



Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye

Instructions on “*The Four Dharmas of Gampopa*”

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This article is humbly dedicated to
His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,
His Eminence the IVth Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Lodrö Chökyi Nyima,
to all our eminent spiritual masters,
and to the preservation & propagation of the Buddhadharma,
especially of the Karma Kagyü Lineage.

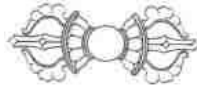
Introduction

Before presenting instructions on “*The Four Dharmas of Gampopa*,” I want to ask you to give rise to the pure motivation, which is the wish to achieve perfect buddhahood and not to abide in either samsara or nirvana in order to be able to benefit all living beings who are as limitless in number as space is vast in extent

In his former life, Lhaje Gampopa was the bodhisattva named Metog Dagtse. He met Lord Buddha in that incarnation and promised him to help spread the Dharma in the world in later times. He did so when, in the year 1079 C.E., he was born as Lhaje Gampopa and in his extraordinary life founded the Kagyü lineage. We will look at each line of the very profound and invaluable prayer that he composed and that has come to be known as “*The Four Dharmas of Gampopa*.” The prayer is:

སྒོ་ཚེས་སུ་འགྲོ་བར་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་གསོལ།
ཚེས་ལམ་དུ་འགྲོ་བར་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་གསོལ།
ལམ་འབྲུལ་པ་སེལ་བར་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་གསོལ།
འབྲུལ་པ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སུ་འཆར་བར་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་གསོལ།

“Grant your blessing so that my mind may become one with the Dharma.
Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may go along the path.
Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may clarify confusion.
Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.”



The First Dharma of Lhaje Gampopa

The first line of the sacred prayer, i.e., the first Dharma of Lhaje Gampopa is: “Grant your blessing so that my mind may become one with the Dharma.” One’s mind becomes united with the Dharma by entering the spiritual path after first having renounced and turned away from worldly aspirations.

The Four Contemplations that Turn the Mind

- The precious human birth

Buddhism speaks about three kinds of practitioners, those with lesser, average, or greater propensities and capabilities. These three types refer to a disciple’s capability to develop and mature spiritually. It’s necessary for individuals with lesser capabilities to learn about the inadequacies of samsara and to understand how it really is in order to renounce it. They need to practice four ordinary preliminary contemplations in order to really know the true nature of samsara and thus to turn their mind. Acknowledged by all traditions of Buddhism and reflected by students at the beginning of every meditation, the four fundamental practices are contemplating one’s precious human birth, contemplating impermanence, contemplating karma, and contemplating the inadequacies of conditioned existence. If they are understood well, disciples know what samsara entails, renounce it, and turn their mind on the Dharma.

The first contemplation is practiced so that one really knows that it’s very hard to attain a precious human body. Dagpo Gampopa explained in *“The Jewel Ornament of Liberation”* that the cause for attaining the perfect result, which is buddhahood, is the Buddha nature that all living beings have always had since time that is without a beginning, but aren’t aware of, and the basis for attaining the perfect result is a precious human body. Among the six realms of conditioned existence, being born as a human is the best mode of existence because then one can develop one’s spirituality. A very good human life is characterized as having the eight opportunities and ten acquirements. The eight opportunities mean not being born in eight unfavourable states of existence, which are hell states, spirits or hungry ghosts, animals, long-living gods, barbarians, having wrong views, born in a time devoid of buddhas, and born

as an imbecile. The ten acquirements, which are precious endowments, mean having been born as a man or woman, having been born in a country where there are Lamas and teachers, having one's sensory faculties intact, having faith in the Dharma, not having committed an extreme negative action, a Buddha having come into the world, the Dharma being taught, all the teachings being present, and there are beings who compassionately care for one another.

A person who knows how to deal with all situations in life is called *skye-bu* in the Tibetan language. Not every human being is referred to as *skye-bu*, though, which we will inadequately translate as 'person' or 'individual.'

People encounter a great variety of situations; everyone has positive and negative experiences. Some people become frustrated and discouraged when they face painful and problematic situations and thus cannot deal with them properly. The trait of a *skye-bu* is that he or she is able to recognize and accept any situation whatsoever, has confidence and is willing and determined to deal with it. Such a person knows how to work with anything in a very best way. The eight opportunities and ten acquirements that are characteristics of a person with greater capabilities do not suffice to describe a *skye-bu*. The Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje wrote in "*The Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*" that someone who is called a *skye-bu* has a precious human life, i.e., has the greater propensities and capabilities, but this person also has and cultivates faith, joyful endeavour, and the three kinds of wisdom-awareness (*shes-rab* in Tibetan).

Faith is extremely important. Buddha Maitreya stated in "*The Gyulama*": "Faith is realizing self-arisen truth." There are three kinds of faith: faith of belief (*yid-ches-kyi-dād-pa*), faith of aspiration (*dōd-'pa'i-dād-pa*), and pure faith (*dan-ba'i-dād-pa*). I will speak about the first two kinds now.

Everybody has faith of belief in any worldly and spiritual interests and preoccupations that they are anchored in. Faith of belief in oneself, i.e., trusting oneself, is always a part of everything one does. One needs to have faith of belief, which is very important for both secular and spiritual interests that one has and for any engagements that one pursues. One cannot progress or mature on any path if one doesn't have firm and steadfast faith of belief. In a Sutra, Lord Buddha said: "White Dharmas cannot be born in the mind of someone who does not have faith." In the same Sutra, he compared lack of faith with a seed that has been burned by fire and cannot grow into a sprout and blossom. Therefore, having faith is very important.

The second trait of a *skye-bu* is having joyful endeavour, *brtson-'grūs* in Tibetan. The great saint Shantideva described joyful endeavour in "*The Bodhicharyavatara*" as having joy in virtue, in what is beneficial and good, i.e., white Dharmas, as well as in actually engaging in virtuous activities.

A person who has a demanding job and is in a high position in society endured many hardships and passed very sophisticated levels of education due to having had a good motivation. A good motivation is always connected with joy. In the absence of the good motivation to attain a specific result in everyday life, it will be rather hard, if not impossible, to succeed. In the same way, one needs to know what to expect when one feels inspired to engage in spiritual practice. One needs to know that the goal of the path of Dharma is freedom from suffering and attainment of omniscience. If one knows that it is necessary to practice the path so that one can realize the true nature of one's mind, one needs to have a very strong motivation. Therefore, one's motivation is extremely important. Joy is always linked with

endeavour, and having joyful endeavour means one gladly practices the path diligently in order to achieve the result.

Mahayana practitioners always have the good motivation and hope to benefit others and not themselves and they never expect something in return for anything they do. Hoping to achieve freedom from suffering and lasting happiness for oneself is a motivation that is too narrow and restricted for a mahayana practitioner who needs to cultivate joyful endeavour in order to be able to help everyone attain lasting happiness and peace. It is evident that a mahayana follower needs joyful endeavour since his or her motivation is immense. Joyful endeavour is the cause for accumulating the merit of virtue and pristine wisdom, *ye-shes*. And that is why in the treatise entitled “*Entering the Middle Way*,” Chandrakirti wrote: “All qualities without exception arise from joyful endeavour. It is the root of all beneficial accomplishments.”

The third trait of a person who is a *skye-bu* is wisdom-awareness, *shes-rab* in Tibetan. Practitioners develop and cultivate three kinds of wisdom-awareness: wisdom-awareness gained from hearing the sacred teachings, wisdom-awareness gained from contemplating the sacred teachings, and wisdom-awareness won from meditating them. All three are very important. Lobpön Ludrup, Acharya Nagarjuna, said: “Wisdom-awareness is very important. It is the root of all visible and invisible qualities.” Visible qualities are those that are created and ripen in this life, and qualities that cannot be seen are those that are created in this life and ripen in a future life. It is said that things will not go well in this life and one won’t be able to practice the path that leads beyond this life if one doesn’t have wisdom-awareness. One needs it - it is very important to develop and cultivate wisdom-awareness.

The definition of the three types of wisdom-awareness: By hearing Lord Buddha’s teachings, one learns to identify what is virtuous and non-virtuous and has no doubts as to what is right and wrong. By contemplating the teachings, one gains unfaltering certainty that what one heard and learned is true. Meditation means habituating oneself to what one learned and contemplated and making the sacred teachings a part of one’s life. So, one’s uncertainty and doubts have been overcome, one has gained unfaltering certainty, and one integrates the teachings fully in one’s life by meditating them. If one develops the three kinds of wisdom-awareness, one will become very capable at helping others because one’s knowledge, *shes-rab*, will be very powerful. But that is only one side of the story, like one wing of a bird.

It is said that one’s wisdom-awareness is faulty and one will err if one doesn’t have loving kindness and compassion. Both need to be practiced together. Knowledge or wisdom-awareness is cold and faulty if one doesn’t develop it together with warm-heartedness, i.e., loving kindness and compassion. But one will fall into a state of mental dullness or stupor if one only develops wisdom-awareness and doesn’t develop loving kindness and compassion. Loving kindness and compassion and wisdom-awareness must be practiced together.

So, those are the conditions that define a good human life. They are the eight opportunities and the ten acquirements. Further conditions that define a precious human life, a *skye-bu*, are faith, joyful endeavour, wisdom-awareness, and loving kindness and compassion. Everyone needs to find out for themselves whether they have all conditions and work at creating and developing the qualities that are still missing in their life.

Having spoken about how precious the human body is, in “*The Bodhicharyavatara*” Shantideva compared it with a boat that is hard to find and easy to lose. He said that only somebody who is stupid doesn’t make best use of it. Since one can progress along the path and cross the ocean of suffering and pain in the boat that is one’s precious human body, one

should not underestimate it. One should treat one's body carefully and lead one's life heedfully for the benefit of one's next life, too. One should not think negatively of one's body, having thoughts like "My body is ugly. I don't like it," and so forth. One needs the three kinds of wisdom-awareness so that one can navigate, i.e., lead one's life well. Wisdom-awareness is like the captain of the boat, and faith, joyful endeavour, and loving kindness and compassion are like the boat's engine.

In "*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*," Dagpo Gampopa wrote that it is not enough to be in a boat that has a good engine and with an intelligent captain on board. One also needs a map. Lord Buddha's Dharma is the map. The teachings of the sutras and tantras offer a great variety of methods by which one can navigate the path. And "*The Four Dharmas of Gampopa*" are a short and very concise map. Let us meditate these instructions for a short while together now.

Translator: "What is really meant by *goms-pa'i-shes-rab*? Is it only meditation or does one somehow cultivate *thös-pa'i-she-rab* and *bsam-pa'i-shes-rab* and then go into action or conduct? Would you please explain this a little more? What is meant by *goms-pa'i-shes-rab*?"

Lama Sönam: It is a meditative process. One looks at what the teachings mean when one studies them, gains certainty, and meditation is abiding in one's recognition. One wins wisdom-awareness by meditating. While practicing calm abiding meditation, one is aware of the bell on the table, for example, recognizes that one has the thought that there is a bell, has certainty that the bell is a bell, and abides in that certainty, which is the aspect of special insight meditation.

Student: "Does meditation form one's character and have an impact on one's actions? A thought doesn't have an impact on my actions, but it sinks into my consciousness. Then I meditate it, then it forms my character, and then my actions will have changed because my character will have changed. Is that right?"

Translator: "What is the connection between meditation and action? How does one transform one's own way of being? How do the qualities develop due to meditation in that one is more generous?"

Lama Sönam: It is a little bit difficult to understand what you are asking.

Translator: "Try it again."

Same student: "I contemplate the real meaning and I accept that it is good, but it is not enough to just accept."

Lama Sönam: "Accepting is not enough, but ..."

Same student: "Then I do calm abiding meditation and somehow have knowledge of what I contemplated. Maybe it becomes more a part of my thinking by meditating and then it becomes a part of my character. And then the action will be positive. What I accepted becomes part of my consciousness through meditation and then automatically my actions will be positive. Is it like this?"

Lama Sönam: Maybe. Thinking and thinking is not meditation.

Same student: "I rest in it."

Lama Sönam: Look at the thought. It's very important to recognize your thoughts and then slowly, slowly all thoughts settle into themselves – we say *rang-babs* in Tibetan.

Translator: "Fall into themselves."

Lama Sönam: Like that. Then it is possible for your character and actions to change. The important thing is that when you read a book, hear a teaching, reflect the meaning, then after that you can realize the meaning, which you never understood before, by meditating. You heard the meaning, but haven't realized it. You have the direct experience of the meaning

slowly, slowly, look at that, and then rest. This is *shes-rab*. You realize what you never realized before, which is *lhag-mthong*, ‘special insight.’

Translator: “But what is the effect of *lhag-mthong* meditation on daily activities? How do they go together? You see, when I meditate and there is no connection with my daily activities and I behave in a nasty way as every time, where is the connection?”

Lama Sönam: There is always a connection.

Translator: “Where is the influence of the meditation on daily activities? How does that function?”

Lama Sönam: If you talked a lot, then at the end of the day you think, “Today I talked an hour with this man and that person.” You reflect what you said, recognize whether you said something wrong, and conclude, “It’s not a good idea that I talked like that. I have to make a change.” You can do this through your meditation. Or you worked all day and reflect, “Today I worked for 8 hours. What did I do?” If you recognize that you did something wrong, then you can change it and do it the right way. You can do this and that is connecting through meditation. If we sing the song “*Turning Daily Behaviour into a Practice*,” you can understand what Milarepa did. You will understand what we are learning to say and do, so let’s sing this song together.

“Turning Daily Behaviour into a Practice,”
composed by Jetsün Milarepa

“Rechungpa, perk up your ears and listen my son -
Your ancient father Milarepa, I,
At times do sleep and while sleeping I meditate.
And during the sleeping where sleeping is meditating
I’m using instructions, converting this stupor to light.
It’s me is the man who has these, others who don’t.
If everyone had them, I’d be so happy they did.

Your ancient father Milarepa, I,
At times do eat and while eating I meditate.
And during this eating where eating is meditating
From instructions I know eating-drinking as ritual feast.
It’s me is the man who has these, not all who do.
If everyone had them, I’d be so happy they did.

Your ancient father Milarepa, I,
At times do walk and while walking I meditate.
And during this walking where walking is meditating
From instructions I know walking-sitting as ritual rounds.
It’s me is the man who has these, others who don’t.
If everyone had them, I’d be so happy they did.

Your ancient father Milarepa, I,
At times do act and while acting I meditate.
And during this action where action is meditation
From instructions the action releases impure being.
It’s me is the man who has these, not all who do.
If everyone had them, I’d be so happy they did.

And you, too, Rechung my son should practice like this,
And you, too, Megong should wake up and cook the soup.”

- Impermanence & death

One likes to think that one’s life will last forever, but it won’t. It is a fact that one’s precious human life is impermanent and that everyone dies. In “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*,” Gampopa wrote:

“It is necessary to meditate the transient nature of all outer and inner phenomena so that one turns one’s mind on the Dharma.”

Outer phenomena are all appearances in the world, and inner phenomena are all sentient beings living in the world – they are all impermanent. If one investigates well, one will discover that no phenomenon, no family member or friend is not subject to change and that nobody will be able to accompany one at death. One will be alone when one dies and will lose everything. There is a popular saying: “Nothing lasts, and there is nobody who has not died previously.” So, it is reasonable not to be attached to persons and things because, in the end, one will be disappointed when one has to part and leave everything behind. The world is instable; one will never find security in the world because everything changes. Furthermore, the time of one’s death is uncertain and one cannot determine when it will occur.

One’s mind apperceives appearances that one thinks are pleasant and thus one experiences happiness, but everything changes and therefore one cannot hold on to the things one likes. In the same way, one apperceives appearances that one thinks are unpleasant and feels displeased. It is natural to want to hold on to one’s pleasant experiences of things, and it is natural to want to eliminate anything, even smallest pain, that makes one feel unhappy or that makes one suffer. It is necessary to keenly examine these deeply ingrained habitual patterns, which are clinging to those things that make one feel happy and resisting those things that make one feel unhappy in order to clearly know why it is futile to rely on things that make one feel happy and to clearly know that, like the things that make one feel happy, those things that make one feel unhappy are also impermanent and change.

Many people assume that they can have lasting happiness and will be content if and only if they have a good body, if they have a good family, if they have good friends, and if they own many good things - and they leave it at that. If one is honest, though, one will admit that one doesn’t have a body that is always healthy, one’s doesn’t have a family and friends who are always nice, the things one owns aren’t always that wonderful, but that all these things only cause problems and aren’t everlasting. That’s why Lord Buddha spoke about impermanence in great detail and taught the four marks of impermanence. The four marks of impermanence are: Whatever is gathered will disperse; whatever rises and flourishes is bound to fall; whatever comes together will separate; and whatever is born is subject to death.

In “*The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*,” Ngülchu Thogme wrote:

“Close friends and relatives separate;
wealth gained with effort is lost;
the guest, consciousness, leaves its lodging the body behind.
Not relying on this life is the practice of bodhisattvas.”

It's important to clearly know that one will lose the eight opportunities and ten acquirements of a good human existence because everything is impermanent. Collecting so many things with great effort and hoarding them can be compared with bees buzzing around to collect-collect-collect and to produce a honeycomb, which we take away from them without giving it a second thought. Likewise, the things that one collects and hoards will – in the end - be enjoyed by others. In the same verse, Ngülchu Thogme compared one's consciousness with a guest residing in a hotel; no guest lives in a hotel for a very long time and eventually leaves. In the same way, one's consciousness will leave one's body one day. One will also leave one's family members, relatives, and friends behind when one continues one's journey and moves to another hotel. Clinging to people and things not only causes difficulties and problems in this life, but will also cause difficulties and problems in one's next life.

One doesn't know when one will die, and when one does it will be like water being absorbed by dry earth and like the flame of a butter-lamp being extinguished. Our life will end like that, no matter what. Life does not continue, rather there will be a time when one's mind will separate from one's body, which is the definition of death. When one's mind separates from one's body, then one will be separated from everything that one is associated with through one's physical body, i.e., one's environment, people, and possessions. At that time, one's physical body will be called "a corpse," but one's mind won't be a corpse. It's a big mistake to think and cling to the thought that one's life in its present form lasts forever, so it's important to contemplate and never forget the truth of impermanence.

The definition of impermanence is coarse and subtle change that takes place from moment-to-moment and at all times - everything changes in every instant and nothing lasts. Clinging to anything that one assumes and therefore thinks is permanent and real is a grave mistake because there is no solid phenomenon at all. Coarse impermanence is, for example, that seasons change and the sun and moon rise and set. It's important to contemplate subtle impermanence well, though, for example, when one is moody. One thinks it's all right being in a good mood and isn't when one is in a bad mood. There's no need feeling sorry for oneself when one is in a bad mood and to think, "I'm so bad off. Nothing is working out for me. *Alles ist kaputt*," etc. because that changes, too. Lord Buddha said:

"From among all the footprints made in the jungle, the elephant's footprint is the largest. From any knowledge that one can gain, being aware of impermanence is supreme."

Let me tell the story of the great teacher of mind training named Karak Gomchung. He spent much time meditating in a cave. Its entrance became overgrown by a thorn bush more and more each year. Karak Gomchung became entangled in the thorn bush every time he left his cave. He thought that he should tear it down so that he could go outside when he needed to without trouble, but he looked at the bush and thought, "Why bother? Maybe I'll be dead tomorrow. It would be better to meditate." So he didn't do anything and just left it, but he had to make his way past the bush every time he had to leave his cave. He contemplated impermanence and death every time he went outside, and for years and years he wondered whether he should tear it down or not. Karak Gomchung became a Mahasiddha because he contemplated impermanence and death so regularly and intensively because of the thorn bush.

There is a purpose in practicing the sequence of the four contemplations in the given order. Having come to appreciate and acknowledge the invaluable occasion of having attained a good human life, the truth of impermanence becomes central and points to the truth of karma.

- Karma

Mind separates from the physical body at death and continues its journey into a following life and after that into the next. Mind is a continuous stream that flows from one life to the next. Karma is not left behind at death, but is stored in one's mind and ripens and manifests when causes and conditions come together. Lhaje Gampopa taught:

“Self-aware pristine wisdom, *rang-rig-ki-ye-shes*, as well as positive and negative habitual inclinations and patterns are not extinguished at death, but continue.”

Positive karma is the virtuous activities that one created and that are stored as habitual imprints in one's mind; negative karma is the non-virtuous activities that one created and that are also stored as habitual imprints in one's mind. Actions that weren't carried out cannot become karmic imprints. Actions that were carried out are irreversible and cannot be retracted; they are ingrained as karmic imprints in the mindstream of the person who performed the action.

One can win certainty of rebirth by taking the example of dreams. One's body is asleep when one dreams, but one's mind doesn't sleep. One experiences the images that appear in one's dreams as realities, e.g., one can experience being devoured by a tiger, or that one is eating, drinking, dancing, and so forth in one's dreams. Waking up the next morning is similar to being born with a new body in a new life, from one life to the next, in which case one goes through experiences that are based upon the karma that one created and accumulated. Body and mind are not one. They connect for a while and separate at death, and this takes place again and again. The body is impermanent, and the mind continues from one life to the next. Having wise understanding of karma and knowing that the mind doesn't end at death, it is logical that positive actions leave corresponding positive imprints in one's mind, ripen, and manifest as circumstances and conditions that one experiences in one's next life. Likewise, negative actions leave corresponding negative imprints in one's mind, ripen, and manifest as circumstances and conditions that one experiences in one's next life.

There's no reason one shouldn't have a happy life, a good family, good friends, and good things, but one shouldn't make the mistake and think that these things are truly real and that they last. One's habit of clinging to things that one considers pleasant and one's habit of rejecting things that one considers unpleasant will increase more and more if one makes the mistake of thinking that all those things are real and never change. Suffering ensues due to one's attachment and rejection, and they both continue dominating and determining one's future - from one life to the next. It's important to know that one doesn't leave one's karma behind when one dies and that the causes of one's karma that one created will ripen and manifest to oneself as results in a future life. So that is why the teachings on karma are presented in this order and should be contemplated after having understood quite well the teachings on impermanence and death.

Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, said:

“Look at your present body if you want to know what you did in your past life.
Look at your present mind if you want to know where you will go.”

This means to say that by looking at one's mind and by being aware of what one is doing now, one can see what one can expect in the future. So it's very important to have a positive mind, to engage in profound methods of practice, to sharpen one's intelligence and knowledge, and to accumulate positive karma by engaging in virtuous verbal and physical

actions while on the path. If one goes along the path of Dharma positively and focuses one's attention on beneficial qualities of being, then positive results will ensue. If one focuses one's attention on unwholesome activities and speaks and acts accordingly, then one will have created unfortunate causes and conditions for one's future. Lhaje Gampopa taught that one's attachment and aversion will definitely diminish if one takes these thoughts to heart.

Student: "I can't get it together. On the one hand, it is said that only a buddha knows which cause gives rise to which result. It seems like a contradiction."

Lama: You can conclude that having a good body now is a result of good karma and that being sick or experiencing difficulties are also results of karma. You can't change circumstances and conditions that you experience now because they are karmic results. You can't know exactly which past karma brought on a specific result. You can deduce, though, without being able to specify the cause of a specific result. A buddha sees the exact connection between a cause and effect, and that's the difference. The Buddha said that karma never ends, but that it accompanies one, will ripen, and will manifest for oneself. Disciples can deduce that a positive mind, positive speech, and positive actions will affect their future. Everybody knows many people who try so many things in order to accomplish an aim, but fail, which is a result of karma. One can see that they try their best to have a good and happy life. Some people succeed, have a happy life, and become very rich, for example, and others, who do the same things and apply the same effort, have difficulties and go down and down. Seeing this, one can guess that there is a connection between causes and results.

Student: "You said that the mind goes from life to life. Is the mind permanent?"

Lama: The mind is impermanent, but it continues and never dies. The mind is a continuation of moments that constantly change. If the mind were always the same, then it would be permanent. For example, I was born in Nepal, but my mind has changed, and now I am in Germany. So, one cannot say that the mind is permanent.

Same student: "If it's not the same, it would fall apart, and one can see that Lama Sönam isn't another consciousness."

Translator: "Can you say that the stream is permanent?"

Lama: You cannot say that.

Same student: "As a child I had other thoughts ..."

Lama: My mind is not the same every day. It changes constantly. For example, your mind is not the same as it was when you beat the drum this morning.

Same student: "The mind is not permanent and I have another collection of thoughts in my mind now than I had this morning, but I remember that I beat the drum and my memory is in my consciousness. There is also a connection in reincarnations, between former and previous in the life of a tulku, and things aren't just mixed randomly. Thoughts change, but there is a systematic order."

Translator: "One has to distinguish between the terms 'continuous' and 'permanent.'"

Same student: "..."

Lama: What is your problem?

Translator: "There's no problem. It's a discussion, and it's very interesting."

Lama: All minds are impermanent.

Translator: "There are so many questions."

Lama: Let me finish with the teachings first. ... Oh, I forgot what I wanted to say. You all made me ...

If one knows quite well that all things are impermanent and that karma is infallible, then one's mind will be more open, and that's why it is said that the teachings on impermanence and karma are the foundation of every Buddhist practice. They are the right view how the world is

and are pivotal teachings of Lord Buddha. These teachings are very important, so one should gain certainty of them. If one wants to understand these topics more deeply, it would be advisable to study the life of Jetsün Milarepa, especially the song that he composed when he visited his home after having been gone for a long time and found his dead mother's bones lying in a heap on the ground, furthermore the text composed by Patrul Rinpoche, entitled "*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*."

When Jetsün Milarepa was very old, a disciple asked him: "Tell us, whose incarnation are you? Your realization is evidence that you aren't the incarnation of an ordinary being." Milarepa replied: "I'm not the incarnation of Vajradhara, but I had trust and devotion in the Buddha. Look at my life. I committed very many bad actions when I was young. When I realized that I had collected much negative karma and would be reborn in the hell realms due to having killed so many living beings, I entered the path and was very fortunate to meet my great teacher Marpa Lotsawa, who transmitted the teachings to me. I practiced the teachings and was able to purify my negative karma. Anybody who thinks I was born into this world as a realized being has the wrong view." Milarepa told his disciples: "Everybody can practice the profound methods of Dharma. Everybody has the potential and therefore can attain the state of Vajradhara if they dedicate their life to the Dharma and whole-heartedly practice the path." The Tibetan term for "whole-hearted" in this context is *syning-rüs* and means 'heart-bone.' Milarepa added: "Just as I have done, you can also attain realization by practicing the methods. If you succeed, then you can be reborn as the tulku of a buddha."

One needs to turn one's back on worldly aspirations in order to fully turn one's mind on the Dharma and to practice the path. Having looked at what it means to have a precious human birth, we saw that one creates one's own karma and therefore is responsible for everything that one experiences. Let me share the sacred verse spoken by Lord Buddha with you:

"I am the one who protects myself from suffering by abandoning non-virtuous actions, and I am the one who creates my own happiness by engaging in virtuous actions."

It's important to know that one will have to endure one's karma that one created and creates - nobody else will have to. And so one acknowledges that one should be heedful of everything one does and one appreciates that one can purify one's karma by turning one's mind on the Dharma and by practicing the path.

- Samsara

Contemplating the inadequacies of conditioned existence is the fourth fundamental preliminary practice that inspires a disciple to turn his or her mind on the Dharma. The Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term for *samsara* is '*khor-ba* and means 'wheel.'

There are two kinds of manifestations in samsara: pure and impure appearances. There are six impure realms of existence in samsara. Impure appearances are the six modes of conditioned existence, which arise in the wake of karma that is created due to a particular negative emotion. They are: the realms of hells (caused by anger), hungry ghosts (caused by miserliness), animals (caused by ignorance), humans (caused by desire), demigods (caused by jealousy), and gods (caused by pride). The realms of humans and gods are much better than the other four because they are more pleasant.

All human beings without exception experience four kinds of suffering: the suffering of birth, of sickness, of ageing, and of death. On top of these four, humans experience more

fundamental kinds of suffering by craving for things they don't have, by struggling to keep and protect what they have managed to get, and by being separated from things that they like, referred to as "friends" in Tibetan usage. Furthermore, they experience suffering by rejecting and struggling against things they don't want, referred to as "enemies" in Tibetan usage.

When their positive karma is exhausted and spent, all beings without exception who were born in the very happy realms of the gods experience the immense suffering of falling from their very joyous state of existence to a lower realm. It is evident that it doesn't matter in which of the six realms of samsara a being exists - they all experience suffering because there is no lasting happiness in conditioned existence. If one knows this, then one has won certainty that peace and happiness cannot be found in samsara. Ascertaining that samsara is futile is called "renunciation." One should know this. When one is certain that samsara is instable and insecure and when one has the sincere wish to become free of the transient and painful conditions that samsaric existence always entails, then one will automatically seek a way out and turn one's mind on the Dharma.

There are three categories of suffering in the entirety of conditioned existence. They are: suffering of suffering (*sdug-bsngäl-gi-sdug-bsngäl*), suffering of change (*'gyur-ba'i-sdug-bsngäl*), and all-pervading suffering (*kun-khyab-kyi-sdug-bsngäl*), the latter also referred to as suffering of conditionality (*'du-byed-kyi-sdug-bsngäl*).

In "*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*," Gampopa wrote that because of having been born, humans have the five skandhas and thus automatically suffer, which is the definition of all-pervading suffering. The five *skandhas* ('aggregates or formations of being') are the five principal mental and physical constituents that one has and clings to as real. They are: form, sensations, recognition, mental events, and consciousnesses. Seeing that samsara only entails suffering, on top of all-pervading suffering, one experiences other kinds of suffering, e.g., suffering that arises from sicknesses or from hearing harsh words or foul speech. Since everything is transitory and therefore instable, the second kind of suffering that one experiences is suffering of change, which means that everything, including samsaric bliss, inevitably changes into the suffering of loss; it also refers to the suffering of birth, sickness, ageing, death, etc.

Lhaje Gampopa's teachings correspond to the verse that Thogme Ngülchu wrote in "*The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*":

"Pleasures of the three realms are like dew on the tips of grass:
Their very nature is to evaporate instantly.
To strive for supreme liberation, which is changeless,
is the practice of bodhisattvas."

These teachings move disciples with lesser and average capabilities to stop clinging to and relying on impermanent joy, to turn their back on samsaric aspirations, and to practice the path to liberation from suffering, misery, and woe. It's possible to have wonderful experiences for a long duration of time in the three realms of conditioned existence, which are the desire, the form, and formless realms. But all these experiences are transitory and are not what liberation from suffering means. One will be confused and thus will err if one thinks that transient bliss is absolute and lasts. And that is why Lord Buddha taught extensively about impermanence and the suffering of change. He taught that everything changes from one instant to the next.

One needs to understand that one has no control over one's experiences because they are caused by one's karma and disturbing emotions, which dominate and determine one's life. Therefore the instructions say that any bliss experienced in the three realms is like building a house on ice. This cannot happen in Germany, but it happens in the mountainous regions of Nepal. It's hard digging one's way to the stable earth due to the deep snow in Nepal, and a house will collapse if it is built on the instable foundation of ice that melts in the summer. Like a house built on ice, there is nothing durable in conditioned existence. In the same way, one will have no stable foundation by basing one's life on ignorance, *ma-rig-pa*. Jetsün Milarepa wrote about this in "*A Song of Meaningful Connections*" and taught that one's connection with samsara is created by ignorance and one's connection with nirvana is established by pure devotion and diligence. If one turns away from samsara and practices the good methods of skilful means, then one will achieve liberation from suffering and attain omniscience. One should think about this.

One notices how people base their life on having pretty clothes, delicious food, fame, and many things that just do not last. And so, the suffering that they experience when things fall apart is called "the suffering of change." Of course, it also happens that suffering changes into happiness, and you have all experienced this for yourself. Shantideva spoke about it in "*The Bodhicharyavatara*" when he wrote that friends turn into enemies and enemies turn into friends. Everyone has experienced that their best friend turns against them on the very same day or their worst enemy becomes a best friend the next day. These instances illustrate that nothing is durable and real and that everything changes.

Suffering of suffering is felt as massive suffering. Suffering of change isn't felt as strongly. The most subtle category of suffering is all-pervading suffering, which one automatically experiences due to having been born and thus due to the presence of the five skandhas. We saw that the definition of suffering of suffering is physical pain and the definition of suffering of change is loss of happiness. One feels these, but one doesn't feel all-pervading suffering and therefore one is indifferent about it. One will hardly be aware of and know about all-pervading suffering on one's own and as long as one doesn't receive teachings and doesn't contemplate them well.

Lhaje Gampopa wrote:

"I'm not immediately aware that I created any suffering that I experience. One tends to blame others for any suffering that one experiences."

In the same way, one can hardly appreciate on one's own that one can liberate oneself from suffering, but there are many methods to become free from suffering. Finding methods to free oneself from suffering is based upon one's own mind, *rang-ki-sems-blo*, which depends upon one's karma. One's karma in turn depends upon the seeds one planted in one's past life, which ripen and manifest in this life. If one knows that the teachings on karma are right, then one will naturally be able to accept and deal with any suffering that one experiences. That's why it's so important to contemplate and have confidence in karma. Nobody wants to suffer, yet everyone does again and again. By acknowledging and understanding karma, one has wise understanding and compassion for others when one sees them suffer.

Since suffering is impermanent, one needn't despair or be depressed when one suffers and, instead, one can actively work with it. A great Kadampa teacher said: "Suffering is the best teacher." It teaches one to abandon negativities and enables one to sweep away one's negative karma. Accepting any problems or difficulties one encounters is the first step one

takes when trying to overcome them. There's absolutely no reason to be sad, frustrated, or discouraged when things seem to go wrong. Shantideva taught about the benefit of suffering and said that one becomes weary of samsara when one suffers and thereby vanquishes the demon of arrogance. One develops compassion for others when the demon of one's arrogance has been relinquished, thus overcomes one's negativities and cultivates joy in virtue. One should think about this.

Student: "What do the words that you used, *pham* and *chung*, mean?"

Translator: "*bLo-pham* in Tibetan means 'sad, disappointed,' *blo-chung* means 'being down,' i.e., 'depressed.'"

Since the basis of suffering is not real and is therefore instable, every difficult situation presents the chance to become free. The true nature of one's mind is Buddha nature, which is more happiness and bliss than one can imagine. If one trusts that one has Buddha nature and can relate to it, then one knows that everything changes and that one can become free from suffering. If one investigates suffering and analyses it in its entire scope and depth, one will discover that it isn't real. One will find that its essence is empty of true existence and will then know and trust that one can become free. There's no reason to be sad and feel discouraged. One needs to know about and contemplate all-pervading suffering, but it isn't that easy. It's very good to know about the inadequacies of conditioned existence. Let me tell a story.

There was a Geshe named Lamrütanpa who focused his mind on the defects of samsara as his object of meditation and only laughed once in his entire life. Since he always looked so gloomy due to intensively meditating suffering that pervades the three realms, many disciples, servants, and villagers gave him the nickname Lamtan Blackface. A few of his disciples pleaded with him, "Please make a white face because all the people in this district are gossiping and being rude." There was a huge turquoise on the mandala in his meditation box, and one day, while he continued meditating suffering, a mouse entered his box, went to the mandala, and tried and tried with all its might to get hold of the turquoise – in vain. Suddenly it let out a loud squeak of desperation. All the mice nearby came running and helped the mouse push the turquoise into its little mouse hole. This made Geshe Lamrütanpa laugh from the depth of his heart. It was the only time he laughed in his life. He was truly touched by others' suffering.

Vasubandhu, who was one of the most influential figures in the history of Buddhism and author of "*The Abhidharmakosha*," wrote:

"Ordinary people are not aware of all-pervading suffering.
Noble beings, *phag-pa*, feel all-pervading suffering precisely
and know that it must be overcome."

The Tibetan term *phag-pa* means 'noble' and refers to practitioners who have attained the first level of realization and continue advancing to further bodhisattva stages. The example that Vasubandhu gave to illustrate a noble being's perception of suffering is like the pain felt by having a strand of hair in their eyes that makes tears fall. Ordinary beings, who aren't trained, perceive all-pervading suffering like a strand of hair on the palm of their hands and don't feel it. Noble beings, who have understood emptiness, are touched deeply by all the suffering they see.

Gaining wisdom-awareness of the various categories of suffering moves one to turn one's mind on the Dharma. Regardless of whether one contemplates karma or all shortcomings of

samsara, compassion will arise in one's mind if one contemplates suffering. Compassion is the foundation of all qualities that one develops and cultivates more and more while practicing the path. That is why, when Buddha Shakyamuni turned the Wheel of Dharma three times, he taught the Four Noble Truths at the first Dharmachakra and told his disciples:

“Monks, you should know the truth of suffering.”

If one contemplates the first noble truth deeply, then one will earnestly and sincerely turn one's mind on the Dharma.

Question: “Does one control one's feelings or do they change?”

Lama Sönam: They change by themselves. If you try to change your feelings, then you are trying to manipulate and control them. This doesn't work because then they become more solid and will increase. For example, if one throws a stone into a big pond, waves are created that become bigger and bigger and spread across the entire surface of the pond. The waves are like one's emotions that arise due to one's thoughts.

Question: “What is all-pervading suffering?”

Translator: “That's what Lama Sönam has been teaching. You have a body when you are born, have feelings, the ability to discern and to think, and you have consciousness, which are the five skandhas. The fact that you have the skandhas means that you have been born in conditioned existence. Having been born into conditionality, you suffer, which is all-pervading suffering.

Same student: “Then it's the same as suffering of suffering.”

Translator: “No. Suffering of suffering is the normal pain that one feels when one is hit.”

Same student: “Then all-pervading suffering is a basis for the other kinds of suffering.”

Translator: “Yes, it is part of all other sufferings.”

Lama Sönam: Okay.

We have gone through the four contemplations to turn one's mind on the Dharma. I now wish to present the instructions on how to go along the path, which is the second Dharma of Gampopa.

The Second Dharma of Lhaje Gampopa

The first Dharma of Gampopa is: “Grant your blessing so that my mind may become one with the Dharma.” The second Dharma of Gampopa is: “Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may go along the path.” Entering the path of Dharma occurs when one seeks and takes refuge and develops *bodhicitta*, ‘the mind of awakening.’

- Taking refuge & developing bodhicitta

Taking refuge is the gate that students of all Buddhist traditions pass through when aspiring to practice the Dharma. There are four levels of taking refuge: outer, inner, relative, and absolute. Outer refuge is taking refuge in the Three Jewels - the Buddha who is the teacher, the Dharma that is all teachings of the Buddha, and the sangha that is the community of practitioners and helpers. Having taken outer refuge, one gradually becomes aware of inner refuge, which is the true nature of one's mind, i.e., one's Buddha nature. Vajrayana disciples furthermore take refuge in the Three Roots - the Lama who is the source of all blessings, the yidams who are the source of all extraordinary accomplishments, and the protectors who are

the source of all enlightened activities. A special feature of vajrayana is seeing the Lama as the embodiment of the Three Jewels and Three Roots. Taking refuge is the basis of the path. The text, *“The Torch that Lights the Path”* states that no set of vows that one can take is more supreme than taking refuge – it is the basis for one’s entire practice along the path. Taking refuge qualifies one to go along the mahayana path, *theg-pa-chen-po’i-lam*.

Lhaje Gampopa wrote:

“Following the path means developing love and compassion for all living beings, which is relative bodhicitta. Since all phenomena arise in dependence, they are devoid of inherent existence and are like appearances in dreams. This is the meaning of ultimate bodhicitta.”

One needs to develop and cultivate relative bodhicitta and one also needs to strive to attain ultimate bodhicitta. Having entered the Dharma, actually following the path is based upon having given rise to and developing bodhicitta, *byang-chub-kyi-sems*. It is an attitude, a decision one makes to be there for and to benefit all living beings. It doesn’t make a difference if one’s virtuous activities are large or small, one’s attitude is decisive because it is the means to come closer and closer to the goal, which is attainment of enlightenment. That is the purpose of following the path.

Relative bodhicitta is cultivating love and compassion for all living beings. The definition of love (*byams*) is wishing that all living beings are happy and prosperous and have the causes for happiness and prosperity. The definition of compassion (*snings-rje*) is wishing that all living beings be free of suffering and have the causes to be free of suffering. Compassion is therefore stronger than love. One should regularly check whether one has love and compassion, which are the two aspects of relative bodhicitta. Chandrakirti wrote: “It is most important to praise the qualities of love and compassion and then to praise Lord Buddha. I bow to love and compassion first.” He explained why it was more important to bow to love and compassion than to the Buddha. He was a great logician and wrote that Buddha in a former life as a bodhisattva had developed love and compassion. Chandrakirti argued:

“How does one become a bodhisattva? By developing love and compassion.

No one ever became a buddha without first having developed love and compassion.

And that is why,” he continued, “the cause of buddhahood is more important for me than the result.”

- Developing the four immeasurables

Next to developing love and compassion, one needs to develop and cultivate the four qualities that are called “the four immeasurables” if one wishes to follow the mahayana path correctly. Love is the first quality; compassion is the second. The third quality is joy, and the fourth is equanimity. I spoke about love and compassion in the discussion on developing bodhicitta and will speak about the other two now.

Joy is defined in *“The Light of Certainty”* and is described as rejoicing when one sees or learns that someone is mentally and physically very well off, which means that one feels no jealousy. Equanimity means being impartial, i.e., due to having taken the first three immeasurables to heart, one doesn’t cherish oneself, one doesn’t have sympathy for some, and one doesn’t feel hostile towards others. One doesn’t privilege anyone, rather one cherishes everyone just as one cherishes one’s mother. Contemplating and meditating equanimity means knowing that there is no living being who wasn’t one’s mother in a past life. A mother, who always does so much for her child, has helped and cared for one the most

in this as well as in all past lives. Developing and cultivating the qualities of the four immeasurables enables one to see one's mother in every living being. They are also a foundation to follow the meditative path. So, one needs to be attentive and know that the qualities of the four immeasurables are one's own true nature since time that is without a beginning and to practice so that they manifest fully.

Evidence that the qualities of the four immeasurables are always and already within one's mind is that, when they are in need, one naturally rushes to the side of persons who are close, like one's parents, relatives, and friends, or tears immediately come to one's eyes and one cries when one hears that they are in trouble or are sad. It also happens naturally that one is touched deeply when one thinks of one's Lama or spiritual teacher, when one recalls his qualities, or when one reflects specific teachings that Lord Buddha presented that the hairs in one's pores rise or one starts crying. These reactions also show that one has bodhicitta. If one has these feelings and reacts in similar ways, then one is a suitable vessel for mahayana. Being confident that one has these qualities within, one can practice the methods of the path and progress through the stages by developing relative bodhicitta and attaining realization of absolute bodhicitta. Taking the bodhisattva vows is a good method to train and practice bodhicitta.

Buddha Maitreya explained the purpose of cultivating bodhicitta together with wisdom-awareness in the text, *"The Ornament of Clear Realization,"* and defined the meaning. He wrote: "One strives to attain correct and perfect buddhahood in order to benefit other living beings."

Bodhicitta has two aspects: compassion for others and the strong wish to attain perfect buddhahood. One will be able to manifest ultimate bodhicitta with the help of relative bodhicitta and thus fully and perfectly realize one's Buddha nature.

All appearances and experiences that can be perceived and that can be known have both relative and ultimate reality. It's important not to be one-sided by believing in one aspect only, thus falling into the one or the other extreme view. Rather, one needs to integrate the relative and ultimate truths, which is what is meant of taking the middle way. Falling into the extreme of relative reality, one will remain attached to appearances and experiences and will be stuck in the belief of permanence, referred to as "eternalism," which isn't the right view that one needs to have in order to follow the path correctly. Falling into the extreme of ultimate reality, one will be stuck in the belief called "nihilism," which isn't the right view either. One needs to avoid the two extreme views, which are believing in permanent existence or believing in non-existence. Being free of the extremes doesn't mean that one unites them, rather one takes the middle way when following the right path correctly. Relative bodhicitta has to be permeated by wise understanding so that one can realize absolute bodhicitta. Therefore Lhaje Gampopa wrote in the second verse of the prayer: "Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may go along the path."

One begins practicing the path by developing relative bodhicitta, which has two aspects: the enlightened attitude of aspiration (*smön-pa 'i-byang-chub-kyi-sems*) and the enlightened attitude of application (*'jug-pa 'i-byang-chub-kyi-sems*). For example, one first has the wish to go into town, which would correspond to bodhicitta of aspiration, and utilizing one's energy by actually going would correspond to bodhicitta of application. In the same way, having the wish to attain perfect buddhahood in order to be able to benefit all living beings is bodhicitta of aspiration, for which one takes the bodhisattva vows. Following the path of a bodhisattva

(*byang-chub-lam-gro*) by practicing the methods that lead to buddhahood is bodhicitta of application. And that is why Lhaje Gampopa wrote:

“How can one develop and practice relative bodhicitta?

By knowing that it is invaluable to have more love and compassion for others than one has for oneself.”

Having explained how to follow the path by cherishing others more than oneself, let us meditate the instructions for a short while together.

- Giving & taking

The *blo-sbyong*-teachings, ‘mind training’ teachings that were brought to Tibet by Atisha Dipamkara, offer many instructions on how to learn to cherish others more than oneself, i.e., how to develop an open and warm heart. A main practice of lojong is giving and taking, called *tong-len* in Tibetan, i.e., giving one’s own well-being and happiness to others and taking on their suffering.

As it is, one cherishes oneself and strongly thinks that one deserves to be privileged over others. As long as one thinks like this, one cannot develop equanimity and, instead, thinks it’s all right to take what one wants from others and to leave things one doesn’t want to them. One is used to thinking this way. Lojong is the practice of reversing this habit by giving everybody one’s happiness and taking on their suffering. One again and again meditates the specific lojong practice of tonglen in order to become open for others’ suffering.

It’s interesting to note that the term *goms*, ‘meditation, becoming accustomed,’ is spelled with a *tsa* in Tibetan. As long as the Tibetan word for “meditation” is spelled with the syllable *tsa*, a practitioner is still actively habituating to a practice, whereas when the *tsa* is left out of the spelling, then it connotes that a practitioner has become accustomed to a practice and needn’t meditate it anymore. If one again and again practices giving one’s happiness and well-being to others and taking on their suffering, then one’s mind will become less and less malevolent and more and more benevolent and one will be better and better service-oriented. Tonglen is a fundamental practice if one aspires to develop relative bodhicitta. One practices tonglen by using one’s ingoing breath to take on others’ suffering and one’s outgoing breath to give all one’s happiness to them.

Student: “How can one bear taking on all the suffering of others and not having anything to give anymore if one gives everything positive that one has away?”

Lama Sönam: Your question suggests that you cling to yourself and think that you are special. Tonglen is a practice to sharpen your awareness. It’s a mental process.

One imagines that all living beings or only one or a few people one knows who are suffering are in front of oneself. One reflects that they are in physical or mental pain or anguish and thinks that they might be suffering because of outer circumstances or because of inner disturbing emotions. One imagines all their suffering in the form of black light. One imagines that there is a sphere of white light in one’s heart center, which has Bodhisattva Chenrezig’s seed syllable HRIH in its center. When one inhales the black light, one imagines that it enters the sphere of white light in one’s heart center. One sees that the light in the sphere is very bright and doesn’t mix with, but totally absorbs the black light, just like butter that is totally burned and disappears when it is thrown into a big open fire. Following, one imagines that one’s present good fortune and well-being that one has brought to mind are turned into white

light that one exhales. One thinks that the white light reaches the persons one imagines in front of oneself and melts into them. One wishes that they receive it, that they become free of their suffering and pain, and that they are happy. One will notice that one's attitude becomes more and more positive and one becomes more and more helpful to others in daily life when engaging in this practice again and again. The better one is able to relate to others positively, the more one's huge ego will weaken and diminish. This is the practice one can carry out by using one's breath so that one cultivates an open and warm heart, which is the result of tonglen.

It's possible that beginners are afraid that they would actually take on the suffering, negative karma, and problems of others and would actually give away all the good that they think they have. Then, when they have problems or get sick, they conclude, "Oh, tonglen is to blame." This happens to beginners. If one is mainly used to only being concerned about oneself and one's own well-being, then one has such fear, but one needn't. One's fear is unfounded because any suffering and prosperity that somebody experiences depends upon that individual's karma and mental defilements. It's impossible to take others' suffering and pain upon oneself because everybody experiences their own karma. Tonglen is a method to open one's heart more and more for others. On the other hand, one can develop strong expectations. It can happen that somebody practices tonglen because he or she really wants to take on the suffering or sickness of somebody else, maybe of a brother, sister, or friend. They become terribly frustrated when they notice that they can't and doubt the practice. Seeing that it's impossible to really take on the suffering of others, one shouldn't have such ideas. Having hopes and fears is wrong, but one can change one's own attitude and intentions by practicing tonglen; one can gain a very positive attitude and have good intentions. Someone who is focused on the benefit of others has a very powerful mind and can help many more people much more effectively.

It would be good to reflect the following verse from the song of realization, entitled "*Seven Delights*," that was composed by Mahasiddha Götsangpa:

"When samsara with its anguish has me writhing in its torments,
Instead of wallowing in misery
I take the greater burden down the greater path to travel
And let compassion set me up.
To take upon myself the suffering of others
When karmic consequences bloom, delight!"

The Third Dharma of Lhaje Gampopa

We went through the teachings that explain the first two Dharmas of Lhaje Gampopa, which are: "Grant your blessing so that my mind may become one with the Dharma. Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may go along the path." The third line of the sacred prayer, i.e., the third Dharma of Gampopa is: "Grant your blessing so that the Dharma may clarify confusion." Having entered the way of the Dharma and being on the path, the third Dharma is the fervent prayer that confusion be clarified.

Buddhism often speaks about ground, path, and fruition. Ground refers to the four contemplations to turn one's mind away from samsara and to renounce it. Path refers to the practices of developing love and compassion for all living beings. Fruition depends upon the right view, which Gampopa addressed in the third and fourth lines of the prayer. Practitioners

need to have the right view if they hope to reach the end of the path and attain fruition; they must recognize their wrong views in order to be able to transform them. The Tibetan term for wrong view is *'khrul* and is also translated as 'deception, mistake, error, confusion, illusion, delusion.'

One has many delusions and one needs to know and vanquish them in order to realize the indwelling true nature of one's mind and to unite with it fully. Therefore Gampopa delineated the practices of the path in his works and teaches us that we need to have renounced samsara and developed the mind of awakening if we want to overcome our delusions, i.e., our confusion. He taught that if one has contemplated impermanence well, then one will have renounced attachment to worldly concerns. Furthermore, if one has contemplated karma well, then one will have given up wrong views. Lord Buddha explained in great detail in both sutras and tantras that the right view is knowing karma and that one knows how things function if one knows how causes and effects function. The Buddha said that is the right view.

There are philosophical schools that deny the law of karma. Adherents believe that there are no past or future lives and that at death the mind dissolves into space and the body turns into dust, just like mushrooms that simply appear and disappear again. Buddhists argue that thinking life is like a mushroom haphazardly vanishing just as haphazardly as it sprang forth is misleading and deceptive. Buddhists know that a mushroom arises in dependence upon causes and conditions, i.e., in dependence upon the coming together of a spore, fertile earth, moisture, water, and warmth. Buddhism teaches that thinking things arise from themselves or out of the blue is a wrong view. They know that all appearances can only arise and appear in dependence upon causes and conditions. Therefore, Buddhism stresses the importance of knowing that every phenomenon and experience arises in an orderly sequence. Being aware of the infallible law of karma moves a disciple to refrain from acting non-virtuously so as to not have to experience the painful consequences and to engage in wise actions so as to experience the wholesome results.

In the song that he composed, entitled, "*A Presentation of the Middle View*," Jetsün Milarepa taught:

"E-ma! Had living beings never been born, where would the buddhas of the three times have come from? There's never a result anywhere as long as there's no impetus. And so, what seems to really exist is deceptive. Samsara's rounds and nirvana's transcendence, all this is present. That's what the Muni said."

All of that exists, and it is what the Buddha said about relative reality. Seeing one will achieve the perfect result if one has the right view, it's important to develop and have the right view.

Lhaje Gampopa taught that one will render one's attachment to samsara if one contemplates the defects of samsara well. This means to say that one won't cling to transient happiness and transient suffering when one knows that they aren't final, that they pass, and that everything in samsara is deceptive. Gampopa continued and said that one will never again follow a lesser vehicle if one contemplates and develops love and compassion well. The difference between the lesser and great vehicle of Buddhism is that followers of the lesser vehicle do not aspire and do not strive to attain liberation for the welfare of all living beings. Some people think that the lesser vehicle teaches disciples not to have love and compassion, which is totally wrong. The difference between the lesser and great vehicle is cultivating bodhicitta, which is based upon one's motivation. If one's spiritual practice is based upon the strong motivation not to work for one's own benefit, but to achieve buddhahood in order to be able to liberate all

living beings from the rounds of suffering, then it's irrelevant whether one can actually benefit others or not at this time in life. The point is increasing and strengthening one's motivation and, as a result of one's strong motivation, engaging in the spiritual practices.

A mahayana practitioner has the vast motivation to achieve liberation for the welfare of all living beings, thus feels deeply committed towards others, which is the reason for taking the bodhisattva vows. It is a special quality of the great vehicle, which followers of the lesser vehicles aren't aware of. There are three qualitative attitudes one can have when taking the bodhisattva vows and committing oneself to develop bodhicitta for the welfare of others. One can have the attitude of a king who strives to rule a land so that he can help his subjects from that vantage point. Or one can have the attitude of a captain who steers everyone together on the same boat across the ocean or a big stream. Or one can have the attitude of a shepherd who doesn't return home after a long day of having watched his sheep in the fields until they are all safe in the stall. In any case, if one doesn't have and develop love and compassion for every living being, then one isn't a mahayana disciple and should correct that fault.

Lhaje Gampopa continued and tells us that if we contemplate and realize that all things are like appearances in a dream, then as a result we will stop thinking that things are substantially real. He wrote that every samsaric appearance is merely a specific mode of appearance and nothing has real and solid existence. The true nature of all things is perfect peace and is nirvana. Since all things that appear arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, nothing exists ultimately. Since suffering also arises in dependence upon causes and conditions, it has no true existence either. So, ultimately, there is no suffering. All samsaric appearances solely arise in dependence upon karmic causes and conditions together with disturbing emotions. They are the two factors that create samsaric appearances.

Who creates karmic appearances and disturbing emotions? They are created by one's mind. Where do they appear? In one's mind. Where do all judgments, like "beautiful, ugly, good, bad, happy, unhappy, etc." come from? They are made by one's mind. And so, all illusory appearances, like suffering and joy, are created by one's mind. And that is why Jetsün Milarepa sang:

"E-ma!

Although phenomena don't really exist, they appear in such a great variety.
Isn't that wonderful!"

If one realizes that all appearances are manifestations of one's mind, then it's easy to acknowledge that all appearances of relative reality are like appearances in a dream and are therefore illusory. If one asks where appearances in dreams come from, of course the answer is from the mind. To whom do dreams appear? To one's own mind. Who judges dreams as pleasant or nightmarish? One's own mind. For example, designating the time one spent with friends or one spent working as "afternoon" is only a convention that one has become habituated to and that one activates through the specific experience. Designating what everyone refers to as "night" as "night" is also a habitual convention that everyone resorts to, but is not real in itself. Who created these structured habitual conventions? One's own mind.

All habits (*bag-chags* in Tibetan) subside into and are stored in one's mind. When they appear again, then they have awakened (*sād-pa*, which is also translated as 'to be activated'). When habitual patterns awaken, i.e., are activated and apperceived as appearances or experiences, one thinks they are real, but they are only appearances of one's own mind that cease again. Thinking that appearances one apperceives are real and true existents outside oneself is one's

main and initial illusion. And so, it's conclusive that appearances of samsara are only mind, that one is controlled by them, and that the mind clings to them due to not knowing how the mind really abides and appears. There is nothing outside one's own mind that arises or appears of its own accord and independently.

One apprehends progressively and successively, therefore there are various phases of apprehension, which are described as the eight kinds of consciousness. There is the Buddhist tradition that refutes that the mind consists of eight consciousnesses; they say that there are only the first six. The teachings that I am presenting are based on the tradition that speaks of eight collections of consciousness (*rnam-shes-tshogs-brgyäd*). One shouldn't think that one has many minds, but there are the eight phases of apprehension. They are: the all-ground consciousness (8), which is connected with the defiled consciousness (7). Based on the defiled consciousness, the mental consciousness (6) apperceives, i.e., apprehends, a sensory object after it has been perceived by a sensory consciousness (5 – 1). The basis for the seven consciousnesses is the all-ground consciousness (*kun-gzhi'i-rnam-par-shes-pa*), which stores and thus is the basis for all one's karma and habitual patterns that subside into it as imprints and propensities, arise again when causes and conditions prevail, and appear as reflections in myriad forms and ways.

There is a pure and an impure aspect of one's all-ground consciousness. It's an illusion to think that one's karma and habitual imprints that arise out of one's all-ground consciousness and are apperceived by one's sixth mental consciousness truly exist and are real. As long as one clings to appearances as real, one is deluded (*'khrul-pa*) – then one's all-ground consciousness is impure. When one realizes that the karmic and habitual imprints stored in one's all-ground-consciousness are illusory and deceptive and when one sees the true face of one's all-ground consciousness, one will have awakened to buddhahood and will have realized the *dharmakaya*, 'the truth body' – then one's all-ground consciousness is pure. This was stated by Lord Buddha in the 80,000 verse-long "*Prajnaparamitasutra*." The Buddha said:

"The mind is not created,
but the nature of the mind has always been and already is pure clear light."

The Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje wrote in "*The Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*":

"Mind's essence is emptiness, its nature is luminosity,
And, free of impediments, it manifests in any form and way."

Jetsün Milarepa sang about 27 phases of purification of the all-ground consciousness in a song that he composed. One verse is:

"When thunder, lightning, and clouds appear, they appear from the sky,
and when they dissolve, that's where they go."

Another verse: "When rainbows, fog, and mist appear, they appear from vast space,
and when they dissolve, that's where they go."

Another verse: "When a flowing stream, bubbles, and waves appear, they appear from emptiness, and when they dissolve, that's where they go."

Now the verse about the *bag-chags* that are stored in the all-ground consciousness, *alaya* in Sanskrit: “When grasping, clinging, and habituation arise, they arise from the alaya, and when they cease to be, that’s where they go.”

Now: “When self-knowing, self-luminous clarity, and self-liberation manifest, then mind’s true nature manifests, and when they cease to be, that’s where they go.”

So, that’s the essence of the mind.

What happens to one’s habitual patterns and propensities when one dies? We saw that one’s habits are stored as habitual imprints in one’s all-ground consciousness. According to mahamudra, one will meet the true nature of one’s mind, which is clear light, when one dies. As Mahasiddha Götsangpa sang in the song “*Seven Delights*,” mother clear light and son clear light meet at death. If recognized due to meditative experiences, one will have recognized the dharmakaya and will have attained liberation. If one has no meditative experiences, one’s habitual tendencies will then appear, and this is the bardo of death. When good habits appear after death, it is as though light illuminates total darkness. The verse of Mahasiddha Götsangpa is:

“When it’s time to leave this body, this illusionary trap,
Don’t cause yourself anxiety and grief,
The thing that you should train in and clear up for yourself,
There’s no such thing as dying to be done.
It’s just clear light, the mother and child clear light uniting.
When mind forsakes the body, sheer delight!”

We discussed the teachings that all appearances are manifestations of the mind in that all karmic imprints and habits subside into and are stored in one’s all-ground consciousness and arise again in a great variety of appearances and experiences that one considers pleasant or unpleasant. The mahamudra and dzogchen teachings say that when the process of purifying the five skandhas and respective five elements through meditating one’s physical energy channels and the winds that flow through them has been completed, then one’s body manifests purely, i.e., as a vajra body or as the body of a deity. As long as the winds that flow through one’s channels have not been purified, the five skandhas are automatically present (the five principal mental and physical constituents that are form, sensations, recognition, mental events, and consciousnesses). As a result, one is subject to duality and thus divides between what one thinks is ugly or beautiful, etc., thinks appearances are real, and is cut off from realizing the absolute state of being.

Appearances aren’t projections of one’s mind, rather appearances are manifestations of one’s own mind that one perceives and thus apperceives as existing outside oneself. As long as one’s mind hasn’t been purified, one experiences relative reality in reliance upon one’s sensory faculties by which one perceives sensory objects delusively. In the process, one thinks they are permanent and real and in that way is confused.

Lord Buddha presented provisional teachings and ultimate teachings. The Buddha gave the provisional teachings in order to help disciples approach and understand the ultimate teachings, which are definitive. Jetsün Milarepa composed a song, entitled “*Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive*,” in which he explained the meaning of the skandha of form. The lines on the skandhas in the verse are:

“This skandha of form compulsively taken on,
Not realized is four elements making a body.
Sickness and suffering, this is what comes of that.”

Without having reflected the instructions on the skandhas, one thinks that one's body is solid and real, clings to it as a self, and calls it “I, me.” As long as one perceives delusively, one's body is subject to sicknesses and diseases, which are diagnosed as wind, phlegm, and bile disorders in the Tibetan medical tradition. One has to eat, sleep, and clothe one's body, but - above all that - one struggles to obtain possessions and wealth in order to protect one's body.

Jetsün Milarepa continued in the verse and teaches us:

“If realized, it's a deity's union body,
reversing the common assumption you entertain.”

Realizing that one's body is a deity's union body means knowing fully what one usually doesn't perceive, namely that one's body has no permanent reality and is like an image in a dream – appearance-emptiness inseparable. When one realizes how one's body is, *gnäs-lug*, and the manner in which it appears, *sgnang-lug*, then one experiences it as appearance-emptiness inseparable and will have attained a vajra body, the body of a deity. One's ordinary way of apperceiving the elements that comprise one's body or the things one thinks one needs in order to sustain it is always dualistic, i.e., one divides things that one has and things that one hopes to get into pure and impure. At the time of realization, one's ordinary apperceptions that one clings to so strongly will be reversed.

Jetsün Milarepa continued in the same verse and wrote:

“In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as body.
It's as rarefied as a cloud-free sky, is what he taught.
It's pure as a cloud-free sky, is what he taught.”

When one apperceives that one's body has no solid and true reality, then one will have realized the result of the path. Referred to in this verse as “in the end,” one will be free of all concepts and ideas, i.e., mind-made constructs, and will have realized the ultimate state that is devoid of form. The Jetsün compared the ultimate state with the cloudless sky.

“Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive” is such an exceptional and profound song because it describes the view that Marpa Lotsawa taught his heart-son Milarepa. They are the three levels on which one can view and experience one's physical being. While anchored in the relative world that is impermanent, one experiences and relates to oneself embedded in one's conditioned physicality. When one has purified one's apperceptions and is on the level of having wise understanding, one will experience one's subtle vajra body. When one has realized and thus has the view of the ultimate level of being, one will experience one's body as the formless dharmakaya. Comparing it with the cloudless sky is so fitting, since one cannot restrict the sky free of clouds to usual designations that one thinks and creates, because it has no middle, no right side, no left side, etc. This example illustrates the limitless state, free of mental constructs, that one experiences when one has realized the dharmakaya. Let us sing the verse on the skandhas now.

Translator: “On the pilgrimage to Tibet, we only had the book with the songs of Milarepa along and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche had us sing this song in all languages, in

Tibetan, English, French, Greek, and in Chinese. Rinpoche was so proud and told everyone, “Look, now the Injis are singing it in their different languages.” One is forced to have a Chinese guide when one travels to Tibet and our guide was a rather mean Chinese woman who always laid rocks in our way. It was very impressing when Rinpoche brought her to sing this song in Chinese.”

Lama Sönam: Okay. I will sing it in Tibetan and you sing it in English. If one is able to take this view to heart, one will be able to transform confusion on the path.

Question: “What is skandha of form?”

Translator: “The skandha of form is the body one has with which one perceives all sensory objects as mental images of visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings. The result of being confused about the four elements that comprise one’s body is sickness. If one has realized the true nature of one’s body, then one will have realized the body of a deity – appearance-emptiness inseparable. Reversing one’s usual way of perceiving sensory objects enables one to see that ultimately nothing exists and is like experiencing the cloudless sky.”

Lama Sönam: This is the view of the five skandhas that Jetsün Milarepa learned from Marpa Lotsawa, that he realized, and that he shared with us.

“This skandha of form compulsively taken on,
Not realized is four elements making a body.
Sickness and suffering, this is what comes of that.
If realized it’s a deity’s union body,
Reversing the common assumption you entertain.
In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as body.
It’s as rarefied as a cloud-free sky, is what he taught,
It’s pure as a cloud-free sky, is what he taught.”

Marpa Lotsawa first showed Milarepa that all things are empty of inherent existence and secondly that the true nature of the mind is emptiness. In a third stage, Marpa showed his heart-disciple that emptiness has the quality of spontaneity. Realization of appearance-emptiness inseparable is spontaneous self-liberation, which can be illustrated by a snake whose tail is tied into a knot that frees itself without anyone’s help. These are the key mahamudra instructions on the nature of the mind that Lord Marpa gave to Milarepa and that we can practice in order to liberate ourselves.

If one doesn’t understand well that one’s mind’s true nature is emptiness, then one won’t be able to know how things really are. It’s the first step one needs to have taken in order to be able to take the second step, which is learning how the mind is and how it arises and appears. One can engage in analytical investigations in order to correctly know that appearances are emptiness.

The mahamudra instructions teach us how to know and realize that appearances are manifestations of our own mind and give the simile of the ocean and its waves, which arise from the ocean and subside into it again. In the same way, appearances and mind are not different or separate from one another. And that is how all phenomena arise as the self-display of one’s mind. If one doesn’t realize the self-manifesting display of one’s own mind, then one will think that appearances are external to one’s mind and will cling to them as real existents. In this process, one thinks that the apprehending aspect that one experiences is a self, which one calls “me, I,” and that the appearances one apprehended are outside and other than one’s mind, thus apprehending dualistically and separating what one designates as a “self” from what one feels and thus calls “others.”

When one realizes that all appearances are the clear self-display of one's mind, that all manifestations that appear in samsara and in nirvana are inseparable from one's mind, then one will have overcome extremes and have attained profound certainty of the way things are and the way things arise and appear. In "*The Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*," the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, wrote a verse that perfectly describes how one's mind is and appears. The verse is:

"Appearance is mind and emptiness is mind;
Realization is mind and delusion is mind;
Arising is mind and cessation is mind.
May we overcome all assumptions about the mind."

One should gain certainty and know quite well that appearances are mind and that the emptiness of all appearances is also mind. Therefore, there are many expressions in the mahamudra teachings, like appearance-emptiness inseparable, awareness-emptiness inseparable, bliss-emptiness inseparable, clarity-emptiness inseparable.

Emptiness always pervades and is always the ground of every appearance. In the above verse, the Third Gyalwa Karmapa poignantly taught that realization is mind and delusion is also mind, that everything that arises is mind, and that everything that ceases is also not other than the mind. Therefore he had the wish and formulated the prayer that we overcome all mental constructs and realize the true nature of all things. One will have no more doubts when one has dispelled all designations that are based upon one's assumptions, which is what having certainty means.

Student: "Is this the point from which one doesn't fall back into samsara?"

Lama Sönam: One cannot fall when one has reached the state beyond mental constructs and thoughts, i.e., when one is free of '*khrul-pa*, 'delusion.' When mind's delusions are self-liberated, then the same appearances manifest as pristine, primordial wisdom, *ye-shes*. In the third verse of the song "*Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive*," Milarepa spoke about this and wrote:

"However appearances might appear outside,
Not realized are delusory appearances,
Clinging to objects, that is what ties you down.
For those who know, they're illusory appearance.
For them what appear to be objects are mind's resource.
In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as appearance,
And being unborn, dharmakaya is utterly pure.
He taught of its purity in the unborn dharmakaya."

Milarepa stated that clinging pulls one down and keeps one entangled. Practitioners who have realized the teachings experience outer appearances as illusory. And then apprehended appearances are resources for them, i.e., a treasure trove that is always accessible to them. Ultimately, there are no appearances – everything in the unborn realm of dharmakaya is pure emptiness.

The first lines of the above verse describe the time one doesn't realize that one is actually living one's life in a delusory dream. As long as one doesn't know that one is dreaming while one dreams - whether one sees that one is flying, is being chased by a lion, or a fire has broken out -, one thinks images that appear in one's dream are real and feels sad. On another

occasion, Milarepa stated that thinking outer appearances are real is like being bound by an iron chain, which causes suffering. Returning to the example of dreams: One isn't touched or moved by images that appear in one's dream if one knows that one is dreaming. Then one remains calm and can just watch. It's really true. It is said that when one realizes that all appearances are like magical illusions, then they are friends. When one realizes that dream-appearances have no essence and don't exist ultimately, one doesn't suffer anymore. This is what the teachings describe as the unborn, uncreated dharmakaya that is always and already present, and it is the reason why delusory appearances can be self-liberated and can manifest as pristine, primordial wisdom. And so, the fourth Dharma of Gampopa is the result of having realized the third Dharma. That is, having dispelled one's confusion, one realizes pristine, primordial wisdom as expressed in the prayer of the fourth Dharma of Gampopa.

The Fourth Dharma of Lhaje Gampopa

When one has realized that no phenomenon arises, abides, and ceases, then one has attained the ultimate level of realization. In the verse we looked at above, Jetsün Milarepa guides disciples from the provisional meaning to the ultimate meaning. When one has realized the unborn, uncreated dharmakaya, then one will have overcome one's confusion and one's delusions will dawn as pristine, primordial wisdom, which Lhaje Gampopa formulated in the fourth prayer: "Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom." One cannot go there, because the act of going still entails doubts, i.e., uncertainty as to whether one will arrive. Therefore the term "dawn" has been chosen quite well.

Question: "Is Jetsün Milarepa a rangtongpa or shentongpa? Which philosophical tenet did he follow?"

Lama Sönam: All. He made various statements in his songs. Sometimes he presented the madhyamika philosophy that stresses emptiness, but mostly he presented the shentong view. He only wrote about philosophical viewpoints when he was asked, otherwise he sang about his own experiences. In the song, entitled "*An Authentic Portrait of the Middle-Way*," he perfectly explained the relative and absolute levels as they are taught in the madhyamika philosophy. He showed that there is no discrepancy between rangtong and shentong.

Translator: "Who believed in the alaya consciousness?"

Lama Sönam: Mahasiddha Asanga and his disciples. Generally speaking, Acharya Nagarjuna's disciples assert six kinds of consciousness and disciples of Asanga, who concentrate on the clear aspect of the mind, base their understanding on eight kinds of consciousness. When I teach songs of Milarepa, usually the aspect of clarity is the main theme, therefore I spoke about the eight kinds of consciousness.

Translator: "Are the eight kinds of consciousness specific to mahamudra?"

Lama Sönam: Yes. In this context, one differentiates between the impure and pure alaya consciousness. The pure alaya consciousness is the dharmakaya. When one realizes the dharmakaya, then one will have realized one's mind's clear aspect.

The Four Dharmas of Lhaje Gampopa are the quintessence of all teachings that Lord Buddha presented and are what can be summarized as the view, path, and fruition of the Buddhadharma. But, how can delusions manifest as wisdom? This is possible because one's mind has two aspects: delusion and non-delusion. The basis and nature of one's mind – since ever – is immaculate purity, which can gradually manifest as one purifies one's mind of fleeting and adventitious stains that cover and conceal it. If the nature of one's mind were not

pure, then it wouldn't be possible to dispel delusions on the path. In *"The Gyulama – The Uttaratantrashastra,"* Buddha Maitreya taught:

“Since beginningless time, all living beings are buddhas,
but they don't realize it because it is obscured by fleeting adventitious stains.”

One should think about this and know that one is always and already endowed with the Buddha nature. Because the adventitious stains that cover one's indwelling true nature are temporary, one can dispel them, attain fruition of perfect buddhahood, and clearly disclose and manifest it. One has the ability to uncover and to realize one's true Buddha nature by practicing the path and attaining the result. Yet, if one is *mun-pa* ('in great darkness') about the view, path, and fruition, one will be trapped in the thought that samsara and nirvana are separate or that buddhahood is far away and totally out of reach, in which case one is really confused. Samsara and nirvana are not separate. Thinking they are different means one separates them and this shows that one strongly clings to a low view. When one relinquishes clinging to the thought that samsara and nirvana are separate by attaining the right view and by practicing the path, then confusion will dawn as primordial wisdom.

Lhaje Gampopa described non-duality in the text that is entitled *"The Precious Garland of the Highest Path"* and wrote:

“The ultimate truth is that since no phenomenon has an own nature,
anything one can apperceive is of same value. One should know this.”

One should practice so that one has the right view as to the equality of all things. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche speaks about this very often. He said, “One should practice equality when one has smallest pain.”

Translator: “When we were crossing the border on our pilgrimage to Tibet, Khenpo Rinpoche said, ‘Now is the time to have the view of equality.’”

Lama Sönam: Khenpo Rinpoche's statements on having equality by seeing the same value in all things are spontaneous, but they are written in the texts of great masters, too. When I arrived in Germany and had only been here for two weeks, I met Khenpo Rinpoche in Hamburg. He was on his way to India and asked me, “Are you going to India?” I told him that I had to stay here and he inquired, “Oh, how do you feel?” I replied, “Not so well.” Khenpo Rinpoche asked, “What do you think of the German people?” I replied, “Very different. Very different.” Khenpo Rinpoche said, “But they are people like us. You should see this. You need to get to know them and, if you have a positive attitude, you will see that you shouldn't think of differences, but of equality. Then you will feel all right.” Khenpo Rinpoche added, “German people are people. They aren't different than others.” Then he asked me, “How do you like the food?” I answered, “Well, it tastes different. Breakfast is already so different.” To be honest, we are not used to food like this. Actually, I was rather down when I arrived in Germany because of my ailing hip and therefore didn't see anything positively. I found that the beds were too big, so I couldn't sleep well. The blanket was too short and the pillow was too big. I couldn't eat the bread in the morning. It was a serious talk with Khenpo - really. Khenpo Rinpoche said to me, “You know, you have heard and learned the Dharma for years and now is the time to put the view into practice. If you think everything is different and contradictory to your views, then it is not okay.” He continued, “It will be hard for you here if you have thoughts like that.” Then Khenpo Rinpoche composed a song of realization, which is:

“Whenever you experience suffering, assimilate the view of equality.
Whenever you experience happiness, assimilate the view of equality.
Whatever you think you want to accept or reject, assimilate the view of equality.
Whenever you meet friends or enemies, assimilate the view of equality.”

I contemplated and meditated these teachings that Khenpo Rinpoche gave me very often. Whenever I had strong feelings, this song of realization came to my mind. I didn’t just think it up but found out for myself that Khenpo Rinpoche is an extremely good teacher.

Translator: “I think so too.”

Lama Sönam: Acharya Nagarjuna also stated: “There isn’t the slightest difference between samsara and nirvana.”

And so, one can purify one’s mind, one can dispel the fleeting obscurations from one’s mind by utilizing one’s energy to practice the path of mind training and then one will be able to realize one’s mind’s primordial purity. This is what is called “nirvana,” “pristine, primordial wisdom,” and “dharmakaya.”

Within one’s mind’s true nature, all things are of same value and equal taste. When one has realized how the mind abides and the equality of all things, which is referred to as “suchness,” then the term *goms* (‘meditation, habituation’) doesn’t apply anymore. By abiding in equanimity, one’s inner strength will increase and grow and one’s fleeting obscurations will be dispelled, i.e., they will naturally become exhausted. To illustrate this process: Let’s imagine that a Tibetan places the huge lump of butter that he is carrying in his plastic bag next to an oven, the lump of butter has no chance of staying hard – it will automatically melt. In the same way, if one practices abiding in deep mental absorption, then one’s delusions will naturally melt and the force of one’s absorption, *samadhi* in Sanskrit, will become stronger and stronger. One’s apperceptions, thoughts, and hard assumptions have no chance – they will automatically melt away.

The great mahamudra master, Kuntob Ögyenpa, said: “Mind and appearances are connected with each other like fire and its heat.” If one practices abiding in mental absorption and rests in suchness, then all appearances of one’s mind will naturally subside into the purity of space. Jetsün Milarepa presented the wonderful example in the song that he composed about the 27 phases of purification to exemplify appearances and the nature of one’s mind. The verse is:

“When fog, mist, and clouds appear, they appear from space,
and when they dissolve, that’s where they go.”

So, there’s no fundamental difference between appearances and mind – they are the same. But, ordinary people discriminate between an apprehending subject and apprehended objects and think they are two different cases because they don’t know the connection between appearances and mind, which meditation practitioners gradually become accustomed to and eventually realize. Appearances and mind are always inseparable. Ordinary people do not know this; they also don’t know that they have the Buddha nature within. By remaining deluded about the way things are and the way things appear, one will not be able to relate with primordial wisdom that is the basis of and permeates all being. Realization of one’s true nature depends upon training one’s mind by practicing the path – that’s the simple fact of the matter.

There are two possibilities: One has the capabilities and the chance to realize the true nature of one’s mind and all things, which is fruition, by practicing the path or one can remain

entrenched in ignorance. When one has transcended thought-ridden fixations and attained the state of simplicity, which is freedom from mental constructs, then one will be free of change because the true nature is changeless. Remaining ignorant of the fact that mind and appearances are inseparable means one is confused and thus bound to conditioned existence, which is samsara. Becoming aware of the inseparability of mind and appearances means one is on the path to the ultimate state of being, which is nirvana. It is clear that nirvana is not far away and out of reach. Since it is ever-present within, it can be disclosed and manifest freely and openly. Thank you very much.

Dedication

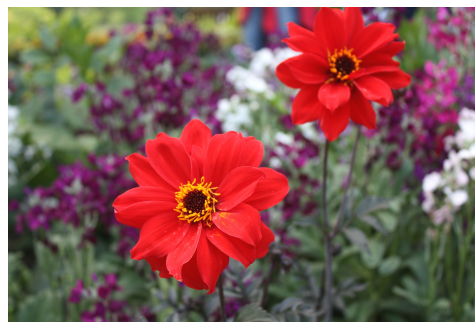
དགེ་བ་འདི་ཡིས་སྐྱེ་བོ་ཀུན། །བསོད་ནམས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཚྲགས་ཚྲགས་ནས། །
བསོད་ནམས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལས་བྱུང་བ། །དམ་པ་སྐྱེ་གཉིས་ཐོབ་པར་ཤོག །

“May all virtue that is created by accumulating merit and wisdom
Be dedicated to attaining the two truth bodies that arise from merit and wisdom.”

May bodhichitta, great and precious, arise where it has not arisen.
Never weakening where it has arisen, may it grow ever more and more.

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in extent.
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,
May I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of buddhahood.

All you sentient beings I have a good or bad connection with
As soon as you have left this confus’d dimension,
May you be born in the West, in Sukhavati,
And when you’re born there, complete the bhumis and the paths.



In reliance on the fabulous simultaneous German rendering of the Tibetan generously offered by Bärbel Schmitt, translated into English, edited & arranged by Gaby Hollmann from Munich. Gratitude to Khenpo Karma Namgyal from Kathmandu for the original Tibetan versions of the prayers. Photo of Lama Sönam taken & courtesy of Josef Kerklau from Münster. Photo of flowers taken & kindly offered by Lena Fong from San Francisco. Copyright Lama Sönam Rabgye & Kamalashila Institute in Langenfeld, Germany, 2009.

May the truth of the teachings spread throughout the world &
bring peace and happiness to all living beings!