzogchen there are two basic approaches, one of which would be called the “common” or “ordinary dzogchen,” which is very similar to mahamudra, and the “uncommon” or “extraordinary dzogchen,” which is slightly different.

The major distinction being drawn here is between all of these traditions, including common dzogchen, and what is called uncommon dzogchen. Dzogchen has three classes within it or three types of instruction. These are called the “mind,” “space,” and “instruction” class. What is called “uncommon dzogchen” refers to the instruction class, which is considered by that tradition to be the highest level of instruction. Within that, there is the essence of the instruction class, which is called the “heart drop” or “nying thig” teachings. The distinction made in this text between the nying thig approach and the approach of these other meditative traditions is a very subtle one, and refers to what you do when a thought arises. In most traditions of medita-

By looking directly at the nature of that which recognizes the thoughts arising, you directly encounter dharmata, the nature of all things

tion, as I have explained, when a thought arises, you look directly at that thought and in that way you directly experience the emptiness which is the nature of that thought. However, in the nying thig tradition, when a thought arises, rather than looking directly at the nature of the thought, you look directly at the nature of that which recognizes the thought arising. This is obviously a very subtle distinction, but the idea is that by looking directly at the nature of that which recognizes the thoughts arising, you directly encounter dharmata, the nature of all things. The slight difference between these two approaches is that in the former instance there is a slight sense of your awareness being directed outward at thought, and in the second there is a slight sense of it being directed inward back at itself. At this point the way you are relating to this distinction is theoretical understanding. It is not difficult to understand intellectually the difference between these two ways of looking, but the main thing, since this is meditation instruction, is to actually practice this. By doing so, you will gain experience of it. So whether you are looking at what arises or looking at that which recognizes what arises, in order to under-

stand what these two things mean, you need to actually have attempted them. Not just once but, because of the profundity of this distinction, you need to do this again and again and again until you actually have a practical experience of it. The meaning of all of this will become much more evident and seem much more relevant to you when you have actually experienced the distinction between these two in your own practice, much more relevant and evident than when it is simply stated as a remark about the difference in techniques of different traditions.

The way to work with the kinds of instructions found in this text is to actually practice them; by practicing them you gain some experi-

ence of what they really refer to, what it is really like. Then you can go back and study the text again and see how your experience matches up with what you find in the text. In this way, by combining practical experience with the learning you have gained from studying this and similar texts, you will find that what you learn from this text will actually become useful to you as a practitioner. It is in this way that the transmission of instructions has been kept as a lineage of practical experience rather than simply being a lineage of transmitted information.

Next the text gives another subtle distinction between the three ways in which thoughts become liberated, but because this is so subtle, at this point there is not much need to go through it.* It is better that you actually just experience it and then you will know what it is talking about. Whether or not it is explained to you, once you experience this liberation of thought, you will know it, you will understand it.

Next the text talks about how to determine the degree of progress in meditation. In sum, it says that there is an external and an internal aspect to the samadhi that develops as you progress in practice. The external aspect, or you could think of it as the external sign of progress, is that you do not become distracted. The internal sign is that not being in danger of distraction, you can relax. What this means is simply that as a beginner, in order not to become distracted, you have to exert a tremendous effort. As you go on, it will take less and less effort to not be distracted. Basically, what is being said is

The indication of progress is that it takes less effort not to be distracted

that the indication of progress is that it takes less effort not to be distracted. Therefore, what is called “nonmeditation,” or “no meditation,” which is the final stage of meditation, is the exhaustion of the need for any effort. So the term “no meditation,” in that context, means no need for intentional meditation. This is true because in the nature of mind or the nature of things there is nothing to be meditated upon. However, there is something to be gotten used to. When it is said that there is nothing to be meditated

upon, it means that meditation upon the nature is not the fabrication of any kind of specific meditation experience. As we saw before, it is not meditating or pretending that that which exists does not exist, or that that which does not exist, exists. It is simply seeing things as they are. Meditation on the nature of things is

simply seeing your mind as it is. In a sense you can say that there is no meditation on it; there is no intentional meditation or contemplation. However, there is a process of getting used to seeing it as it is and, therefore, there is a process of cultivation or of training. In order that this process continue, in order that there be progress in meditation, it is of the utmost importance that you not allow yourself to become distracted from the recognition of your mind’s nature, not only during formal meditation sessions, but as much as possible in post-meditation as well. So when you are eating, when you are lying down, when you are walking, when you are sitting around, when you are talking, whatever you do, you should try to maintain mindfulness of the fundamental nature.

Next the text gives two sets of parallel instructions. The first comes from the dzogchen tradition and the second comes from the Kagyu mahamudra tradition. The instruction from the dzogchen tradition gives the essential point that makes this instruction section of the ati yoga or dzogchen teachings distinct, which is distinguishing between mind and awareness. In the context of that tradition, the term “mind” is used

***Editor’s note:** Rinpoche is referring here to the following passage from the root text: “...according to Vimalamitra, liberation without a sequence of thoughts is like a child looking around in wonderment in a temple: There is no mental construct of good or bad made from the initial perception. Liberation in its own ground of whatever thought arises is like the snake’s knot disappearing in space: As soon as it appears it disappears without need of a remedy. Liberation in the realization that thoughts are neither helpful nor harmful is like a burglar raiding an empty house: Whether it occurs or not, there is neither loss nor gain.”

to refer to what we would normally call thought or deluded mind. “Awareness” is used to refer to the innate nonconceptual cognitive lucidity of the mind. The point made in this tradition is that it is of great importance in meditation to properly distinguish between these two in your meditation experience. Since mindfulness, as a mental process, is a function of mind, therefore, intentional mindfulness itself cannot recognize the nature of mind. Mindfulness, as useful as it is, has some dregs or impurities in it because it has some conceptual content. The actual recognition of the nature of mind is distinct from mindfulness. It is a cognition without object, a cognition that is recognizing or experiencing itself.

To be precise about this distinction between mind and awareness, mindfulness can be of two types. There is a kind of conceptual or intentional heavy-handed mindfulness that is a function of mind, and then there is a kind of subtle mindfulness that is characteristic of awareness as well. The distinction is that the mindfulness that you are using in your meditation is incapable of recognizing the mind’s nature and tends to objectify. In other words, the faculty you are employing in meditation objectifies what it experiences. When it seems to be experiencing something other than itself and has, therefore, that sediment of conceptualization, that is mind. When the faculty you are experiencing in meditation has no object other than itself, experiences its own nature as luminosity, and has the characteristic of light, brilliant clarity, like a lamp flame, like a bright light, then that is awareness. The key point is that it has no object. Mind always has an object. Awareness does not have an object. The experience of awareness is like being frightened

When the faculty you are experiencing in meditation has no object other than itself, experiences its own nature as luminosity, and has the characteristic of light, brilliant clarity, like a lamp flame, like a bright light, then that is awareness

or being terrified. It is that kind of intense nonconceptual experience. When you have recognized this, when awareness arises in your experience and you recognize awareness as awareness, then you will have certainty about what all of this means. This is very different from a theoretical presentation. As mentioned in the text, what he is explaining is very different from a theoretical presentation or a scholarly presentation of the difference between mind and awareness. This is practical advice. It is like the heart’s blood of the lineage that makes this distinction. It is the single key point of all of this—this distinction between mind and awareness—and so it is considered quite precious and rare. Therefore, at this point, one is admonished not to talk about this to those who have broken samaya or who are just big talkers about meditation. It is fine to talk about this to people who actually practice meditation, but a distinction needs to be made between those who practice and those who just want to acquire jargon that they can then use to impress others. Finally, Jamgön Lodro Thaye mentions that Ekajati* is watching. So that is the instruction from the tradition of ati yoga or dzogchen.

nally, Jamgön Lodro Thaye mentions that Ekajati* is watching. So that is the instruction from the tradition of ati yoga or dzogchen.

Next are presented instructions from the mahamudra tradition, the Kagyu tradition. When in your practice you are attempting to have a continuous recognition of dharmata, of the nature of your mind, the key point here is to be unfabricated. But in doing this, do not think that you need to try to force it. This point from the mahamudra tradition is, do not try to force the recognition of it. What will happen is that you will have a momentary recognition of

***Editor’s note:** A female dharmapala, Ekajati is the principal protector of the dzogchen teachings.

dharmata and then you will try to stick to it with force and vigor. That will not help. It is actually sufficient according to the teachers of the Kagyu tradition to have had that momentary glimpse of it. You do not need to try to prolong it because it will not work anyway. If you try to prolong it, all you will do is create a fabricated similitude of that experience. You cannot force it. In any instant or actual meditation on the nature of mind you are purifying the negative karma you have accumulated over innumerable eons. An instant of meditation on the nature causes all of your karmic winds and so on to enter the central channel. In short, there is no limit to the benefit of this kind of recognition.

While you cannot force it, nevertheless this kind of recognition of your own nature is the one thing that matters. In the Kagyu terminology, it is “the one thing which, if known, frees all.” Another term that goes with that is “knowing all, but missing out on the one.” If you recognize your mind’s nature, then that in itself is the recognition of the essence of everything else that is to be known. But if you do not recognize your mind’s nature, no matter how much else you otherwise know about dharma, you are missing the point.

Next the text gives instructions for a method of enhancing one’s meditation practice that is called “mixing of awareness and space.” Essentially this consists of either looking into the middle of the sky or into the middle of a large body of water such as an ocean and mixing your awareness with where you are looking. By doing this, and doing it mindfully with some vigor in your mindfulness, you will have an experience of limitless awareness that is without substantiality, awareness without center or limit.

Following that, the text addresses the question of determining what is happening in your meditation. Specifically there is the possibility of mistaking any of the three meditation states for one another. There are three things that

superficially sound or seem very similar. One is the recognition or experience of emptiness, i.e., a state of vipashyana. The second is a state of shamatha, and the third is a state of blank neutrality. It seems it is possible to confuse these in practice, and now they are explained. The experience or recognition of emptiness is a direct experience of your awareness or by your awareness that is something that you cannot conceive of. You cannot actually say it is one thing or another. You cannot contain it conceptually at all. You cannot describe it to yourself; therefore, it is inexpressible. This direct experience that is utterly inexpressible and inconceivable is the experience of emptiness.

The experience of shamatha is an experience in which all of the agitation of thought is completely pacified, and there is a limitless experience of peace and a limitless experience of stillness and tranquillity. It is like a body of water without waves. That is the experience of shamatha.

The experience of neutrality is different from those two in that your faculties of mindfulness, alertness, and awareness are weak. There is a feeling of obscurity. It lacks recognition or direct experience and so is different from the experience of emptiness. It is different from shamatha in that there is some undercurrent of thought. In the state of neutrality, there is an undercurrent of thought that is very subtle, that distracts you, that you recognize only after you have become distracted. So if there is a feeling of basic stillness but you are still being distracted by some undercurrent, that is neither emptiness nor shamatha, that is neutrality.*

Of these three states, the realization of

***Editor’s note:** The translation of the root text begins, “Three things are said to pose the danger of misunderstanding: emptiness, calm abiding, and neutrality,” which seems to imply that all three are conditions of misunderstanding. However, if one continues to read the text, it will become clear that the danger is of confusing neutrality for either emptiness or shamatha.

This direct
experience that
is utterly
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inconceivable is
the experience of
emptiness

emptiness is what we are attempting to achieve, but shamatha is also acceptable, especially if that is what you are attempting to practice. If you are trying to practice shamatha, then a state of shamatha itself is not regarded as a defect, although a distinction needs to be made between a state of shamatha and a state of realization. However, the third of these states, the blank neutrality in which the undercurrent is functioning, needs to be rectified. The way to rectify that is to recognize it and to strengthen or tighten up your awareness, to put more effort into mindfulness and more effort into alertness and into awareness. There is a particular variety of neutrality where you have a feeling of dense obscurity or thickness to your mind, like being in some kind of fog. That can be dispelled by vigorously breathing out all the stale air in your body and then breathing in. Other things such as the verbal repetition of mantras—not the mental repetition of mantras, but the actual use of speech to repeat them—and

sometimes physical movement can dispel this feeling of dense obscurity or thickness of mind.

Having recognized the presence of neutrality in your meditation, it is necessary to dispel it, and there are steps to this. The first is learning to distinguish between neutrality and the other two states, especially between neutrality and shamatha, but also between neutrality and insight. The second step is learning to recognize it when it occurs. The third is learning how to get rid of it.

Sometimes the state of neutrality afflicts our meditation but at other times our meditation is impeded not by neutrality but by the presence of actual kleshas. So next the text explains how to deal with the kleshas that arise in meditation. The klesha used as an example here is anger.

There is a particular variety of neutrality where you have a feeling of dense obscurity or thickness to your mind, like being in some kind of fog. That can be dispelled by vigorously breathing out all the stale air in your body and then breathing in

The reason why anger is used as an example is that, because it is the most vivid, it is the easiest klesha to recognize. When a thought of anger vividly arises in your mind, which means the thought of anger will have some intensity to it and, therefore, be easy to apprehend, look directly at it. Looking at it directly does not mean distancing yourself from it and looking at it theoretically or conceptually. When you look at kleshas from a distance, looking at them conceptually, you are considering the characteristics and contents of the thought, so in that sense there seems to be something there. You have an idea of whom you are angry at, how you feel about them, and so on. That is not looking directly at it. If you look at it nakedly or directly with nothing in between that which is looking and that which is looked at, then you will see the nature of it rather than there appearing to be something there. When you look at it directly and rest within that looking without fabrication, without attempting to tell yourself anything about the anger, then the

heavy-handed quality of the anger dissolves on the spot and the thought is seen to have no benefit or harm. It no longer has any kind of negative energy to it, so it neither helps nor harms.

The text concludes with some instruction for daily practice, different sorts of things one can do throughout the day. They are not that difficult to understand so I am going to stop here. If you have any questions, please ask.

Question: Two questions. One, you spoke about a nun in this tradition . . . Machig Labdron?

Translator: She wasn't a nun.

Question: She was a sky dancer? What was the

distinction there between the teachings and her own direct experience?

Thrangu Rinpoche: The difference between Machig's teachings and the teachings which came from India that she received, are that the teachings of pacification, which came from India, take the approach of pacifying the thought and delusion and kind of letting it settle down. Whereas Machig's approach, called "severance," is very aggressive. Not aggressive in a bad way, but aggressive as when we say "aggressive treatment of something." It is just slicing through thoughts. Not waiting for them to settle down but slicing through them or destroying them. You can tell by the word "severance." The words "pacification" and "severance" describe the difference. The practice of severance involves not pacifying thoughts, but actually bringing up the most difficult thoughts, bringing them up and cutting through them. In the practice of severance you work especially with fear. The way you do it is that you go to places where you feel unsafe. Typically, one goes to charnel grounds to practice. You get really, really scared, and then you cut through it.

Question: The second question is about when you were talking about the arising of thoughts and having the direct experience of them. Personally, if anger comes up, then the next feeling or thought that comes up is guilt. Do you just keep on looking at them as they keep on arising?

Thrangu Rinpoche: It does not matter. While the thought of anger is present, you can look directly at the thought of anger, or if it is succeeded by a thought of guilt, you can look at the thought of guilt. In either case, when you look at a thought, what you discover is that, although there is something you can experience that you

The practice of severance involves not pacifying thoughts, but actually bringing up the most difficult thoughts, bringing them up and cutting through them

can call a thought, an experience of anger, a feeling of anger, when you look right at it, there is nothing there. Therefore, it is called the unity of clarity and emptiness. Clarity is appearance or experience that has [in reality] no substantial existence. Thoughts are all the same. They are just like water bubbles. You see them, but then there is nothing there.

Question: In the sutra tradition of the middle way, are there analytical meditations which specifically reveal the luminous nature of mind? And if that is so, what are those analytical meditations?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Not directly, because in analytical meditation you are always concerned with the maintenance and cultivation of some kind of conviction. Therefore it is very indirect. It takes a very long time. If you persisted with the maintenance and refinement of your conviction about the nature of mind long enough, then eventually there could be a discovery of the mind's innate lucidity, but it is not directly pointed out in the sutra system.

Question: Why is it that yidam practices are done by accomplished realized beings and why are empowerments given, such as the Kalachakra, which are so extensive and detailed that it would be very hard for me or other people like me to actually do?

Translator: Those are two very different questions I am asking right? You want to know why people who have already attained enlightenment continue to do yidam practice and you want to know why empowerments for yidam practice are given to people who are unlikely to ever do that yidam practice? Okay.

Thrangu Rinpoche: In answer to your first

question, there are many different types of teachers, and they are all not necessarily at the same level, so it would be difficult to give one answer for why they would all continue to do these practices. In the case of some of them, they do them because they still have some distance to go on the path, and so they continue to practice for their own benefit, to expand their experience and realization. In the case of others who have already attained supreme siddhi, who in fact may be fully awakened buddhas, then if they continue to do formal practice, they do it as an example to others, to show the importance of formal practice.

In answer to your second question, the giving of empowerments really has two aspects to it. There is what is called “actual” or “ultimate” empowerment, and then there is what is called the “external” or “symbolic” empowerment. In the case of an actual empowerment, nowadays what we would call an “extraordinary” empowerment, what is happening is that the student actually recognizes on the spot the wisdom that that empowerment is designed to communicate. In that case, that is the fullest or most extraordinary instance of empowerment. It is not particularly that it is a different type or ceremony of empowerment; it is a specific instance of empowerment.

Normally when an empowerment is given, the function of it is not only to empower people to do specific practices but to transmit the blessing of dharma through the vehicle of that specific ceremony. In that spirit you might take the empowerment of Kalachakra or of Chakrasamvara or of Hevajra, or of any other major or minor empowerment. The basic process of what is essentially the same, which is that some kind of blessing of dharma is actually entering into you. When it is said that the blessing of dharma enters into you, this does not mean that through receiving an empowerment

Normally when an empowerment is given, the function of it is . . . to transmit the blessing of dharma through the vehicle of that specific ceremony

you can immediately fly in the sky, or that through receiving an empowerment you become intoxicated with some kind of mysterious spiritual drunkenness. It is simply that having received the empowerment, something changes. There will be at least a little bit of an increase in your faith and devotion, a little bit of an increase in your diligence. These changes in you are the principal blessing or benefit of the empowerment process. For example, many people have told me that they were previously unable to understand or settle on the validity of Buddhism, but then for one reason or another they received the Kalachakra empowerment from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thereafter and ever since have been intensely involved in practice. That is an instance of the blessing of empowerment. It is not that they are practicing Kalachakra necessarily, but because of that blessing they are practicing dharma.

Question: In the sudden pointing-out of the nature of mind versus the stillness, occurrence, and awareness approach, you refer to the second as being specifically the Kagyu approach. I was just wondering if there is some flexibility in terms of how specific teachers deal with specific students?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Yes. There are different texts composed by different teachers, and teachers today follow these different texts and, therefore, guide their students slightly differently.

Question: In the root text, “three things are said to pose the danger of misunderstanding.” What does “danger” refer to here?

Translator: Maybe it is a little unclear in the English. What it says in the Tibetan is “there is the possibility of mistaking one of these for

another.” The word that is translated as “danger” here means it is a possible thing that might happen.

Question: What are the ten winds?

Thrangu Rinpoche: There are the five main and five minor energies or winds of the body. The five major ones are the winds which govern the principal physical processes: the “digestive wind;” the “eliminating wind,” which is connected with going to the bathroom; the “upward moving wind;” the “pervasive wind,” which enables you to move your limbs and so on; and the “life wind” or “prana wind,” which is the one that keeps you alive, keeps you in your body.

Question: When the winds enter the central channel, is it one or all of them which enter?

Thrangu Rinpoche: There are two mentions of all of this in our text. When it says “the ten winds become workable,” it means that as a sign of practice they start to function in an ideal way. Generally speaking, the karmic energy or wind flows through the two side channels, the ones on the right and left of the central channel. The wind or energy that flows in the central channel are wisdom winds, not karmic winds. Through the cessation of the flowing of winds through the right and left channels, which is the bringing of the winds into the central channel, there is a transformation of karmic wind into wisdom wind. This is what is referred to when it talks about the karmic wind being brought into the central channel. This occurs as a natural result of meditation, and there are also specific methods for doing this.

Question: I have read some things about the kundalini process, kundalini shakti,* and I do not know how to talk about the same things in Buddhist terms. But you mentioned the karmic winds, the wisdom winds . . . ? How does this relate to the five major winds that you named

***Editor’s note:** The questioner is referring to a form of Hindu yoga.

before?


Thrangu Rinpoche: The ten winds are the energies of your physical body that enable your physical body to do all the things it does. The karmic wind is actually what you breathe in and out. The point of all of this is that the karmic wind, which you breathe in and out, has a little bit of wisdom wind, a very small amount of wisdom wind mixed with it all the time. Therefore, especially at certain times, there is a presence of wisdom wind in your breathing. Through the practice of meditation in general and through certain specific processes or techniques you can cause the karmic wind aspect of this to be transformed into wisdom wind. That is the idea.

Question: As the breath comes in or . . . ?

Thrangu Rinpoche: Normally as the breath is held, which is why there is the practice of holding the breath. Here it talks about this also occurring as a natural result of meditative realization. Some people have the experience, if they develop an extraordinary state of shamatha, of not having to breathe for a while.

Question: In the text there is a discussion of breathing OM, AH, HUNG, and I wanted to know which is recited on the out, the pause, and the in-breath.

Thrangu Rinpoche: In this text, when you breathe out it is HUNG. In between breathing out and breathing in the next time, it is AH. So it is actually held out rather than held in. Then when you breathe in, it is OM. Sometimes it is different.

I would like to thank you for your intense enthusiasm for this text, and for giving me the opportunity to explain it to you as best as I could. I would like to apologize for the brevity of my explanation, which was obviously required by the brevity of the time we had available. We will now dedicate the merit. 

The Cultivation of Bodhicitta And Taking and Sending

The main part of this teaching is based on a teaching of His Holiness Tendzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, given at the Masonic Temple on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles in 1984.

When we look around us and see the great pain and anxiety of life lived without true understanding; when we reflect deeply on the fears that all beings carry hidden in the deep recesses of their hearts—which they are often unwilling to admit even to themselves for fear that doing so would sap the confidence or the false bravado that enables them to push forward blindly in life in the only way they know how—and especially when we reflect on the dangerous and painful vicissitudes of a world that in one moment is peaceful, and in the next full of violence, pain, and grief, full of lives shredded and torn apart by forces beyond one's control; when we reflect on the blood in the streets and the smashed skulls, or when we reflect on the ever-changing display of love and romance as it degenerates slowly into broken dreams, anger, strife, and hatred; when we reflect on the lonesome, the poor, the aging, cold and devastated, dying mass of sentient existence, and we remember that no ignorant being



escapes this constant round of terror and that, if what sages and religious leaders of all ages have told us is true, there may even be worse to come, worlds in which our credit cards hold no sway, where there is not a friendly voice to call and no family to go home to—when we reflect honestly on all of this and stop ignoring and suppressing these thoughts, and when we apply these thoughts to ourselves and to our own particular situations, it gives rise to great renunciation of the vanity of confused existence and to the attendant willingness to quit chasing exclusively after unreliable baubles of happiness and enjoyment

in the external world and to turn one's vision inward in order to find and extirpate the root of misery and suffering and to find the true and reliable source of peace and happiness.

When we think of all of this carefully with respect to ourselves, it gives rise to great revulsion and renunciation, but when we reflect on all of this with respect to others—realizing how blind and helpless sentient beings are in the face of such intolerable suffering—and quit ignoring and suppressing such thoughts, then it leads either to further ignorance and callousness, or it leads to great compassion. Further ignorance and callousness lead only to diminished intelli-

gence, clumsy and vicious living, and in the end to great misery. Therefore, there is no advantage or merit in it for anyone.

On the other hand, in great compassion for suffering sentient beings there is great advantage and immense merit. Compassion based on affection for sentient beings and the pain of seeing them suffer leads one to generate the aspiration to liberate them from suffering, which in turn leads to the intention to do whatever is necessary to do that, even if it means turning the whole purpose of one's life around to becoming a support to the single project of attaining the wisdom and skillful means necessary to assist sentient beings to their own liberation. This generation of the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment leads to kind and compassionate activity in the service of those who suffer and, therefore, to the temporary amelioration of their condition and ultimately to their liberation. This leads to less ignoring and less turning away and narrowing of the focus of one's mind, and in turn to more expansive and less obscured awareness and hence to greater sensitivity and intelligence. Thus the generation of the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment and buddhahood—the generation of bodhicitta—is what the Dalai Lama refers to as enlightened self-interest, in which there is great benefit for everyone.

In fact, the generation of this altruistic intention to become enlightened and perseverance in the training that enables one to do so are the entire path of buddhahood. The aversion that we develop towards cyclic existence, the qualities of revulsion and renunciation that we cultivate, the refuge in the three jewels and the three roots, and the disciplines of moral conduct, meditation, and study that we accept and undertake are the foundation for the generation of and training in this altruistic intention. And

The generation of this altruistic intention to become enlightened and perseverance in the training that enables one to do so are the entire path of buddhahood

all the stages of the paths and levels on the way to enlightenment and the development of mahamudra and dzogchen are nothing more than the fruition of this intention and training.

Sometimes, especially when there are rough spots in our path, we may find that our unspoken intention is really simply to escape the misery of cyclic existence, or in any particular situation, the misery of that situation. At those times, while continuing to practice the disciplines that lead to individual liberation, it is extremely important to continue to generate this enlightened intention and not to give up on sentient beings, not to give up or abandon the intention to assist all beings to liberation. For as the great Tsong Khapa wrote, “If the

thought definitely to leave cyclic existence is not conjoined with the generation of a complete aspiration to highest enlightenment, it does not become a cause of the marvelous bliss of unsurpassed enlightenment. Thus, the intelligent should generate the supreme altruistic intention to become enlightened.”

What is an altruistic mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta? It actually consists of two aspects. The aspiration to bring about others' welfare is the essential cause of the development of bodhicitta. The recognition that one can only bring about others' permanent welfare by first removing all of one's own ignorance through obtaining buddhahood—and the aspiration to do so—is the second aspect. Thus, a main mental consciousness that has as a cause an aspiration to affect others' welfare which is accompanied by a wish for one's own enlightenment is an altruistic mind of enlightenment.

But can it be established that we can even attain enlightenment? That which prevents the attainment of enlightenment are the veils, the kleshas or afflictive emotions, which are a kind of

outer veil, and the cognitive obscurations of mind, sometimes referred to as the obstructions to omniscience, which consist fundamentally of the ignorance that conceives of inherent existence and the dualistic clinging that flows from that conception. It is in the nature of things that if you have two opposites—for instance, hot and cold—if you increase one the other will diminish. The same is true of our minds. Obscured ignorant consciousness that conceives of inherent existence and the wisdom consciousness realizing emptiness are opposites. Because the wisdom consciousness realizing emptiness has a valid foundation, as one increases one's knowledge of the understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence, the obscured ignorance factors of one's own consciousness diminish. Because this wisdom realizing emptiness can be increased limitlessly, finally overcoming ignorance entirely, it is established that enlightenment is achievable. Through taking this logic to heart and acting upon it, one develops a mind aspiring towards the enlightenment of a buddha.

The main aspect of this aspiration is to train in developing an attitude of mind that is seeking or aspiring to bring about others' welfare. Tsong Khapa writes:

**(All ordinary beings) are carried by the continuum of the four powerful currents,
Are tied with the tight bonds of actions difficult to oppose,
Have entered into the iron cage of apprehending self (inherent existence),
Are completely beclouded with the thick darkness of ignorance,

Are born into cyclic existence limitlessly, and in their births
Are tortured ceaselessly by the three sufferings.
Thinking thus of the condition of mothers who**

**have come to such a state,
Generate the supreme altruistic intention to become enlightened.**

Every sentient being—every being with mind—regardless of how small, including bugs and even microscopic animal life, wants happiness and wants to avoid suffering. Yet limitless numbers of sentient beings are bound in the sufferings of samsara due to actions that are motivated by emotional afflictions, which in turn are based on dualistic perception and dualistic clinging. Therefore, beings are carried by the four powerful currents of birth, aging, sickness, and death, which are brought about by the tight bonds of action (karma). Good and bad actions are brought about by the conception of oneself as inherently existent—the false view that takes what is transitory

as a permanent “I.” This misconception of the nature of oneself comes about through the thick darkness of ignorance which conceives that other phenomena, one's physical and mental aggregates, inherently exist. It is through this process of causation that beings are born in cyclic existence limitlessly and suffer. Thinking about this process of causation with respect to ourselves, we generate renunciation, the wish to get out of cyclic existence; thinking about it with regard to others, we generate compassion for others.

When bodhicitta—the altruistic intention to become enlightened—is cultivated in meditation, it is usually done so by two streams of teaching: the seven-fold cause and effect quintessential instructions and the instructions on equalizing and switching of self and other. When these two streams of instruction are combined, the meditation is particularly powerful.

The first step in this combined practice is to develop equanimity. Imagine three different sentient beings in front of you—a friend, an

Because this wisdom realizing emptiness can be increased limitlessly, finally overcoming ignorance entirely, it is established that enlightenment is achievable

enemy, and a neutral person—and then intentionally generate the usual thoughts of desire, hatred, and a sense of neglect that you have for them. Then think about why you desire the friend, why you hate the enemy, and why you neglect the neutral person. In time it will become clear to you that you hold these attitudes because the friend helps you and the enemy harms. But if you think more carefully, you will see that a friend in an earlier part of one's life can easily become an enemy at a later time, and vice versa. Moreover, in the course of a beginningless continuum of lifetimes, there is no certainty that particular beings have either been just friends or just enemies. Thus you will come to see clearly that your friend has been or could become your enemy and that your enemy has been or could become your friend, and that the neutral person can also have been or might become both friend and enemy. Thinking in this way, one comes to see that there is no reason to get too excited one way or another towards these beings, and in this way one accomplishes equanimity.

The next step then is to recognize all beings individually as the best of friends. Traditionally, it is taught that you should recognize all beings as having been your mother in previous lifetimes and as having been extremely closely connected to you.

There are said to be four modes of birth: birth from a womb, birth from an egg, birth from heat and moisture, and instantaneous birth, as when one is born in a pure realm. It is necessary to have a mother to be born from a womb or from an egg, and since one's birth has been cyclic and beginningless, and therefore infinite in number, it is necessary to have had an infinite number of mothers. Thinking in this way, reflect on the three beings that you are visualizing in front of you, realizing or thinking that both the enemy and the neutral being have acted, therefore, over the course of many lifetimes, as one's own mother and/or best friend, and that they have

been extremely close to you. If it is not absolutely logically certain, it is at least more likely that over the course of lifetimes they have been in such close friendly relationships with you.

The third step is to develop mindfulness of their kindness—the friend's kindness, the enemy's kindness, the neutral person's kindness—when they were your mothers. For this, imagine your mother in this life in front of you and reflect on how she took care of you with such great care and kindness and sustained you when you were a little child: how she bore you with discomfort in her body, suffered the pangs of birth, nursed you, cleaned you, dressed you, taught you to walk and to talk, introduced you to the world and educated you, and loved you in so many unthinkable ways, valuing you as much as

or more than she valued her own life, willing even to give her own life for you if necessary. Then extend the understanding of this kindness to every other sentient being.

The fourth step is to develop special mindfulness of kindness. This is to reflect that sentient beings have been kind to us and are kind to us not only when they have been our friends, but that, irrespective of being our friends,

they have been either directly or indirectly extremely kind. For instance, in our ordinary lives, no matter what we use to sustain our life—food, clothing, shelter, and so forth, medicine, educational opportunities, protection, etc.—these all come to us by way of the kindness of other sentient beings. When one considers the immense amount of intelligence and care that has gone into crafting all the things we use and live amongst, down to the finest details—the intelligence that created the washers, the spigots, the light bulbs, the garden hoses, the refrigerators, elevators, computers, the air traffic routes, and so forth—when we consider all of this intelligence and care, one sees that limitless numbers of people have been indirectly very kind to us.

Traditionally, it is taught that you should recognize all beings as having been your mother in previous lifetimes

In order to attain happiness, liberation, and buddhahood for ourselves and others, it is important to accumulate merit, which is done in relation to other sentient beings, especially when we help other sentient beings. Thus it is in dependence on other sentient beings that we accumulate great merit, and without other sentient beings it would be impossible to do so. For instance, with regard to generosity, gifts must be given to someone else. The ethics of refraining from harming others must be observed in relation to other sentient beings. This training that we are now engaged in, one-pointedly generating and strengthening an altruistic attitude, must be done in relation to and dependent upon other sentient beings.

And of course, other sentient beings are needed for the practice of patience. In this regard, of course, enemies especially provide a great service for us. This is explained very beautifully in Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Moreover, the great effort and exertion of bodhisattvas come about as a consequence of their taking cognizance of the limitless types of suffering of limitless sentient beings. Thus it is on the basis of other sentient beings that they develop their great effort.

Similarly, the concentrated meditation and wisdom of bodhisattvas is dependent upon their concern for others. The fact that their meditative concentration and their wisdom become so powerful is due to their being conjoined with the force of one-pointed altruism toward other beings. The great practitioners, the arhats and arhatis, of the lesser vehicle—the hinayana—are said to develop extraordinary meditative stabilization, which is a union of calm abiding and superior insight, of shamatha and vipashyana. However, through that union they can achieve liberation from cyclic existence only for themselves. Why is that? Because their wisdom consciousness is not enhanced with the factor of

It is in dependence on other sentient beings that we accumulate great merit, and without other sentient beings it would be impossible to do

altruism, of one-pointed dedication to the welfare of others. Because the motivation of hinayana practitioners is confined to self-liberation, it does not take into account the totality of existence, and therefore it is impossible for them to develop omniscience with respect to all phenomena. Thus, other sentient beings are extremely kind and extremely valuable in developing samadhi and wisdom.

Thus, without other sentient beings as objects of one's observation and activity, it would be impossible to engage in these powerful forms of virtue. But then one might object that these other beings do not necessarily have any motivation to be kind or to help one, and that, therefore, there is no reason for developing a sense of their kindness. However, if that were the case, then, since the dharma—the dharma of realization, which is the cessation of suffering, and scriptural dharma, which outlines correct paths to enlightenment—has no motivation to help one, then it would be inappropriate to cherish the dharma, to value it, and to make offerings to it. Therefore, whether the other person or sentient being has a motivation to help one does not make any difference. If it helps one, then that being or thing is to be valued as being kind, and we should be mindful of that kindness.

Shantideva raises the further objection that, though it might be the case that beings or objects with no motivation to help us should still be cherished as being very kind to us, an enemy surely does not have a motivation to help and does surely have a motivation to harm. So how could one reflect on the kindness of enemies? Shantideva answers that it is because a person has harmful intent toward us that they get the name of "enemy," but that it is precisely because of that harmful intent and the actions that arise out of it that we have something with which to cultivate patience. Thus the enemy is very

helpful to us and provides a great service to us. If we did not have enemies in the natural course of our lives, in order to learn to practice patience, we would have to go out and hire some enemies. Therefore, the enemy should be thought of as being very kind to us.

That is how we develop special mindfulness of kindness.

If sentient beings are helpful to us even when they are enemies, then what need is there to say that they are helpful when they are kind? If even enemies are kind when they cause harm, what need is there to say that friends are kind when they are helping us?

Now, it is always the better mode of behavior to repay the kindness one has received from others—to return something for their kindness. Thus the fifth step is to develop the intention to repay the kindness of all sentient beings.

Then the next step is to equalize self and other. This equalizing is the realization that others are equal to us in wanting happiness and in not wanting suffering. Within this context of both self and others' wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, what is the difference? We as individuals are only one, whereas others are infinite in number. Thus, for anyone with true intelligence, the greater number of sentient beings is more important than the smaller number. Thus, it would be completely unsuitable for one to use others for one's own purposes, while it would be completely and entirely suitable and most correct to use oneself for others' welfare. Thinking in this way, we begin to cherish others.

Then the next step is to reflect on the disadvantages of cherishing oneself. The state of ruination that we are currently in is due to the fact that our conception of inherent existence of ourselves and self-cherishing work together, the one influencing and strengthening the other. It is these two that ruin us and spoil our lives. There is no one who does not consider himself or

herself to be important. This is natural in sam-sara, but we need to consider and reflect on the state that this type of self-cherishing, self-centeredness, and self-importance has led us into. What a mess it has created. If from beginningless cyclic existence until now, we have engaged in self-cherishing and it has brought us into such a mess, is it not then a terrible mistake to continue this self-cherishing? Would it not be better to do something else? Especially when we know that if we cherish others, we will achieve limitless great merit, through the power of

which we can achieve great exertion for the benefit of others, which always redounds to our own benefit indirectly?

Shantideva wrote that Gautama Buddha and we ourselves were equal in the past in being ordinary sentient beings. If we look into the reasons why we in our present state are caught in the mess that we are in—mentally, emotionally, politically, socially, economically, environmentally—while Gautama Buddha has gotten rid of all faults and become a special being endowed with all good

qualities, the reason that one finds is that Gautama Buddha at a certain point gave up self-cherishing and began cherishing others and thereby proceeded to such a high and evolved state, whereas we continue to do the opposite. We neglect others' welfare, while principally seeking only after our own, thereby propelling ourselves into further cyclic existence. When one reflects in this way on the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others, one proceeds to the next step of the actual thought of switching self and other.

The name "exchanging self and other" or "switching self and other" is given to the process of switching one's own attitude of cherishing oneself into an attitude of cherishing others and the attitude of neglecting others into an attitude of neglecting oneself. So we begin to train our-

If we did not have enemies in the natural course of our lives, in order to learn to practice patience, we would have to go out and hire some

selves to do that. This is called exchanging self and other.

The next and tenth step is to take others' suffering within oneself, emphasizing compassion. When we think again and again about the sufferings of sentient beings, all of whom we now consider to be extremely dear to us, we naturally develop a wish to relieve them of their suffering and the causes of their suffering. It is helpful at this point to imagine all of these sufferings and causes of suffering of other sentient beings and to draw them into oneself in the form of black light, poison, weapons, or beings of whom one is particularly afraid. One draws them into oneself and absorbs them fearlessly down into the very basis of one's life.

The next step is to reflect on these sentient beings who want happiness but are bereft of happiness, and through being moved by that situation to develop an attitude of giving to other sentient beings all of one's own happiness and causes of happiness in the form of physical happiness, resources, and roots of virtue that will bring happiness. One imagines that one is giving other sentient beings one's own good body, resources, potential for wealth, good health, and long life, and all of one's roots of virtue. This giving of happiness can be done in the form of imagining light going out from oneself, or as Shantideva suggests, in the form of imagining whatever they want going out from oneself to them. If a person wants a lamp, in the form of a lamp; if a person needs clothing, in the form of clothing; and so on with food, shelter, whatever.

When one develops familiarity with this visualization and has practiced it for some time, one can coordinate the visualization with the breath. When one inhales, one imagines that one

is inhaling others' suffering and the causes of their suffering, and when one exhales, one imagines that one exhales one's own happiness and the causes of happiness. In the process of these visualizations, one thinks that the sufferings of all sentient beings are in this way relieved, and that they are thereby enriched and established in states of happiness and liberation, and one does so with great joy.

Now at this point, this meditation is just imagination. If one wonders whether it is actually possible to bring about others' welfare in this way, then one should know that what one is doing now is just imagination. But according to the Dalai Lama, at the point of actually developing bodhicitta it is possible to actually bring about the welfare of others.

At this point one generates a special resolve to take upon oneself, and oneself alone, the burden of bringing about others' welfare and of relieving their suffering. One develops here a fantastic, strong, and unusual altruistic attitude, which is the willingness to take upon oneself the burden of freeing all sentient beings from suffering and of joining all sentient beings with happiness. One takes this upon oneself alone, so that if there were not another bodhisattva in all the world systems of existence, one would still be resolved to bring about the liberation of all sentient beings single-handedly.

Developing this vast and unusual altruistic attitude with great force induces the intention to become enlightened for the benefit of all others, which is the actual altruistic mind generation, the actual generation of bodhicitta. One does this because, as the Buddha Shakyamuni said, "The buddhas do not cleanse the ill deeds of sentient beings with water nor relieve the suffering of sentient beings through touching

The name 'exchanging self and other' . . . is given to the process of switching one's own attitude of cherishing oneself into an attitude of cherishing others and the attitude of neglecting others into an attitude of neglecting oneself

them with their hands, and the buddhas do not transfer their realization to others. Sentient beings are liberated through being taught.” Sentient beings eventually escape cyclic existence through their own effort through being taught the truth. Thus one needs to prepare oneself to teach others. But if the meaning, the doctrines, and the skillful means that we need to understand in order to teach others are obscured to us, we cannot possibly teach others. Furthermore, what is to be taught to others must be something that is going to help them and be of assistance to them personally and individually. Therefore, one needs to know the interests, the dispositions, the capabilities, and so forth of other beings, both in groups and individually, in fine detail.

That which prevents one from knowing in fine detail what needs to be taught to others, and that which prevents one from knowing others’ interests and dispositions in subtle detail, are the obstructions to omniscience, the cognitive obscurations of mind. Thus bodhisattvas identify as their real enemy their own obstructions to omniscience. Without overcoming the obstructions to omniscience there is no way to bring about the vast amount of help that is needed by the vast ocean of sentient beings afflicted with suffering. It is not sufficient to overcome the kleshas, the afflictive obstructions to liberation from cyclic existence; but, in order to overcome the subtler predispositions that are established in the mind by the afflictive obstructions, it is necessary to overcome those afflictive obstructions themselves first. This establishes the procedure of the path of first overcoming the afflictive obstructions and then overcoming the obstructions to omniscience.

When the obstructions to omniscience have

Sentient beings eventually escape cyclic existence through their own effort through being taught the truth. Thus, one needs to prepare oneself to teach others

been removed, the next moment, which is a state of being devoid of the obstructions to omniscience, is the state of omniscient awareness of a buddha. Therefore, it is through this type of thought that one generates an attitude, a deep feeling or a deep thinking, that there is no other way for oneself but to overcome the obstructions to omniscience and become a buddha. This mind, this attitude is called bodhicitta, the altruistic mind of enlightenment.

When one meditates in this way on these two streams of instruction, over and over again, and reflects on their meaning over and over again from the very depths of one’s heart, one will naturally generate a mind that wishes from the bottom of one’s heart, day and night, to liberate all beings from suffering and to establish them in the state of buddhahood, and one will definitely generate the indomitable intention to attain buddhahood in order to do so.

When one cultivates one’s mind in this way in meditation, one cultivates it over the course of months and months, years and years, even over the course of many lifetimes. Though it may seem to take a great deal of time, it is definitely the case that as this meditation is gradually cultivated, the mind is gradually transformed. When one generates even a slight portion of this altruistic attitude, one establishes a cause that will bring about permanent happiness in the future. Even in this lifetime, one’s strength of mind, one’s will, and one’s peace of mind will increase. Therefore, the cultivation of bodhicitta is something that is helpful not only in the long run, but also in the short run. So it is really worthwhile to make the attempt to cultivate bodhicitta, and to bend one’s efforts to this attempt. ㊦

Cultivation of Bodhicitta and Taking and Sending

A summary of the seven-fold cause and effect quintessential instructions and the instructions on equalizing and switching of self and other, based on a teaching of His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

[1] Develop equanimity by contemplating the equality of a friend, an enemy, and a neutral person.

[2] Recognize all beings individually as your mother in previous lifetimes and/or as your best friend.

[3] Develop mindfulness of their kindness when they were your mother/best friend.

[4] Develop special mindfulness of kindness—by reflecting upon interdependence and the six paramitas.

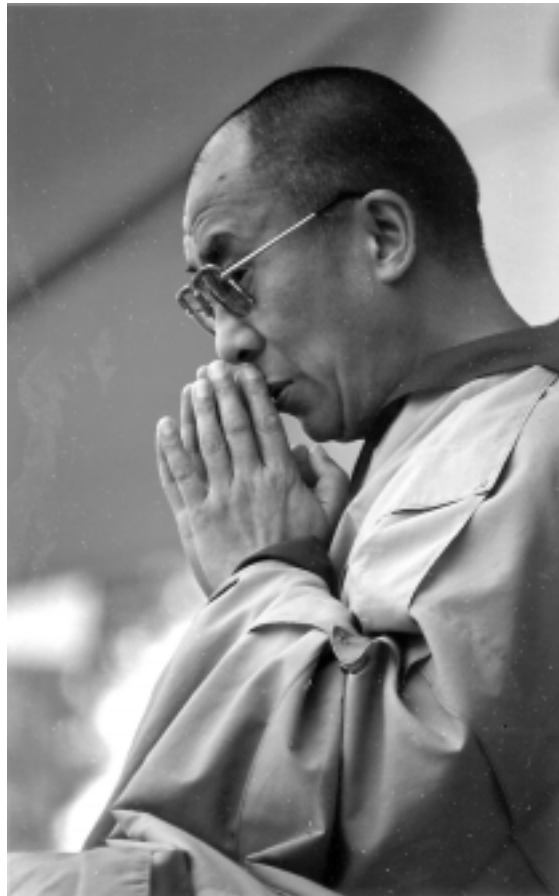
[5] Develop the intention to repay the kindness of all sentient beings.

[6] Equalize self and other—realize that others are equal to us in wanting happiness and in not wanting suffering, and that the happiness of all others together is more important than our own.

[7] Reflect on the disadvantages of cherishing oneself and the advantages of cherishing others.

[8] Engender the actual thought of exchanging self and other, exchanging cherishing of

oneself for cherishing others and neglecting others for neglecting oneself.




[9] Taking: Imagine taking others' suffering into yourself in the form of black light, poison, weapons, or frightening beings, and absorb them all fearlessly down into the very basis of your life (on the inbreath).

[10] Sending: Imagine giving others your own good body, resources, potential for wealth, good health, and long life, and all of your roots of virtue in the form of light or in the form of anything else they might want going out from yourself (on the outbreath). In the process of these visualizations, think that the sufferings of all sentient

beings are in this way relieved.

[11] Generate with great force the resolve to take upon yourself, and yourself alone, the burden of bringing about the welfare and relieving the suffering of all other sentient beings.

[12] Generate the intention to become enlightened for the benefit of all others. 

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Some people do not have any particularly preponderant klesha and are not particularly involved with anything overtly unvirtuous. They are more afflicted by the basic fundamental fixation on their own existence. Or, they might be afflicted by doubt and hesitation. They may always wonder whether “such and such is like this, or like that.” Or you might be afflicted by meaningless regret, constantly regretting things, constantly questioning your own actions. Or you might be mostly afflicted by a state of neutral sleepiness, or simply by the presence of a great deal of thoughts that are not particularly kleshas or negative in themselves. If any of these is your principal problem, then in the same way, you aim your practice at that.

— from Thrangu Rinpoche’s commentary
on *Creation and Completion*

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