



Venerable Chöje Lama Phuntsok



Lojong – Bringing Forth Our Basic Goodness

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*“I prostrate to the Great Compassionate One.
In your form is united the compassion of Buddha and his sons.
You are the incomparable Lord of Dharma with whom any relationship is meaningful.
My Root Guru, you embody the life-breath of this Lineage.
I pray to you from the depths of my heart, bless me with the full development of love,
compassion, and Bodhicitta, and the ability to dismiss and dispel.”*
-- Palden Atisha, *The Seven Points of Mind Training*

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Introduction

I have been asked to speak about mind training, but first we need to understand what our mind is. Mind training is called *blo-sbyong* in Tibetan, the term *blo* meaning ‘mind, consciousness.’ The Tibetan term *sems* has the same connotation and is associated with the word *bsam*, ‘to think, to contemplate.’ We have many thoughts and we *bsam-blo-btang*, ‘reflect, decide,’ to do something before we start. What decides to do something? Our mind, and many thoughts arise in our mind while making a decision or imagining things.

Everyone has different thoughts. When we investigate, we find that it is our mind that thinks and that it does so in a great variety of ways. Some people think about their lives and most of them come to the conclusion that they lead a good life and are pleased with themselves. Some people are narrow-minded and others are more open. Thoughts can be pure or impure, benevolent or malevolent. We can say that most people have good thoughts and intentions for themselves, but that they rarely have good thoughts for others. We engage in mind training in order to have good thoughts for others.

In short, thoughts continuously arise in our mind and we hardly stop being involved with them. As it is, we are only aware of our coarse thoughts and don't notice our subtle thoughts. Our streaming thoughts resemble the constant flow of water in a river, so the river we see is never the same. To be able to train our mind, *sbyong* (the second word in *blo-sbyong*), it is first necessary to investigate and see how our mind functions. The teachings on mind training consist of seven points that are easy for beginners to understand. Every Dharma student needs to investigate and see for themselves how their mind functions, and, just as when striving to achieve the aim of any meaningful or senseless undertaking, everyone has to consider how to go about it. We need to know whether a goal we want to achieve is meaningful or meaningless at the start. We also need to know whether our endeavours to achieve our goal benefit ourselves and others or not. Anything we do to reach our goal that benefits ourselves but is harmful to others is negative.

While working to achieve our goal, we need to act just like a bee that collects nectar and flies away without damaging the flower. *bLo-sbyong*, 'mind training,' is the method that enables us to learn and know whether we will be able to achieve our goal in a good way and without harming anyone. If our actions don't become better and we don't become more benevolent in the course of our endeavours, then our mind training didn't bear fruits. The mind training practices are methods that we apply to improve the way we think and to make more meaningful decisions that benefit ourselves and others.

Not hurting anyone, we begin where we are by thinking of our parents' kindness and by giving rise to the wish to repay them for everything they did for us. To become a better person and to have a positive attitude towards others, we contemplate how good our mother was to us and give rise to the wish to protect her when she has problems or feels dismayed. Slowly and gradually we extend our wish to other family members, then to friends and acquaintances. When we see that we have good thoughts for those individuals, we include persons we do not know and extend our well-wishes to them. When our attitude towards people we know and towards people we don't know has become positive, then we think of non-humans and have good wishes for them. We practice mind training to diminish our negative ideas of others while increasing our positive attitude towards more and more living beings.

Why is it necessary to practice mind training? Due to our long-standing, ingrained habitual patterns, our thoughts are influenced by our negative emotions and are thus negative. Just like an evil person doesn't become good overnight, it's impossible to vanquish our negative mental activities and negative thoughts all at once. We have to work on overcoming them slowly and step by step. But we first need to reflect and recognize our negative discursiveness in order to be able to overcome it. A person involved with negative mental activities doesn't reflect whether he benefits or harms others, rather, he is somebody out to only benefit himself, for example, by devising or trading with harmful and destructive things, such as weapons and atomic bombs.

We think with our mind, act with our body, communicate with our speech, and practice mind training to improve our activities. Many people don't really know if their physical and verbal activities will lead to positive or negative results. It would be senseless to hit somebody we don't agree with, because we will probably be hit back. In situations like that, it's better to think before acting. We can also fight others by slandering them and as a result they will most likely speak badly to and about us, so it's better to think before speaking. It would be reasonable to contemplate that we will be harmed if we scheme to harm somebody else. Our negative mental, physical, and verbal activities will decrease and our positive mental, physical, and verbal activities will increase if we practice mind training and think about the consequences of our actions before we carry them out.

Dharma practitioners should be especially vigilant and refrain from the three very negative and harmful physical acts, which are taking life (i.e., killing), taking what is not given (i.e., stealing), and engaging in sexual misconduct. They should also be especially careful and refrain from the four very harmful kinds of speech, which are lying, slandering, using harsh speech, and engaging in idle chatter. Furthermore, they should be very careful and avoid the three negative mental activities, which are having greedy thoughts, being malicious, and having wrong views. So, there are ten negative activities of body, speech, and mind that harm us as well as others and that Dharma practitioners learn to recognize by practicing mind training.

The source for our negative and harmful activities is our frame of mind, i.e., our thoughts, *bsam-blo*. We would never take the life of a living being without first having had the thought to kill. We would never steal without first having had the intention. By practicing mind training, we are aware of our thought to kill or to steal and tell ourselves, "No, I won't do that." This applies to all harmful actions that we might commit. Instead of lying, slandering, or engaging in idle chatter, we decide to tell the truth, to speak nicely, and not to gossip or chatter. Any negative thought that we have leads to a painful result. By thinking about engaging in positive activities, our negative thoughts diminish and eventually cease. The purpose of mind training is to diminish our negative thoughts and to increase positive ones.

Many thoughts and decisions, *bsam-blo-btang*, lead to negative results and many lead to positive results. Instead of being involved with negative thoughts by planning to kill, we focus our attention on positive thoughts and decide to save and protect lives. Likewise, instead of wanting to steal, we think about being generous and act accordingly. In the same way, instead of engaging in sexual misconduct, we say, "No, I won't do that, but will remain true to my commitment." Instead of lying, we decide to tell the truth and in this way our habit of lying diminishes. It's very negative to disserve relationships by being slanderous. Instead, we think of how to unite people and speak gently and in a friendly manner about others. Furthermore, instead of engaging in idle and useless chatter due to laziness, we try to become knowledgeable so that we can take part in meaningful conversations. Instead of following after and worrying about satisfying our greed, it is better to be content. The antidote of being malicious is thinking about how to benefit others and acting in that way. The antidote of having wrong views is overcoming doubt in *karma* (the Sanskrit term that was translated into Tibetan as *lās*, 'the infallible law of cause and effect, the result of actions') and *rten-'brel* ('dependent origination') and gaining an understanding of these two topics.

In summary, there are ten negative activities of body, speech, and mind that lead to painful results, and there are ten positive activities of body, speech, and mind that bring wholesome results. It is very beneficial for oneself and others to refrain from the ten unwholesome activities and to engage in the ten wholesome activities. By killing a living being, for

example, we also harm ourselves; by saving and protecting lives, we also benefit ourselves. Therefore, we should sincerely contemplate whether it is really necessary to harm others and why it is better not to do so. It's very important to think about this.

When I was about 12 years old, I was invited to accompany an elderly monk to the home of a family to practice there. I saw a small image of Buddha Shakyamuni on their shrine when we were there and thought, "It's so beautiful. I want to have it." I decided to steal it and, when nobody was looking, I stuck it in my pocket. After we had returned home, I thought, "I stole and it wasn't such a good idea. People will call me a thief if this is discovered. I should return what I stole." At that time, two thoughts had come to my mind, to steal the beautiful amulet and to return it, which I did. In that way, the negative thought that moved me to steal was overcome by contemplating how bad what I had done really was. This story illustrates the process of mind training and the importance of being fully aware of our first thought or intention in order to correct it.

It isn't sufficient to just read the text, *The Seven Points of Mind Training* by Palden Atisha. But when we wake up in the morning, we can think, "What should I do today and how should I go about it?" We should examine whether our plans are beneficial or not. If we engage in mind training, we can notice when an idea isn't good. For example, if we plan to visit a restaurant and think, "Then I'll have a strong drink," we ask ourselves, "Is that a good or bad idea?" Having thought about it and knowing that alcohol causes drunkenness, which leads to strife, we resolve, "No, I won't do that." This is positive mind training. It helps us become better people in life, so it's very important.

Usually we have no control over our thoughts and thus we have no control over our actions, and that's why we should practice mind training. It's the method that enables us to generate *Bodhicitta*, 'the mind of enlightenment' (i.e., 'the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings,' *byang-chub-kyi-sems* in Tibetan). We see that practicing mind training is beneficial in many ways.

Many people live very good; they have a house, a car, etc. Since they are preoccupied with their possessions, their possessions are detrimental for them. By practicing mind training, we concentrate our attention on meaningful things.

Before commencing with an explanation of *The Seven Points of Mind Training* by Palden Atisha, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye offered a song of praise in the commentary that he wrote to the text, which we don't want to withhold from readers of this article. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye wrote:

*"Guru Buddha Bodhisattva Bhyonama – 'Homage to Gurus, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas.'
With undivided faith, I place upon my head the lotus feet of the Perfect Sage, who first set in motion the wheel of love and triumphed completely in the two aims. To the renowned sons of the Victorious One I bow, to Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and the others who set out in the ship of courageous compassion and now liberate beings from the ocean of suffering. The spiritual friend unsurpassable reveals the noble path of compassion and emptiness. He is the guide of all victorious ones. I prostrate myself at my Guru's feet."*

Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye then wrote about *The Seven Points of Mind Training*:

"Easy to understand, it is not corrupted. Easy to practice, it is entered with enthusiasm. Yet it is so profound, so Buddhahood is attained."



The Actual Instructions

One: The Preliminaries

What are the preliminary practices? There are four: contemplating how difficult it is to be born as a human being with a precious human body; contemplating impermanence and death; contemplating the defects of samsaric existence; and contemplating karma.

It is necessary to contemplate how hard it is to have a precious human body. We do this by first being grateful for not having been born as an animal, but as a human. What is so special about being a human? We can carry out our plans, can achieve happiness and well-being, and can avoid suffering and pain. We wouldn't be able to do this if we had the body of a dog.

It's extremely hard to attain a precious human body that enables us to achieve happiness and well-being by engaging in wholesome activities and abandoning negativities. We can see how hard it is by counting how many humans live in *Jambudvīpa*, the Sanskrit term for our world, *dzam-bu-gling* in Tibetan. In comparison, we wouldn't even be able to count how many animals live in the small country of Germany. This illustrates how exceptional it is to have a precious human birth and how difficult it is to attain it. If we don't appreciate and acknowledge how rare and precious our human existence is, we will most likely waste our life. There are even people who commit suicide; they should at least have tried to help themselves and should have reflected how to be helpful to others. In any case, contemplating how difficult it is to attain a precious human birth inspires us not to waste it.

Secondly, it is necessary to contemplate impermanence. Life is transient. Everybody who is born dies. If we don't contemplate that all things are impermanent and transient, we won't think that we, too, will die. If we think about it, we will know that it is logical that we will die because we were born. Just like a flower grows, withers, and dies, everything that is born and that grows, withers and dies. We are no exception. Since we can die any moment or any time, we only don't know when this will occur, it's very bad to commit negative deeds while alive.

After having contemplated how precious our human body is and impermanence, we contemplate the defects of samsara, the unremitting cycle of conditioned existence that is marked by suffering and pain. Suffering means that we aren't happy or well. It's not easy to truthfully acknowledge that samsara only entails suffering. Many people even think that their

happiness is suffering, which shows that they haven't understood what suffering really is. Many people who are well-off think, "I'm wealthy, have everything anybody could want, am married, my children received a good education and have good jobs, so I don't suffer." They are mistaken, though, because their luck is also subject to the suffering of change. Thinking possessions and wealth denote true happiness is a wrong way of thinking. People who think like this will suffer when things change and when they eventually lose what they own. We suffer when a family member becomes sick. We can even get a stomach ache after having enjoyed a delicious meal. As said, suffering is being unhappy and sad.

There are many kinds of suffering and it is useless assuming that there is no suffering in samsara. We suffer when we are sick and will suffer having to pay lots of money if we are hospitalized. Nobody wants to suffer; everyone wants to be happy and well-off. Being happy means not experiencing suffering; being unhappy means not experiencing well-being. Many people are quite well-off, but they suffer when things change. We need to contemplate and know that the defect of samsara is that it always entails suffering.

The fourth preliminary practice is contemplating karma, i.e., that every action has a result and that every result is based on a cause. For example, a good wheat seed couldn't sprout and grow into a good crop unless there is a connection between cause and result and unless there are sufficient contributory factors, like water, sunshine, and good earth. When right causes and conditions come together, a planted seed will sprout and bear fruits that are related with the seed. Causes and conditions and their connection are referred to as "karma" and "dependent origination," *lās* and *rten-'brel* in Tibetan. Since causes and results are connected, positive causes naturally render positive results. No seed can sprout and grow into a ripe plant in the absence of the contributory factors it needs. As in the example of the beautiful amulet, hadn't I returned it, this negative act would have given rise to the negative result of having been a thief. We contemplate karma to know that every action has the power to engender a corresponding result.

Karma is not a matter of Buddhism, rather, it is a universal truth. The table in front of me is only a table due to the coming together of specific causes and conditions; in the absence of these specific causes and conditions, this object wouldn't be a table. It's a universal truth that positive actions bring forth positive results and negative causes give rise to negative results. We are aware of the fact that the sound of a snapping finger can only be heard when specific causes and conditions come together and that this sound cannot be made with one condition only, which is what dependent origination means. Just like the sound of a finger-snap, all things arise and appear in dependence upon many things. We should think about this.

The four contemplations are the preliminary practices of mind training. Reflecting them well before engaging in any meditation practice is also a good foundation for the main practices of mind training.

Two: The Main Practices of Mind Training

The main practice of mind training begins with the instruction to **"Regard all phenomena as dreams."** Generally, we know that we dream. Sometimes our dreams are pleasant and sometimes they are unpleasant. When we wake up from a dream, we realize, "Oh yes, it was only a dream." Sometimes we have nightmares. We feel relieved when we wake up and realize that our nightmare was only a dream. Realizing that our dream experiences weren't real after we woke up, we do think that any happiness and suffering we experience while awake is real. We are convinced that our dream experiences and the things

we experience while awake are different. They aren't different, though, rather, our daily experiences are dream-like. When we suffer, it's a relief knowing that our experiences are like a dream, but they are also dream-like when we experience happiness and joy.

It's very helpful to see all phenomena as a dream. If we do, we can relax by being assured that any suffering we might be experiencing will pass. By knowing that any suffering we experience is like a dream, we won't suffer as much and won't think, "Oh, it's so terrible! My pain will never end!" Furthermore, if we realize that all experiences are like a dream, we won't cling to joyful experiences either. We can realize that both the feeling of happiness after we woke up in the morning and the feeling of being depressed in the evening are dream-like, alternate, and pass. Worrying that it will be hard to accomplish any plans we have is also only dream-like. The experiences of happiness and suffering continuously alternate. By realizing that these experiences are like a dream, we are less tense and can relax, which is a result of mind training.

The next instruction is to

"Examine the nature of unborn mind." This instruction advises us to examine our own mind, *rang-sems*. We do this by looking to see where our mind is and what color and form it has. Since everything that we can see has a color and form, we discover that we can't see our own mind when we look for it. Just because we can't see our mind doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. After all, we experience happiness and suffering. Who experiences happiness and suffering? Our consciousness, our mind.

Since we have a mind, we think that it is born or created, but it isn't born or created, *ma-skyed-pa*. This means that although our mind is unborn, it is present. But where is it? Our thoughts are constantly directed outwards, so we can search for our mind outside our body. Since we can't find our mind outside our body, we can search for it inside our body and look to see whether it is in our hands, or in our legs, or in our head, etc. We can try and then think that our mind is where we think it is. Then we have the feeling that it is where we think it is, but this feeling changes when we direct our attention somewhere else. Seeing that we can't find our mind outside or in a specific spot in our body, it can only be emptiness, *stong-pa-nyid*, i.e., empty of inherent existence. As such, it is free of happiness and suffering. We saw that a harmful action brings forth a painful result and a wholesome action engenders a joyful result. Feelings of happiness and suffering can only arise and be experienced because our mind is empty of solid existence. Thus our mind is the basis for our experiences and is paramount.

We examine our mind with our mind. We carry out three procedures to examine our mind. We look to see which color and form it has, whether it abides outside or inside our body, and whether it is a thing or nothing. What do we find when we search for our mind in these three ways? What is the answer when we thoroughly examine which color or form our mind has?

Student: "None."

Lama Phuntsok: Can we say that our mind doesn't exist because it has no color and form?

Student: "No."

Lama Phuntsok: Is it an existent?

Student: "Yein, 'yes and no.'"

Lama Phuntsok: If it isn't non-existent, it must exist. But where is it located if it exists? Outside or inside our body?

Student: "In cognition."

Lama Phuntsok: Cognition is a mental activity, a discursive activity. Is discursive activity an existent?

Student: “No.”

Lama Phuntsok: A discursive activity takes place when we identify the color of an object. Mind is merely discursive activities, so our mind comes and goes just like our thoughts come and go. We wouldn’t have a mind if we didn’t have thoughts. So, when thoughts arise, our mind has these thoughts. Our mind is angry when we are angry. We couldn’t become angry if we didn’t have a mind.

Student: “Isn’t this just clinging?”

Lama Phuntsok: Yes, it’s grasping and clinging. We grasp and cling to what made us angry when we are angry, therefore our mind seems to exist. But, since it has no color or form, it isn’t an entity. Our mind seems to exist because we cling to our thoughts, so we can’t say that our mind is empty. If it were empty, we couldn’t become angry.

Some people think that saying mind is emptiness means it is nothing, a void, which isn’t the case. Do you think that saying that the mind is emptiness means that it is empty?

Student: “No.”

Lama Phuntsok: Why? Because our mind experiences happiness, suffering, and various things. When our mind comes together with good situations, then we are happy. When it comes together with bad situations, then we are unhappy and suffer. So our mind is not empty. Its essence is emptiness, but it isn’t empty. Our mind can never disappear or vanish like a table that has been burned to ashes. Therefore, we must be careful when learning that the mind is emptiness. Emptiness isn’t nothing-ness, rather, emptiness is lack of impediment for things to arise when causes and conditions prevail. We need to examine our mind subtly, which is the reason the root text states, “Examine the nature of unborn consciousness.”

The next line in the first verse of the main practice of Lojong is:

“Self-liberate even the antidotes.” As we saw in the introduction, antidotes are the methods we apply to reverse negative thoughts into wholesome ones. Antidotes, like everything else, do not exist of their own accord and are also empty of inherent existence. When our mind is free of negative thoughts, then we needn’t apply antidotes to diminish and overcome our negative thoughts, which is what the above line connotes. Let me explain in detail.

Many thoughts arise in our mind, thoughts concerning happiness as well as suffering. These thoughts all arise in our mind, i.e., our mind is the source of all experiences and appearances that we perceive and apprehend. We need to gain control over our mind so that we win control over the way we apprehend appearances. If we aren’t in control of our mind, we apprehend appearances unconsciously, *blo-ba-med*. We need to become aware of our mind in order to be able to realize how things really are and how they appear to us. We lose control over our mind when we simply follow after thoughts the moment we perceive a form, sound, or other object of the senses. We have control over our mind when we don’t simply follow after thoughts that arise in our mind after having perceived an object. We practice mind training to realize that our mind is the source of all phenomena that appear to us. Therefore it is stated in the root text, “Self-liberate even the antidotes.”

We engage in mind training so that eventually we need not apply antidotes to reverse our thoughts. But, to accomplish this, we need to realize that our mind is the source of all thoughts that we have. We need to have mindfulness and awareness to realize that our mind is the source of all our thoughts and appearances. Mind itself isn’t identical with happiness and suffering, rather, we create happiness and suffering with our thoughts. We have many thoughts. Our mind gives rise to the great variety of thoughts that we have, therefore we have to be very mindful of our thoughts. The more mindful and aware we are of our thoughts, the more relaxed we become. Many people are never relaxed, but think a lot and are always

nervous. When we progress in mind training, we become more relaxed and as a result our mental activities become weaker and weaker and diminish more and more. Mind training is the method to learn to control our mind. Meditation practice is the method to pacify our mind. Letting our mind rest in peace through meditation practice makes it easy to practice mind training.

Question: “Is one-taste related to mind training?”

Translator: “Do you mean one of the four levels of accomplishment in Mahamudra?”

Same student: “Yes. Being free of attachment to what is good and bad is actually one-taste.”

Lama Phuntsok: When one doesn’t experience good and bad as independent existents, but in equality, we can speak of one-taste, *ro-gcig*. A sign of reaching or of having reached this level of accomplishment through meditation is that one isn’t exalted when one is lucky and isn’t depressed when one suffers or has a strain of bad luck. People who are overly joyous when things go well for them, complain a lot when things go wrong for them. The sign of having achieved one-taste is being balanced and in equilibrium. One’s clinging to what one thinks is bad and wants to eliminate and to what one thinks is good and wants to keep or attain diminishes.

The next line in the first verse of the main practice of Lojong instructs us to

“Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.” The *alaya* (the Sanskrit term translated into Tibetan as *kun-gzhi'i-rnam-par-shes-pa*) is ‘the basis or ground consciousness (i.e., storehouse) of all ordinary experiences.’ Our mind consists of eight consciousnesses, *rnam-shes-tshogs-brgyäd*. The alaya is our eighth consciousness. The other seven are (1-5) the five consciousnesses associated with each of the five sense perceptions (*sgo-lnga'i-rnam-shes*), (6) the mind consciousness (*sems*, i.e., the intellectual cognition or apprehension of a sense perception), and (7) the consciousness tainted by the negative emotions (*nyön-mongs-rnam-shes*). The five main negative emotions (*dug-lnga'i-nyön-mongs-pa*, *klesha* in Sanskrit) are desire, anger, ignorance, pride and jealousy. The alaya (also referred to as “the nature of everything”) is neutral and passive. The seven consciousnesses associated with perceptions and apperceptions, i.e., thoughts, arise out of and subside into the alaya, where they are stored as habitual patterns until activated by thoughts of the sixth mind, *sems*. Since it is characterized by basic ignorance, *ma-shes-pa*, the sixth mind consciousness is impure and is purified through the practice of mind training.

The essence of all living beings’ mind is the same, yet everyone’s thoughts differ. Why? Because everyone thinks differently. Mind’s essence is pure, but mental activities aren’t pure and vary from one individual to the other. By learning to rest in the alaya, the basis of everything, we practice abiding in equilibrium. By progressing in practice, we are able to pacify our mind consciousness, *sems*. If, through meditation, we are able to abide in equilibrium one-pointedly, without following after thoughts that arise in our mind consciousness, they will diminish. When they have ceased, we can abide in the essence of everything, not obscured by ignorance. Let me explain in detail how our mind functions.

Taking the visual consciousness, the moment the visual faculty of our visual sense organ (our eyes) perceives an object that is fit to be seen, our visual consciousness arises. Then our sixth mental consciousness immediately arises and, automatically influenced by our afflicted consciousness, is moved and intensified in its evaluation of whether we think that the object we saw is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Having apperceived a form, we are attracted to it if we think it is pleasant, reject it if we feel it is unpleasant, or are indifferent if we feel it is neutral. Clinging to the form we perceived with our mind consciousness, our sympathy for the perceived object causes us to have desire, our antipathy for the object we saw causes us to

have aversion, and, due to wanting things to be different, desire and anger arise in our mind. The same process takes place when, with the other sense faculties of our other sense organs (ears, nose, tongue, and tactile body), we perceive and apprehend a respective sense object. Next to visual forms, the other sense objects that we can perceive and apprehend are sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. And so, this is how our eight consciousnesses function.

In summary, the basis of our seven consciousnesses is the *alaya*, ‘the ground consciousness.’ When a sense consciousness has arisen due to having perceived an object with a sense faculty and sense organ, our afflictive mind awakens our ingrained habits that are stored in our *alaya* and, depending upon those habits, automatically influences and intensifies thoughts that we have with our mind consciousness about that perceived object. Our mind consciousness then fabricates, makes plans, i.e., thinks. In this way, we have three categories of the eight consciousnesses: the basis (the 8th consciousness), thoughts that are intensified by clinging and grasping (the 6th and 7th), and the sense consciousnesses (the first 5).

We always speak about having one mind, but our mind consists of those eight consciousnesses. We learn about our eight consciousnesses so that we can understand how our mind functions. The instruction we are concerned with here, “Rest in the nature of *alaya*, the essence,” means allowing our seven consciousnesses to diminish and cease so that we can abide in equilibrium. When we abide in equilibrium, we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel things just as they are, without making an addendum. When we see a form that is white, for example, we see that it is white and, even when we close our eyes, we know that it is white. Let’s take this piece of paper in my hand. We all see that it is white. When we close our eyes, we know that the piece of paper is white, although we don’t see it anymore. In this process, our mind consciousness grasped at the piece of paper and judged that “It’s white.” We try to stop grasping so that we can rest in the ground of our consciousnesses, our *alaya*, without adding anything through mental activities, as is usually the case.

What is the purpose and benefit of resting in the *alaya*? We don’t judge, i.e., we don’t become involved with mental fabrications anymore, such as, “Oh, this is new and that’s old. It’s this and not that,” etc. Having pacified our consciousnesses by resting in the *alaya*, we don’t grasp for and don’t cling to things. Then the five sense consciousnesses are at ease. If we can rest like this for 10 minutes, then we won’t grasp for things by thinking, “Oh, this is good and that is bad.” When we don’t succumb to mental activities and are free of such thoughts, then our attachment and rejection will have ceased. As a result, we don’t create karma. If we can rest in the *alaya* for an hour, then our negative emotions will diminish all the more so. By meditating in this way, our thoughts that are influenced by our afflictive consciousness cease. When thoughts about the past or plans concerning the future arise, then we aren’t resting in our basis and aren’t meditating.

In short, the purpose of resting in the *alaya* is to pacify our mind. Our mind isn’t abiding in peace when we have many thoughts. But we can abide in more and more peace by practicing not to give in to our thoughts. That’s why we are instructed to “Rest in the nature of *alaya*, the essence.” This practice is very important.

We meditate resting in the nature of *alaya* step by step and gradually. Being involved with thoughts is an impure mental activity. When we have collected our thoughts, we try to rest in our basis. If we can do this, then we are resting in our pure consciousness. But we can’t really succeed at this stage in our lives and therefore we need to exert much effort in practice. We begin where we are by practicing calm abiding meditation, *zhi-gnäs* in Tibetan, *shamatha* in Sanskrit. We practice *zhi-gnäs* by focusing our attention one-pointedly on an object. It would

be very helpful to receive instructions on how to practice *zhi-gnäs*. It's not easy for us to meditate calm abiding, because, since time that is without a beginning, we have been living our lives in reliance on our disturbing emotions and strong habitual patterns.

We practice *zhi-gnäs* by first sitting in a posture that is conducive to abiding in calm. We concentrate our attention on our body and sit straight. The five main points in our body, called *chakra* in Sanskrit, are our forehead, our throat, our heart, our navel chakra, and our secret chakra. We can designate syllables for the chakras, the white syllable OM for the chakra in our forehead, the red syllable AH for our throat chakra, the blue syllable HUNG for our heart chakra, the yellow syllable SO for our navel chakra, and the green syllable HA for our secret chakra. It's very helpful to focus our attention on these syllables in our five centers. If it's hard imagining the script of the syllables, we can concentrate our attention on the colors.

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First we imagine that white light radiates out from the OM in the chakra of our forehead, thus becoming free of all our thoughts. Secondly, we imagine that white light returns to us and enters into the same chakra. Thirdly, we rest in the feeling that the white light has melted into this chakra. Then we imagine that red light radiates out from the AH in our throat chakra; we imagine that it returns to us, enters our throat chakra, and we rest in the feeling that the red light has melted into the chakra in our throat. We practice these three phases in the same fashion for the blue syllable HUNG in our heart chakra, for the yellow syllable SO in our navel chakra, and for the green syllable HA in our secret chakra. For as long as possible each time, we rest in the feeling that the light has melted into the respective chakra. It is advisable to rest our hands on our knees while doing this. Then we don't have the feeling that the light of our navel and secret chakra is impeded by our hands when we hold them slightly below our navel.

Practicing the five stages, our mind has no chance of fabricating thoughts about the past or future. We wouldn't be meditating if we were involved with thoughts. If we intensify this practice by being diligent, we will make our own experiences and we will progress. One day we will be able to rest in the nature of everything, our alaya. If a practitioner can directly rest in the alaya, he needn't engage in these five stages.

Everyone experiences in which way practicing the five stages help calm the mind. They are methods to pacify disturbing mental activities and enable us to be able to rest in the alaya. Unpleasant feelings can arise, though, because our body and mind are connected. If our knees or shoulders start hurting or we feel uncomfortable while practicing, we take a break or stretch our arms and legs. We can engage in this meditation practice alone or in a group. We can also gently sing the five sounds of the five syllables. Then we have a better feeling for the streaming light and would also be using our speech in our practice.

Life consists of body, speech, and mind, as well as of qualities and activities. The five colors symbolize these five aspects of life. We have our body, we have our speech, and we have our mind that thinks. Everyone has personal qualities and engages in specific activities. Our body and mind are inseparable when we practice. Practicing the five stages makes it possible for our mind to rest in peace. Just reading the instruction, “Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence” won’t enable us to do this. We won’t see, hear, taste, smell, or touch anything while we practice the five stages and if we practice diligently again and again, we will progress and will be creating a positive habit in our mindstream, which is the purpose of mind training. When we are able to rest in the alaya, then our mind will have been trained. As long as we can’t rest in the alaya, we have to practice. Working with the five lights is a method to rest our mind in peace and ease.

In short, the main section of Lojong, ‘mind training,’ commences with resting in the alaya. Our teacher will instruct us how to practice, but everyone has to engage in the practice and experience the results for himself or herself.

“In the post-meditation experience, one should become a child of illusion.” Having finished a meditation session and while involved in daily activities, being a child of illusion means knowing that everything we experience is like an illusion, like a dream. Everything we encounter is an opportunity to reverse our negative ways and become better. We do this by engaging in the next two instructions of the second verse, which are:

“Sending and taking should be practiced alternatively. Those two should ride the breath.” The practice of sending and taking is called *gtong-len* in Tibetan, also translated as ‘giving and taking.’ We imagine giving all our happiness and good karma to all beings while breathing out and imagine taking in all their suffering and bad karma while breathing in. There’s no need to fear that we will be giving all our possessions and well-being away or that we will really be taking on others’ negativities. Rather, the practice of sending and taking is a skilful method to train our mind and develop positive qualities.

It isn’t easy to have positive thoughts for others and to work at becoming a better person. We won’t be able to accomplish this real fast, but we can imagine benefiting somebody by sending him or her positive wishes and by imagining taking on his or her suffering and pain. If we can’t help somebody practically, then we can send well-wishes their way.

There are countless suffering beings in our world and it’s impossible to help all of them. Yet, we can benefit others a lot by practicing *gtong-len* and sending them best wishes and thoughts. If possible, we should help others on a practical level, too. *gTong-len* is a skilful practice of mind training to develop and improve our own mind. It is an indispensable practice for students treading the path of Dharma. This practice isn’t carried out anymore when we engage in the main practice of resting in the nature of all things, but it is then a skillful practice during the period of post-meditation.

A day and a night consist of 24 hours, and it's hard enough to rest in the nature of everything, the alaya, for an hour. If we could, we would still have enough time left to engage in the other Dharma practices. It would be great if we practiced *gtong-len* during the 23 hours left us that day, but we have to sleep for 7 or 8 hours. So, it would be a very good habit to practice giving and taking while we dream.

Student: "I have a question. I don't know what the word *alaya* means. Can it be compared with omniscience or Dharmakaya?"

Lama Phuntsok: Alaya is the ground consciousness. There are two aspects, the pure and the impure alaya. When it is purified, the alaya is the Dharmakaya.

"Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue." The three objects are the things we think are pleasant, the things we think are unpleasant, and indifference about objects that we think are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. The three poisons refer to the three main mind poisons, which are ignorance, attachment, and aversion. The three mind poisons arise due to the three ways we see and apprehend things. When we think something is pleasant, we develop greed and attachment. When we think something is unpleasant, we reject it with aversion. When we are indifferent about an object that we perceived, we remain ignorant of its worth. It's very beneficial to recognize how the three mind poisons arise in our mind and what they connote, otherwise we won't be able to avoid and overcome our disturbing emotions. It's very important to immediately recognize whether we think an object we perceived is pleasant or unpleasant, i.e., desirable or undesirable.

The three seeds of virtue are the three wholesome ways of apperceiving an object. We need to engage in virtuous activities, instead of being attached and greedy for things we think are pleasant and nice. Secondly, we need to engage in virtuous activities, instead of giving in to our aversion for things we think are unpleasant. Every helpful and harmful action that we carry out depends upon our motivation. If our motivation is negative, harmful results will ensue; if our motivation is positive, beneficial results will ensue. The three seeds of virtue are connected with the three mind poisons, i.e., they are the three ways of apperceiving objects and depend upon our attitude and motivation, too. This is the way in which the three objects, the three mind poisons, and the three seeds of virtue are connected. To be able to relinquish our three mind poisons through mind training, we have to look at them.

We have attachment and grasp for an object we perceive and in that moment we think, "Oh, it's so pretty and nice." We have aversion and are angry about an object we perceive and in that moment we think, "Oh, I don't want to have anything to do with it." When we think that the object we perceive is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, the third mind poison arises in us, which is indifference or ignorance. We should be very careful and aware of our thoughts when we perceive objects. If we are aware and aren't attached to an object that we think is nice, we won't cling to it and thus won't be greedy. Every action we carry out will be virtuous and good if we don't cling to the objects we perceive in these three different ways.

Whoever acts virtuously will not succumb to the three mind poisons, so we should always try to engage in virtuous activities. Being able to act virtuously depends upon whether we have given way to the three mind poisons or not. This depends on whether we cling to the objects that we perceive in the three described ways. So, that is how the three main mind poisons arise in dependence on the three ways of clinging to objects we perceive.

"In all activities, train with sayings." A Dharma practitioner should take this instruction to heart and also make aspiration prayers, for example, "May all my activities be good and benefit all living beings"; or the prayer composed by Shantideva, "May all my virtue ripen in

others and may all beings' negativities ripen in me." Beginners might have doubts and fear that they will suffer if they make aspiration prayers like this. But there's no need to worry, because having aspiration prayers of goodness is a skilful method of mind training and matures our own mind. We can't really give all our fortune and well-being to others and can't really take on their suffering and misery. The purpose of having positive aspiration prayers is to cultivate our own mind and become better individuals. If we want to be better than we are now, then we practice by giving rise to the motivation and the wish to help others become happy and free of their suffering. That is why we use sayings and recite aspiration prayers.

"Begin the sequence of sending and taking with oneself." What do we take upon ourselves when we practice this instruction? We take on the suffering of others, but, in truth, we can't, because everyone's negative karma only ripens for them and not for us.

Any painful experiences we have aren't caused by others, rather, are the result of our own past negativities. Any suffering we experience exhausts our past negative karma. When our negative karma is exhausted, it's easier to take on the suffering of other beings by making aspiration prayers. We can't heal others of any sickness they have as long as we are sick, so we first need to become cured of our own sickness. When we are healthy, we will be able to protect others from sickness and suffering and can help them become well. This is why the instruction is to "Begin the sequence of sending and taking with oneself," which means to say that we will be able to begin thinking we are taking on the suffering of others after we have purified our own negative karma.

Although it's impossible to give away our happiness and any good that we have accumulated to all the needy beings in the world and to take on their suffering and pain, we can protect them from their negativities by engaging in the practice of *gtong-len*. It is a skillful method to protect others and to develop and mature positively. If we can make one person happy and protect him or her from suffering, then he or she will experience well-being. Anybody who is hungry suffers and reciting a wishing prayer for this person will not alleviate his pain. By doing *gtong-len*, we send this person all our best thoughts and wishes that his hunger be stilled, which doesn't actually help him. We can only help by giving a hungry person something to eat. Imagining that we are exchanging his pain with our satisfactory condition only benefits us. There are many ways in which living beings suffer and there are many ways to help them. Mind training is the practice of aspiring to free others from suffering.

Three: Transforming Bad Circumstances into the Way of Enlightenment

The first instruction in the third section of the actual instructions is:

"When the world is filled with evil, transform all mishaps into the path of Bodhi." There is the vast world, *dzam-bu-gling*, and its inhabitants. For example, there are the inhabitants of Germany in the country of Germany. Things are getting worse in the world. Negative circumstances, such as sicknesses, natural catastrophes, and wars in the vast world of *Jambudvīpa* bring on much suffering. We can't eliminate these negative circumstances, but we can use them for our practice on the path of Dharma. If we have a good motivation and progress in our practice, we will eventually be able to transform adverse circumstances.

To be able to tread the path of a Bodhisattva, *byang-chub-kyi-lam*, we need to give rise to the mind of enlightenment, *Bodhi* in Sanskrit, *byang-chub-kyi-sems* in Tibetan. We meditate *snying-rje*, 'loving kindness and compassion,' to develop and cultivate the mind of awakening. We won't be able to develop loving kindness and compassion if we don't have a wholesome and good intention. Loving kindness and compassion are thoughts. Love is the

wish that others have happiness and its causes; compassion is the wish that others be free of suffering and its causes. *sNying-rje* is the sincere wish to help others attain happiness and freedom from suffering. It's impossible to tread the path of a Bodhisattva without having loving kindness and compassion. As said, they are both thoughts that are only meaningful if they embrace others. To be able to serve others reliably and truthfully, it's extremely important and an indispensable condition to awaken the mind of enlightenment.

Loving kindness and compassion certainly aren't like the satisfaction that lions and tigers feel after having killed and devoured their prey's meat. Having loving kindness and compassion doesn't mean only being concerned about oneself, rather, it means having the strong wish that others be happy and free of suffering and aspiring to help them. It's only possible to awaken loving kindness and compassion by having a pure motivation. And it's only possible to transform adverse conditions by giving rise to the mind of awakening, which, as we just saw, presupposes having a pure motivation.

Secondly, **“Drive all blame into oneself.”** Sometimes we are sick or dismayed and then we aren't happy. This happens. We can't blame anybody for any trouble we experience, because we created the causes for our misfortune ourselves. We have been roaming around in samsara since time that is without a beginning and have accumulated much negative karma, which ripens as sickness and problems. When we really get to the heart of the matter, we realize that our problems are caused by our intense ego-fixation, i.e., our egocentricity is actually the cause of any suffering and anguish that we experience.

It's very important to realize that any troubles and problems we experience are due to our own bad behavior in the past. We should make wishing prayers that the results of our negative past karma, which would otherwise ripen in a future life, ripen in us now, in that way exhausting our negative karma that we have accumulated for such a long time. We should never forget that we will experience the results of the negative actions we committed and continue committing and that it's impossible that any suffering we go through is caused by anybody else. Of course, we don't want to become sick, but we will get sick when the conditions come together. A sickness doesn't befall everyone when conditions prevail; many people stay healthy during critical times. It's due to our own negative karma that we become sick, which nobody can change. We can make the aspiration prayer, “May any negative karma that I accumulated in the past ripen in me now as a sickness, thus purifying my negative karma.”

Thirdly, **“Contemplate the great kindness of everyone.”** We should contemplate that everyone has been and is very kind and friendly to us and should be very grateful. Why should we contemplate that everyone has been and is very kind to us? We want to help others attain Buddhahood and won't be able to help them without having given rise to the mind of awakening, *Bodhicitta*. We won't be able to attain Buddhahood if we neglect others. Since they make it possible for us to develop loving kindness and compassion, we focus our attention on all living beings and are grateful to them. In short, we need to have loving kindness and compassion for all living beings because, without them, we wouldn't be able to develop loving kindness and compassion and thus wouldn't be able to attain Buddhahood. They are indispensable, and for this reason we are grateful to all living beings for their great kindness.

Is the mind of awakening kind to us? No.

Student: “No?”

Lama Phuntsok: No, because the mind of awakening and loving kindness and compassion can't be generated and developed if there are no sentient beings. They are the object and having loving kindness and compassion is senseless without them. Bodhicitta is a thought.

Same student: "Isn't there a process?"

Lama Phuntsok: Bodhicitta is the cause of Buddhahood. But how can we give rise to Bodhicitta if there are no sentient beings? Living beings are the objects that make it possible for us to develop loving kindness and compassion. Without them, we wouldn't be able to give rise to and have *snying-rje*. It is due to their kindness that we are able to develop loving kindness and compassion. Bodhicitta is an attitude; it is the wish that living beings have happiness and freedom from suffering. How can we give rise to this thought and have this wish if there are no living beings? Therefore, we should be grateful to everyone.

Then we learn that **"Regarding confusion as the four kayas is unsurpassable shunyata protection."** Phenomena that appear to us are illusory. Why are appearances illusory? Because we are ignorant, *ma-rig-pa*. Illusory appearances are mere appearances and have no substantial inherent existence. For instance, we see forms and colors in this room and think that everything is pretty and clean. A dog wouldn't perceive the things we see the way we do; a dog apperceives delusively in another way than we do. For example, all of us use the bathroom for the same purpose, whereas a dog wouldn't because it doesn't see things like we do. Since beings see things differently, we understand that phenomena don't have an essential existence of their own, but are illusory. Let's take the example that we have the feeling of being burned in a fire while dreaming. The moment we wake up, we know that the extreme anguish and suffering we experienced while dreaming of being burned were illusory. It's the same while we are awake. We apperceive appearances as though they are real and lasting. In that moment, appearances are illusory because we are deluded about their true nature.

We perceive and apperceive appearances. When we recognize that they are illusory and don't cling to them as real, then they appear as the four *kayas*, 'the four bodies of a buddha,' *sku-bzhi* in Tibetan. The four bodies of a buddha are: *chös-sku* (*Dharmakaya*, 'the truth body'), *longs-pa'i-sku* (*Sambhogakaya*, 'the enjoyment body'), *sprul-pa'i-sku* (*Nirmanakaya*, 'the emanation body'), and *ngo-bo-nyid-kyi-sku* (*Svabhavavikaya*, 'the essence body').

The Dharmakaya is our mind's emptiness. The Nirmanakaya is the appearance of a Buddha's clarity that is perceptible to ordinary living beings. The Sambhogayakaya is the semi-manifest form of enlightenment that is endowed with the perfect teacher, retinue, place, teaching, and time and is only perceptible to disciples on advanced levels of practice. The Svabhavavikaya is the inseparability of the three kayas. Delusiveness is transformed into the four kayas when we don't cling to appearances as true existents. The four kayas are the result of Dharma practice.

The kayas' indivisibility of emptiness and clarity appears in our mind. Thus our mind is the indivisibility of emptiness and clarity. Our mind's essence is Dharmakaya. Our mind's clarity that manifests naturally is the Sambhogakaya. Our mind's unimpeded manifestation is the Nirmanakaya. The inseparability of the three kayas is the Svabhavavikaya. Presently, our mind is obscured by our disturbing emotions. When we have purified our mind of its delusiveness, then it manifests as the four bodies of a buddha.

Our mind is by nature the indivisibility of emptiness and clarity and has all qualities of Buddhahood, which is the reason we experience appearances. All appearances that manifest to us are the Nirmanakaya. The essence of our mind is emptiness, its nature is clarity, and its

manifest cognition is just as unimpeded and boundless as the sky. These are the aspects of our mind that are inseparably united.

We are deluded, i.e., ignorant, *ma-rig-pa*, as long as we don't realize our mind's essence. Our alaya consciousness arises due to our delusiveness, i.e., due to being ignorant of our mind's essence. Because of ignorance, we perpetrate a delusive experience the moment we perceive an object and thus it appears to us wrongly. In dependence on our habits that are stored in our alaya consciousness and by way of our afflictive consciousness, our mind consciousness, *sems*, evaluates a sense perception that we perceived with our respective sense organ, sense faculty, and sense consciousness. Due to this process, we apprehend appearances in a deluded fashion and mistakenly, *'khrul*, i.e., not having realized our mind's essence, phenomena are delusive appearances, illusions, *'khrul-snang*.

When we understand how our mind functions and when we realize that our mind is the four kayas, we won't apprehend appearances in confusion, *'khrul-ba*. Knowing that our mind's essence is emptiness, its nature is clarity, its cognition is as boundless as the sky, and that these three aspects of our mind are indivisibly united is a very profound view. Knowing that our mind is the four kayas protects us from illusory appearances. It is the unsurpassable view and isn't easy to understand.

Question: "You spoke about being attracted to objects that we think are pleasant and rejecting objects that we think are unpleasant. I don't understand what being indifferent means."

Lama Phuntsok: After we perceive something and feel that it is pleasant, we think, "That's good." After we perceive something that we feel isn't pleasant, we think, "That's bad." After we perceive something that we feel isn't pleasant or unpleasant, rather, neutral, we are indifferent and don't think, "It's good" or "It's bad." Being indifferent means having no feeling and thought about what we perceived.

Same student: "I don't understand that one is ignorant when being indifferent."

Lama Phuntsok: If you understand this, then you aren't ignorant.

Same student: "Does it mean understanding clinging and not clinging?"

Lama Phuntsok: Ignorance means not knowing. Sleep is also referred to as a state of ignorance because there is no knowing, *ma-shes-pa*, during that time. From among the three mind poisons, it's hardest understanding what ignorance means. Not knowing is, for example, being uncertain whether something we eat tastes good or not. The moment we know that something we ate tastes good or doesn't taste good, we know.

"Four practices are the best of methods." There are four special methods of practice to transform negative circumstances and adverse conditions into the way of enlightenment. They are: accumulating merit and wisdom, purifying negative karma, giving *torma* (a symbolic ritual offering made of flour) to gods and demons, and offering *torma* to dakinis and protectors (*dakinis*, 'she who travels in the sky,' and protectors are expressions of awakened activity).

The accumulation of merit and wisdom is gathering merit and gaining wisdom, which are practiced together. We accumulate merit by first making offerings to the Three Jewels, our Lama, our parents, and friends. We also try to benefit all other living beings by being generous and by serving them. We try to accumulate as much merit as possible by engaging in meaningful activities.

Secondly, we engage in the purification practice to cleanse the negative karma we have accumulated since time that is without a beginning. In order to regret and confess all the bad

actions we committed in the past, we have to realize that they were not always good. Having regretted our past bad deeds, we confess them and promise never to repeat them. We do this by meditating Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, Dorje Sempa; it's the best method to purify all the negative karma that we accumulated every day in all our past lives.

The third method is to make torma offerings to beings that have no form. There are formless beings that harm us and we call them "demons"; and there are formless beings that help us and we call them "gods." We first need to acknowledge that there are these beings that we do not see, and we should know that some of them are troublemakers and some of them are helpers. We offer these formless beings presents in the form of torma, which consists of edible substances, or we perform *The Sur Ritual Offering* for them. *Torma* is *gtor-ma* in Tibetan and means 'leaving something,' which doesn't mean giving away things we don't want. Moved by loving kindness and compassion, we recite dedication prayers while offering torma to the formless beings. While performing this action, we can recite the mantra of the Lord of Compassion, Noble Chenrezig. His mantra is OM MANI PEMA HUNG.

The fourth method is to offer torma to dakinis and protectors, who are also formless beings, so that they are active and remove negative conditions and disruptive impediments and establish positive conditions that are conducive for our Dharma practice. It's necessary to know that there are formless beings, such as gods and demons, dakinis and protectors, and to pay respect to them.

Everybody needs good conditions and doesn't need obstacles when working to achieve a goal. Everything goes smoothly when the conditions are good, but problems arise when there are obstacles. Therefore, as stated, "The four practices are the best of methods." We will have no problems and will be able to accomplish our aims easily if we practice them.

"In order to take unexpected conditions as the path, immediately join whatever you encounter with meditation." It's important to make best use of everything we encounter for meditation practice. Whether we are presently experiencing positive conditions and are happy and well, whether we aren't that fortunate or are sick, we should take everything as the path and include it in our meditation. We should never stop practicing mind training, no matter what happens.

Four: Integrating Practice in Our Whole Life

The first instruction in the fourth section of the actual instructions is: **"The condensed heart instructions are the five forces: Practice them."** The numerous profound instructions for Dharma practice during life can be summarized as five forces. They are: the force of impetus, the force of meditation, the force of virtuous seeds, the force of repudiation, and the force of aspiration.

The force of impetus is thinking, "From this moment until enlightenment, from this moment until my death, from this moment until next month, in reliance on Bodhicitta, I will do what is necessary and avoid doing meaningless things." The force of meditation or familiarization is again and again giving rise to the aspiration to attain enlightenment. The third force is planting the seed of virtuous deeds, never being content with our efforts to develop and strengthen Bodhicitta more and more. The fourth force is repudiating activities and thoughts that aren't beneficial, for example, repudiating self-cherishing thoughts the moment they arise and abandoning them. The fifth force of aspiration prayers is dedicating any virtue that we

have been able to accumulate for the benefit of all living beings. We practice mind training by applying the five forces with diligence.

The practice when we die is: **“The Mahayana instruction for ejection of consciousness at death is the five forces. How you conduct yourself is important.”** This practice concerns the practice we do when we die. It will be very important to practice the five forces that we just discussed when we are dying. We practice them in another order at this time, though, the first being the force of planting the seed.

When we are certain that we will die, the seed we plant is being fully aware of the fact that all worldly possessions that we have gathered in our life will be of no use to us at this time. Being aware of this fact, we consciously let go of everything. The second force is aspiration prayers. We pray, “The hour of my death has come. I give rise to Bodhicitta in my mind and make wishing prayers to the Lamas and the Three Jewels that they bless me.” The third force is repudiation. We do this by being aware of our bad actions and resolve not to repeat them. We contemplate that ego-fixation has only caused us suffering and have the wish to let go of cherishing ourselves. The third force is impetus. We make the best use of dying by resolving never to abandon the mind of awakening. The fifth force of meditation is keeping no other thought than Bodhicitta in mind when we die. If it is certain that we are dying, we shouldn’t think of our loved ones or about our possessions. We shouldn’t cling to our father and mother, our family members, or our friends, otherwise our mind will be disturbed.



Five: The Extent of Proficiency in Mind Training

The first line in the fifth section of the actual instructions tells us: **“All Dharma has a single purpose.”** There are many Buddhist schools in the Hinayana and Mahayana traditions of Buddhism and their sole purpose is for followers to become free of clinging to a self that we assume exists.

“Of the two witnesses, rely on the principal one.” A witness is someone who can certify whether we have been truthful or not. There are two kinds, other people’s opinion whether we have improved or not and the experience of our own proficiency in mind training. We shouldn’t trust other’s ideas of what is good or bad. If somebody tells us, “The mind of awakening isn’t good,” we shouldn’t trust this person. If we rely on others, negative thoughts might arise in our mind and influence our attitude. We should ask ourselves, “Is Bodhicitta beneficial and do I need to have the mind of awakening?” The one judge or witness we should rely on is our own mind.

“Always have a joyful mind.” This instruction means to say that if we develop a joyful mind and are happy, negative circumstances and suffering can’t cause us to become fearful and afraid. We will continually encounter negative situations and experience suffering and

pain, but we won't become discouraged, be overwhelmed, or feel depressed if we have a joyful mind. Since we are in samsara, painful situations and problems inevitably arise. If we have cultivated a joyful mind, we can abide in that state, no matter what happens. The benefit of developing a joyful mind is that we will be able to deal with adverse situations much better.

“If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained.” Let's take the example of a horseback rider. If he is good, no distraction will cause him to fall from the saddle. Somebody who isn't trained will fall from the horse when it jumps over the lowest hurdle, whereas a trained rider won't fall. In the same way, if we have established Bodhicitta firmly in our mind, nothing will move us and no negative circumstances will cause us to abandon it.

Six: Commitments of Mind Training

The first instruction in the sixth section of the actual instructions is: **“Always practice the three general principles.”** The first principle is to never forget or neglect the pledge of Bodhicitta that we made. It would be a grave error to do so. The second principle is never to mix things together by thinking we need to do various practices. Instead, we should determinedly establish Bodhicitta in our mind by concentrating our efforts on practicing mind training. The third principle is not being narrow-minded and prejudiced. For example, we are patient when friends cause us trouble or say something bad to us, but we can't take problems that enemies cause. That is what being prejudiced means, which we should abandon. Instead, we should think of and treat both friends and enemies alike. Practicing the three principles enables us to stabilize our mind training so that it doesn't decrease or diminish.

“Change your attitude, but remain natural.” We all think that we are important and others aren't. Reversing this attitude and thinking that others are much more important than we are is a very important practice of mind training. It causes us to want to benefit and help them. Therefore we are told to change our attitude, but to remain natural.

Student: “That's hard. I learned this, but isn't there the danger that one neglects oneself?”

Lama Phuntsok: This doesn't mean that we belittle or think lowly of ourselves, rather, we think, “I'm good, but others are good, too.”

Other student: “I know what it means to feel that others are always better. I've experienced this all my life. But what about me?”

Lama Phuntsok: It's a wide-spread attitude to think one is better than others. We should change this, which doesn't mean that we should reverse it totally and think badly of ourselves in order to be able to think good of others.

First student: “It's a matter of appreciating others. What does ‘remain natural’ in this line mean?”

Lama Phuntsok: Remaining and resting in the reversed attitude.

“Do not talk about weak points.” Some people have an infection, a disease, are handicapped, or mentally disabled. For example, we shouldn't say to someone who is blind, “Oh, you are blind.” That would be very insulting and senseless, and we should never say things like that. We shouldn't comment anybody's weaknesses or speak about their defects or handicaps. Instead, in a friendly and gentle manner, we should speak about pleasant topics to people who are disabled and sick.

“Don't ponder others.” We aren't others. When we ponder the affairs of others, we are thinking about whether they are acting in a good way or not. If we want to investigate what is good and bad, we should scrutinize our own thoughts and activities. Thinking about others' affairs is useless, therefore we are told, “Don't ponder others.”

“Work on the stronger defilements first.” We have many defilements or disturbing emotions; to name a few: attachment, miserliness, aversion, pride, jealousy, ignorance. We should work on the defilements that we see are strongest first.

Aversion and anger are the strongest negative emotion that most people have. Nobody is continuously angry, but people become angry in certain situations or under specific circumstances. The negative emotion of attachment and desire is continuous, though. Attachment is present in many different ways, for example, when we see a flower that we think is beautiful, we are attached to it. We see so many things when we are in a department store and then we have lots of attachment. We want to own all the things that we see when we think, “Oh, this is so beautiful and that is so beautiful, too.” We buy many things and, after having returned home, discover that we really don’t need all the things we wanted to have and bought. Working on ourselves instead of worrying about others, we notice that we wanted to own something because of our attachment and that we only wasted our money if we bought it. We should work on more and more diminishing our attachment and greed. Ignorance is not being aware that we have succumbed to greed and have become enslaved by our attachment. Not discerning whether we really need something that we want to have is ignorance, so attachment and ignorance are closely linked. Miserliness is the thought, “Oh, my possessions might become worthless. I might even lose all of them.” When miserliness is underlined by attachment and possessiveness, then our attachment increases. We should think about our negative emotions and know whether we are strongly attached to things or not. Shri Tilopa told his heart-disciple Naropa: “Son, it is not by appearances that you are fettered, but by craving.” We need to give up and become free of our craving.

Many of you have a camera. There are many different models of cameras, some are in a black box, others are in a white box, some boxes are coloured, or cameras are small or large, etc. If we want to buy a camera and go into a shop together, we would all recognize that one camera is black and the other one is white, but everybody would be attached to the one or the other in their own way. If the one we bought fell down and broke, we would scream, “My camera broke!” Since we aren’t attached to others’ belongings, if somebody else’s camera fell down and broke, we wouldn’t be upset and sad. Of course, the owner of the broken camera would be sad. So, even though we agree on the outer appearance of something, everybody’s attachment to it differs. Attachment and greed determine each other, each being the source of the other. Of course, somebody whose camera broke will immediately be mad at the person who dropped it, so, attachment causes anger. In contrast, we wouldn’t be angry with the person who dropped or broke somebody else’s camera. Attachment, greed, and anger are based on the thought, “That’s mine.” Actually, negative emotions are based on attachment and aversion, sympathy and antipathy. Therefore, taking the instruction to heart, “Work on the stronger defilements first,” is a method to diminish our attachment and aversion. It’s very important.

“Give up all hopes for results.” We will probably have expectations and want to be successful in mind training, but we shouldn’t. If we have hopes and expectations, we might think, “I’m a good practitioner.” It isn’t good to be attached to a result.

“Give up poisonous food.” Clinging to a self is like consuming poisonous food. It means grasping for a self and things that aren’t real and that are actually like a dream. Fixating on a self can be compared to poisoning the food that we eat and expecting a positive result from practicing mind training.

Student: “So, the lines, ‘Give up all hopes for results’ and ‘Give up poisonous food’ belong together.”

Lama Phuntsok: Yes, there is a relationship.

Same student: “I don’t understand the connection to giving up poisonous food.”

Lama Phuntsok: Poisonous food is a simile for clinging to a self. Having a self-cherishing attitude stands in opposition to virtuous activities. There are many householders who are good people, who are concerned about and care for their family, their friends, and the people who work for them.

“Don’t rely on consistency.” Holding a grudge against somebody who has harmed us isn’t good. We can have good wishes for people who have harmed us. As ordinary beings, we usually return favors, but we seek to avenge anybody who has hurt us. If we consider ourselves practitioners of mind training, we shouldn’t wish to harm anybody, rather, we should wish to benefit everybody. It’s a good practice to be grateful and to return favors, but it would be very good to be benevolent towards persons who have caused us trouble.

“Don’t be excited about cutting remarks.” If somebody says something bad to or about us, we shouldn’t retaliate by speaking badly to or about this person. Even if it’s true, we shouldn’t accuse somebody of being a thief and reproach this person. Whether it’s just or not, we shouldn’t respond using harsh language when somebody accuses us of something. If we stole something and someone is angry with us, we remain friendly.

“Don’t wait in ambush.” This means we shouldn’t wait for months or years to get back at somebody who hurt us. For example, we shouldn’t make plans, go out and buy a gun, and wait to take revenge. Rather, we should think that the person who harmed us was deluded and we should have compassion for him.

“Don’t make things painful.” We shouldn’t expose people’s shortcomings or faults that they have to others. We shouldn’t hurt anybody.

“Don’t put the horse’s load on a pony.” We have *dzos* in Tibet and the mountainous regions of the Himalayas. *Dzos* are a cross between a cow and a yak. They are very reliable animals and can carry very heavy loads on their back. Cows are less hardy than *dzos*, so nobody would put the load that a *dzo* can carry on the back of a cow. The meaning of this simile is that we shouldn’t expect anybody else to do our hard work, just as the instruction states, not to “put the horse’s load on a pony.”

“Don’t act with a twist.” For example, we shouldn’t cling to the thought that we can accomplish a difficult task. We shouldn’t deceive anybody and promise them that we can do something that is too big a job for us. In an attempt to gain advantages, we shouldn’t make anybody believe that we can do something that is too difficult for us. Many people do this, for example, there are people who claim to have attained realizations in their Dharma practice or who tell people that they have done something good. We shouldn’t boast about qualities we don’t have. There are strict laws in the West, but in Nepal there are medicine men who sell fake medicine to sick people. It’s reasonable for a businessman to profit from a sale, but it isn’t good to make huge profits or to deceive people by selling fake products.

“Don’t reduce a god to a demon.” A demon isn’t a god and a god isn’t a demon. We shouldn’t make a god to a demon by becoming proud that we are practicing mind training. Our pride, which is a mind poison and is a demon, should diminish more and more and we

should be able to benefit others better by practicing mind training. It would be a great fault and we would fall into samsara if we become more and more arrogant and proud.

“Don’t seek others’ pain as a component of your own happiness.” It would be very bad to be happy when people we don’t like or our enemies suffer. We should abandon having such a negative attitude. We practice mind training to be able to help others attain happiness and well-being and to alleviate and help them become free of suffering. We would be acting in opposition to mind training by taking advantage of others’ pain and suffering.

Seven: Guidelines of Mind Training

The first instruction in the seventh section of the actual instructions is: **“All active meditation is done in one way.”** During everyday life, i.e., whether we are eating, dressing, sleeping, walking, or sitting, we always keep the meditation practice in mind and have the single intention to help others. An important point about our eating habits is that we should eat less meat, thus we would harm less animals. There are many other things we can eat, e.g., vegetables and wheat. We shouldn’t only think about ourselves when it comes to our eating habits. We should also think about the clothes we wear and stop buying clothes that caused harm to animals, such as leather and fur.

Can we harm others when we sleep?

Student: “We can rob others of their sleep by snoring.”

Lama Phuntsok: We should sleep at the right time. Many microorganisms live in our body and we would harm them if we have bad sleeping habits. If we snore, we should sleep in a separate room. Let me tell the story of a heavy Tibetan Lama in India, who was a loud snorer. Nobody he knew was willing to share a room with him. One day he travelled to Hong Kong and booked a single room for himself in a hotel. He snored so loudly that he disturbed the people sleeping in the other rooms. The next day the proprietor kicked him out of the hotel. We should think about not harming anybody when we sleep. We should also be careful not to step or sit on tiny insects when we walk or sit down.

Student: “Many animals living in our body are killed when we take medicine.”

Lama Phuntsok: During these times, we can’t live up to not taking medicine when we are sick and we should take the medicine that a doctor prescribes. I just thought of a man’s father who is very old, is very sick, and suffers immensely. The old man’s son asked me, “Shouldn’t he be relieved of his pain and allowed to die by not giving him his medicine anymore?” I told him that it would not be all right, because it would be killing his father. A disciple from Taiwan studies Tibetan at Karma Lekshey Ling in Nepal and she had a very sick dog that was about to die and suffered immensely. She asked whether she could have her dog put to sleep. We asked His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa about the results of such an action and he replied that he didn’t know. He told her that he would make wishing prayers for her dog after it had died. He told her to ask a Lama. She asked me and I told her that having her dog put to sleep would kill her dog and it wouldn’t be right. This question is asked often, but we should know that killing a being that is still alive is a very bad action and we should never allow that a life is ended prematurely. The disciple from Taiwan didn’t have her dog put to sleep and it died a few days later.

While doing whatever we do, we should never lose the thought of benefitting others. Our one practice should always be to help others. If we have this intention, then we will be able to harm others less and less. Mind training consists of always having the wish to benefit others

and not to harm anyone. This means that we should act like a bee that collects nectar without damaging the flower.

“Two activities: one at the beginning, one at the end.” We might be preoccupied with sicknesses or problems that afflict us. We shouldn’t put the blame on our practice of mind training, but know that everything we experience is a result of our own past negative karma. When we suffer and have troubles, we make the wishing prayer that we are taking on the suffering and negativities of all living beings. We won’t be able to think that others’ negative karma is ripening in us when we are resentful or depressed. We need to be very open-minded to think like this. Beginners can’t think like this from the start.

We experience a morning and an evening every day, and our day begins when we get up in the morning. We should start the day by resolving to never forget Bodhicitta. Having made this resolution, we think of skilful means to benefit others during the day, and, if it isn’t possible, we at least try not to harm anybody. At the end of the day, we should recall whether we were able to benefit someone and rejoice if we did. When we realize that we couldn’t help anybody, we should rejoice that we didn’t hurt anybody that day. Then we should go to sleep with the prayer to be able to practice Bodhicitta more efficiently the next day.

In short, we should make the resolution in the morning to maintain and practice Bodhicitta all day, reflect how we spent the day in the evening, and make wishing prayers for the future before going to sleep. This is mind training. Our mind will become better and better, our ability to help others will increase, our tendency to be less deceptive and to hurt others will diminish more and more, and we will become a better person if we practice in this way. As a result, we will be considered a good member in society and be together with people who are grateful. Then we will be happy.

When we are a better person, have matured, and our intention is only good and pure, then even little birds won’t be afraid of us. They will come to us and, without being fearful, they will let us feed them. Birds flee from anybody who has a negative mind, even if such a person wants to feed them. People also avoid being around somebody who is quarrelsome, but they like being together with benevolent people and seek their company. We will benefit others by practicing mind training. Then we be around many nice people and will be happy. Nobody will suffer and we will have less and less problems.

Just reiterating, “Mind training. Mind training,” will not lead to positive results. We have to practice, and then our life will be meaningful and good. We and others will experience joy, which is everyone’s wish. Wishful thinking will not help anybody. We have to make good use of our precious human life so that we and others are happy. For example, if somebody who snores a lot doesn’t care if he disturbs others, he as well as those he torments won’t be happy. But, if somebody who snores is considerate and sees to it that he sleeps at a distance from others, then everyone will be comfortable and will feel fine.

“Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.” Whether we are happy or sad, this line instructs us to be patient. Sometimes we suffer. Knowing that any suffering we experience is a result of our own past negative karma, we stop acting badly and give up accumulating negative karma by not acting badly. If we are well off and prosperous, we should also remain in equanimity. While making wishing prayers for others, we should share whatever we can with them. It’s certain that suffering and happiness alternate in our lives. Whatever the case, we should always be patient.

It's important to know that things change from one day to the next. Things go well for us on some days and then we are happy, and things don't going well for us on other days and then we are sad. It's important to be patient in all situations. For example, a businessman will be very happy if he made a good deal and might have much alcohol served at a party he organized in a hotel to celebrate the occasion, which is totally meaningless. This same businessman will be extremely discouraged and angry when he is unlucky and doesn't make good business. We should avoid such extremes.

“Observe these two, even at the risk of your life.” There are two rules that we should follow. Firstly, a Dharma practitioner should observe ethical conduct at all times. There's a difference between ordained and lay practitioners, but the main rules of morality are laid out in the ten virtuous activities that everybody should practice and the ten non-virtuous activities that everyone should give up. The second recommendation concerns what we are going through and that we should then specifically practice, “All active meditation is done in one way.” This means to say that we should do everything with a single good intention. The line we are looking at now is that we should practice every instruction of mind training just as decisively as we take care of and protect our life. Why? To be able to cultivate our mind and become a better person. If we don't practice the points of mind training, we will not be able to mature and become better. We will develop positively if we take these teachings to heart.

It's the same for worldly matters. If somebody doesn't break the laws, they are a good person. It's the same in a family. If nobody hurts other family members, family life will be good. It's important to respect all laws of a country and society and all rules of a harmonious family and community life.

“Train in the three difficulties.” This line refers to three things that are hard to do. The first is the difficulty of recognizing our own afflictive emotions. It's hard because we cherish ourselves so much. We think that we are perfect and have no faults. Therefore it's very hard for us to see our own negativities. We saw that attachment and greed are major factors in our life. They pertain to both body and mind. Seeing that it's very hard for us to recognize our own shortcomings and faults, we are ignorant and indifferent. Having recognized our faults, the second difficulty is reducing and overcoming them. The third difficulty is to cut off our afflictions at the root so that they never arise again. Since these faults are central, we have to practice and continuously work at recognizing and eliminating them.

We need to recognize a negative emotion the moment it arises in our mind. The main mind poisons that we need to recognize are ignorance, attachment and greed, aversion and anger, pride, jealousy, miserliness. For example, when we become angry, we should see, “Oh, anger has arisen in my mind.” When we are attached to something we see, we should recognize our thought, “Oh, that's beautiful. I want to have it.” Ignorance means not really being aware of what we are doing or not knowing that we are about to do something that isn't good. Pride is thinking, “I'm the best and can do anything.” We should recognize pride when it arises in our mind. It's also necessary to recognize when we are jealous of a friend or relation who is doing well by thinking, “If only I had that luck. Only I deserve it.” We should recognize feelings like that when they arise in our mind. We also need to recognize when we are miserly or stingy, for example, after having been generous for a good purpose, thinking, “I wasted my money.” We should give up feeling and thinking like that.

Since we have a great variety of thoughts, we have a great variety of negative emotions that we need to differentiate and discern. The first difficulty is realizing that we have negative emotions and thoughts. It's impossible to reduce and overcome them if we don't even know

and admit that we have them. Therefore, the first point is to know and differentiate our thoughts. This enables us to deal with the negative ones that we all have. We need antidotes in order to deal with them. Antidotes are skillful methods we apply to reverse negative emotions and disruptive thoughts when we recognize that we have them.

We want to hurt somebody when we are angry; the antidote is cultivating loving kindness and compassion, which is the wish to help and benefit others. The antidote to attachment and the greedy thought, “Oh, that’s so beautiful. I want to have it,” is developing contentment; it is realizing that we don’t need the things that we think we need and want to have. When we are content, we will be rich. We will never be rich as long as we aren’t content, so the antidote to greed and wanting more and more is developing contentment. *gTi-mug* (‘stupidity, closed-mindedness, mental darkness’) means being ignorant of causes and effects. The antidote of stupidity is *shes-rab-kyi-lag-pa*, ‘the helping hand of wisdom-awareness.’ Developing wisdom-awareness, *shes-rab*, enables us to differentiate why things happen the way they do. The antidote to pride is paying respect to others. We pay respect to others with our body by facing them with humility or by bowing to them. We pay respect to others with our speech by speaking nicely to them, and we pay respect to others with our mind by thinking of their good qualities. Being proud means thinking we are better or wealthier than others. We will be able to eradicate our pride when we respect others and thus we will treat them decently. Jealousy is also a very negative emotion, and the antidote is rejoicing in others’ prosperity and fortunate situation. For example, if we rejoice in the good work that colleagues do, then we won’t be jealous of them. Miserliness is overcome by being generous towards those who are in a higher or lower position than we are.

It’s necessary to first recognize and identify our mind poisons and then to know the respective antidotes so that we can apply them. By practicing in this way, we will be able to diminish our negative emotions and thoughts, until we have cut off their roots so that they will never arise again. By practicing the three difficulties with the right motivation and again and again, we will be able to overcome our negative emotions and thoughts fully. Every practice of mind training is carried out for this purpose, so the instructions in the line we are looking at now, “Train in the three difficulties,” are very important.

There once was a Tibetan Lama who lived all alone in his cave and meditated *The Seven Points of Mind Training*. A thorny bush grew in front of his cave. He had to pass by it every time he went outside. Sometimes his clothes got caught in the thorns and he noticed that he became upset every time. He wondered, “Why do I always get upset?” He thought, “Actually, nobody is there to make me angry. It’s only a bush that disturbs me.” He realized, “It’s my own fault that I’m angry. Nobody is out to harm and fight with me, so there’s no reason to be angry. It’s not the fault of the bush if my clothes get caught in it.” So, he was able to overcome his anger by looking at the matter.

We have many small disturbing emotions that increase and expand. If we notice them at the start and apply the antidote right away, we will become free of them. But, as it is, we have negative emotions. As long as we follow after thoughts that arise in our mind, our afflictive emotions will continue determining our lives. We should know and never forget the antidotes and apply them so that even our smallest negative emotions cease.

Negative emotions are mental activities that we identify and label, i.e., we refer to illusory anger as “anger.” The antidote is also a mental activity that we identify and refer to as “loving kindness and compassion.” So, there are two things to think about when an afflictive emotion arises, namely, to recognize that it is a negative emotion and to remember to apply

the appropriate antidote for that negative emotion. Since it isn't easy to practice the three points, the instruction is to "Train in the three difficulties." They aren't only important for Dharma practitioners, but they are very important for people in all walks of life. For example, managers of big companies have many responsibilities and need to be able to deal with many disturbing situations; they would benefit immensely if they could differentiate and guide their employees heedfully and righteously.

No matter where we are, when we deal with colleagues, associates, family members, or friends, it would be very beneficial to make good use of the opportunity to practice mind training, starting with ourselves. If we have become knowledgeable, have experience practicing them without taking a break, and when it is appropriate, we can share these instructions with others. Some practitioners think, "I can't give these instructions to others because I'm not a Lama." There's no need to worry or have doubts like this when it comes to these instructions. If they benefit one person, it would be very good to share these instructions with that person. More and more people will benefit in due course.

Peace in the world is discussed quite a lot nowadays, but nobody can bring peace to the world. Peace begins in our own heart, so we can contribute to our immediate environment by developing peace in our mind. The more people who do so, all the more peace and harmony will be present on a wider scale. Overcoming our negative emotions is the only way to attain peace. But we need to take the three difficulties to mind and practice them. We can share them with others when the situation is appropriate and thereby we will contribute to peace and harmony in the world.

"Take up the three primary resources." There are three main resources for working at the Dharma that we should know and take to heart. The first is our Lama who instructs us. We need to follow an authentic Lama, i.e., someone who has practiced the Dharma well and has experience. Such an authentic Lama can instruct his students efficiently and correctly. Just a word from a Lama who has best experiences can be very helpful for us. There are many Lamas, and some of them don't have sufficient experiences but teach from books; they aren't the good and authentic Lamas we should follow. After all, we can read on our own and there are enough books on the market. Just like it's impossible to cure ourselves of a disease by taking medicine listed in a book, it's impossible to meditate and win experiences through book-learning. When we are sick, we need to consult a doctor, and if we want to gain experiences that are won through meditation practice, we need an authentic Lama.

The second resource for working at the Dharma is our motivation and intention to follow the instructions of our Lama. The third is having good conditions to practice the Dharma, i.e., having clothing, enough to eat, and a place to live. What is considered to be good living conditions is different in Nepal than here. Living in a small hut, having a warm meal a day and something to wear are sufficient for people living in Nepal, but not here. Westerners need a home with a bathroom.

Student: "A heater."

Translator: "We couldn't practice without having hot and cold running water in our home."

Lama Phuntsok: We need electricity and a phone. So, Westerners need to get many good conditions together, which is expensive in Germany. People have to work for their money, which is an impediment to their the Dharma practice. When it comes to Dharma, we should be moderate by living simply and be content with having just enough. Our Dharma practice will go smoothly when we have these three resources. Instead of wanting everything to be perfect, being content is very important for our Dharma practice. We should think about the three difficulties of the previous line very well for any activity we carry out.

“Don’t allow three things to weaken.” We should always be mindful and aware and never let our love and devotion for our Lama diminish or become weak. Lama in this context is our Root Lama and not one of the many Lamas or teachers we meet in our life. Our Root Lama is especially important as practitioners of the Great Vehicle, which is Mahayana, and it’s extremely important to develop and increase our love and devotion for him. We must avoid teachers and people who tell us to hurt and harm others. Since he instructs us how to mature and become better, our Root Lama is more than a teacher. The second thing we should not allow to weaken is the virtuous activity of mind training that we practice in order to mature and become better. Thirdly, we should never neglect or forget the instructions on leading a meaningful life that our Root Guru imparts. He instructs us in abandoning the ten harmful activities and in engaging in the ten virtuous and beneficial activities. The ten virtuous activities are the three virtuous physical activities, the four virtuous verbal activities, and the three virtuous mental activities that we looked at above.

In summary, the three things we should not allow to weaken are: our devotion and love for our Root Lama, our practice of mind training, and our Root Lama’s instructions.

“Make the three inseparable.” This line instructs us to never forget to avoid and abandon the ten non-virtuous activities and to always be mindful and aware of engaging in the ten virtuous activities of body, speech, and mind. No matter what we are doing and at all times, we should avoid and abandon the ten harmful activities and engage in the ten beneficial activities.

“Train without bias in all areas. Overall deep and pervasive proficiency is important.” It’s crucial to increase our wholesome activities in every area of our life and to work for the benefit of all living beings, not just for the few we like and prefer. Being impartial means not privileging anyone above another and including all nonhumans living in other realms of existence by interacting in mutual understanding and recognition of all life forms.

We must also embrace our environment and act in accord with nature’s elements (earth, water, fire, and air) by never misusing the world’s resources. We poison the water that every living being needs by dumping our harmful waste products into rivers, lakes, and oceans and by washing toxic chemicals down our drain. We pollute the air that every living being needs by using more and more chemical products. We need to protect the many insects that desire to live by not just digging up the earth. Many tiny animals die when they are exposed to sunlight, so we have to be very aware of them and not destroy their sheltered homes. We have to protect our forests, which have an immense influence on the outer layers of the Earth. Of course, we need wood, but we should use it very moderately and conscientiously, especially by using less paper that is made of wood. We throw so much paper and cardboard away. If we continue using as much paper as we do, there will soon be no more forests on Earth. If 100,000 inhabitants of a town use less paper, many trees that are homes for a great variety of animals would not be chopped down. Furthermore, we should think about the electricity that we are using. We will be thrifty with electricity if we are careful with our use of water that reaches our faucets by means of hydroelectric power plants.

Student: “We should have bottled water delivered.”

Lama Phuntsok: Then we will probably need more electricity and cause more pollution. In any case, it’s harmful to be inconsiderate.

We should think about what we really need and not waste and poison our Earth. Scientists are proving how important it is to protect our environment. As Dharma practitioners, we need to

work with our mind so that we benefit others by not harming and destroying our environment. So many problems are arising in our world because people do not think about the consequences of their behavior. It's our responsibility to protect our environment and in that way we help living beings. Mind training means working to become impartial and, instead of hurting others, protecting and helping all living beings, both humans and nonhumans. Our attitude should embrace all living beings, and we should practice whole-heartedly.

“Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment. You should not be swayed by external circumstances.” Things we reject lead to resentment, for example, the thought that somebody is an enemy. Even though somebody is out to hurt us, we should wish to benefit him. It's reasonable to wish our friends well, but mind training is specifically directed towards people we don't like and who we consider our enemies. This doesn't refer to people we might simply disagree with. We think that somebody we helped and who nevertheless wants to hurt us is an enemy. It's hard practicing mind training with somebody like that. So, it's all the more important to develop love and compassion and to have as much patience as possible.

How do we develop loving kindness and compassion towards somebody we think is our enemy? We should think, “Actually, this person wants to be friendly, but can't due to his negative emotions.” Thinking like this, we can have compassion for this person. Nowadays, although it is not their intention, more and more people are hurting others. For example, more and more teachers have scornful pupils and more and more parents have violent children. If grownups practice mind training, they could maintain their composure in difficult situations and could react heedfully and with care.

The large number of people we see in cities aren't our enemies, but they aren't our friends either. We have a better connection with people we are associated with and have an even better relationship with close friends, but this can change after a few years. Good friends can turn into enemies, and, even though we won't be able to benefit such people personally and can't stop them from wanting to hurt us by being patient with them, we should never give up our practice of mind training. It's advisable to stay away from people who are really determined to hurt us, who provoke us, and to make good use of the opportunity to develop love and compassion for them from a distance. We don't only practice mind training when the conditions are good, for example, when we are surrounded by kind friends or are enjoying a good meal at home. Whether conditions are good or bad, we should never give up our practice.

“Practice now.” Much can be said about the instruction in this line. In short, it means that we shouldn't talk too much about practice, rather, we should practice. For example, we can talk a lot about a good meal for a long time, saying, “Oh, it looks so delicious and is so healthy,” but we should eat it. Talking about mind training without practicing is like staying hungry because we just talk about the food on our plate and don't eat it. We have to practice. How? We contemplate that our life is short and know that we practice mind training for the benefit of our next life. Practicing for this life isn't that effective.

We have lived many years since we were born and don't know when we will die. Anything we have gathered and hoarded in this life won't help us in our next life, so thinking of and working for our next life is more important than anything we do for this life. While aspiring to attain freedom from samsara, we will most likely be born in samsara in our next life. Practicing mind training and Dharma are decisive for attaining freedom from samsara. So it's very important to do what our Root Lama teaches us and to practice now.

It will be useless for our Root Lama to teach us if we don't practice. We first need to listen to the teachings of our Lama, then we need to contemplate his instructions so that we understand them. Having gained certainty of our Lama's instructions, we meditate the teachings. By having meditative experiences of our Lama's instructions, we realize how much he has helped us. We won't experience the teachings if we don't practice. For example, receiving a good education is considered important. People will get a good job if they pass the exams. If somebody doesn't want to take on a job that he has learned to do, then his education was useless. What is the purpose of studying medicine and working as a businessman after having passed all medical exams? What is the purpose of listening to the teachings of a Lama, of contemplating them somewhat, but doing nothing about it by not practicing? This is what the instruction of this line means, which is "Practice now."

"Don't misinterpret." We should understand the teachings correctly and not misinterpret them by making mistakes. It's not easy practicing the teachings that we have received and contemplated well. We have to deal with problems that arise. It would be a mistake for a Dharma practitioner not to be patient, just as it would be a mistake for somebody not to be patient when planning to set up a business. The first point of not misinterpreting is not making the mistake of being impatient. The second mistake we can make is only being concerned about becoming wealthy and rich. We should concentrate our attention on mind training. The third mistake we can make is being concerned about others' prosperity or accomplishments. It's even hard for a Dharma practitioner to understand this point. We should develop loving kindness and compassion, and having false loving kindness and compassion is a fault. In that case, it would be good to hear stories, for example, about Jetsün Milarepa.

Jetsün Milarepa lived very poorly. He was sitting near a bridge while people were celebrating a feast in the village on the other side of the bridge. Three girls passed by him. One girl said, "Oh, what a poor man this is. I feel so sorry for him." The second girl said, "I wouldn't want to be reborn in my next 500 lives as impoverished as this man." The third girl said, "Don't be mistaken. He might be a very precious person." Milarepa stood up and told the first girl, "You needn't have compassion for me. I should have compassion for you." He taught her what it means to have compassion and what it means to have false compassion. She understood. Did you understand?

Student: "Yes."

Lama Phuntsok: For example, it would be a mistake to have compassion for Buddha Shakyamuni. Dharma practitioners need to learn to differentiate.

We won't go through all six mistakes that we can make because of the limited time at our disposal. In any case, we shouldn't misinterpret the teachings and shouldn't understand them wrongly. It would be good if our main practice is to use less paper. That's easy and would be very beneficial. We wouldn't have to pick up money as often and wouldn't waste paper. We would spend less money and have more time for our Dharma practice.

Student: "If we pick up less paper money, there would be less *dhanas* ('donations')."

Lama Phuntsok: Oh! If we use less paper, we will be content and have more left over.

Same student: "Okay."

Lama Phuntsok: We can always find ways to use less paper.

"Don't fluctuate." Having many projects in mind, sometimes people practice Dharma and sometimes they don't. That isn't the way of the Dharma. No matter what we are doing, we should one-pointedly focus our attention on mind training at all times. Our practice will remain shallow if we fluctuate and waver.

“Train wholeheartedly.” There are so many distractions in the world, while we practice Dharma, too. It would be wrong to continuously give in to distractions while we attempt to accomplish our goal, not even while concentrated on worldly aims.

“You should liberate yourself by examining and analyzing.” This instruction tells us that we should constantly examine and be aware of our thoughts and recognize what is occurring in our mind. Our negative disturbing emotions (attachment, greed, aversion, anger, ignorance, indifference, pride, narrow-mindedness, and so forth) influence and usually have control over us from morning until night. The source of all these negative emotions is ego-clinging. To become free of self-cherishing, we need to constantly examine our thoughts and be aware of any negative emotion that has arisen in our mind.

“Don’t make a fuss.” We shouldn’t tell somebody we have helped that we have been a great help or boast about it to others.

“Don’t be caught up in irritation.” This line is also translated as “Don’t be jealous.” We shouldn’t be irritated by others and shouldn’t disparage them in public. Not letting our feelings be disturbed is practicing mind training, which benefits us.

“Don’t be temperamental.” This means to say that we shouldn’t be swayed by our good or bad moods, which irritates others and makes them feel insecure. We should train to be balanced.

“Don’t expect thanks.” This instruction tells us not to hope to receive thanks and not to expect anybody to be grateful for any good that we have been able to do.

* * *

In summary, we have gone through the long list of suggestions for our mind training practice. Every instruction serves one purpose only, namely, to diminish our destructive mind poisons so that we become a better person. We will achieve this goal by taking these guidelines to heart and by following them. The text, *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, concludes with verses that I will speak about now.

Closing Verses

*“When the five dark ages occur, this is the way to transform them into the path of Bodhi.
This is the essence of the amrita of the oral instructions,
which are handed down from the tradition of the Sage of Suvarnavipa.”*

There are five degenerations (*rnyigs-ma-lgna*) that occur and are evident during times that are referred to as *rnyigs-düs*, ‘dark ages.’ They are the degeneration of times (i.e., of the environment), the decline of the faculties of beings, the shortening of lifespan, the increase of negative emotions, and the degeneration of beings’ views.

The degeneration of times (*düs-kyi-rnyigs-ma-rtös-ldän*) means that outer circumstances and conditions are becoming very crucial. The global warming crisis brings on many problems for both people and animals. We can know about the environmental crisis when we learn about or experience heavy rainfalls, devastating storms, raging wildfires, and destructive earthquakes. We can see that the faculties of living beings are also declining (*sems-cän-gyi-rnyigs-ma-rgyüd-dbang-po-‘dül-dka’-ba*). Approximately 95% of the world’s population only has

misdeeds in mind; it might be hard to even find 5% who really have good intentions and who act virtuously. It's evident that most people are becoming worse because they are involved in arguments and even fight. The shortening of lifespan is also on the rise (*tshe'i-rnyigs-ma-mar-'grib-thse-lo-brgya-pa*). Nowadays, people over the age of 30 are called "old," and, because most have died before they turned 60 or 70, only a few reach the age of 100. The fourth degeneration is the increase of negative emotions (*nyön-mong-pa'i-rnyigs-ma-drag-la-rgyün-rin-ba*). We can see and experience that people are becoming more and more greedy, are becoming more and more angry and scornful, ignorant, too. The fifth is the degeneration of beings's views (*lta-ba'i-rnyigs-ma*).

Nowadays, people have little to no confidence. Unable to differentiate between what is good and what is bad, they are stuck in a continual feeling of uncertainty. Since they don't know which causes give rise to which results, they don't know what is beneficial and what is harmful. We are truly living in dark ages. Conducive conditions for peace are diminishing radically, while bad conditions for peace in our world are increasing more and more. It isn't at all easy to tackle and eliminate the five degenerations.

We need *byang-chub-kyi-lam*, 'the path of *Bodhi* (awakening),' to vanquish the five degenerate conditions. This means we have to develop and cultivate loving kindness and compassion, *snying-rje*. How do we do this? By practicing mind training. We become a better person if we practice mind training and in that way we contribute to eliminating the very adverse conditions of our times and to increasing good conditions for life on Earth. We won't help anybody as long as we focus our attention on worldly concerns and argue and fight with people. The best thing we can do for peace in ourselves and peace in the world is to create good conditions in our mind. We do this by engaging in mind training. Since nobody can bring us peace, the mind training instructions that we have gone through are like precious nectar. Who gave them to us? The initiator and author was Noble Serlingpa.

The Tradition of the Sage of Suvarnavipa

Suvarnavipa is the Sanskrit name that was translated into Tibetan as *gSer-gling-pa* and means 'Master from the Golden Island.' Jowo Serlingpa's alternative name is Dharmakirti, *Chös-kyi-grags-pa*. He lived on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Buddhism had at this time spread all over Southeast Asia, so he had many followers and initiated the teachings of *blo-sbyong*, 'mind training.' They were gradually passed down to future generations. Jowo Serlingpa first transmitted the mind training instructions to Noble Atisha.

It wasn't easy for Palden Atisha (who was born in Bengal and lived from 982-1054 C.E.) to travel on a sailboat to Indonesia; it took him 18 days and 18 nights. The mind training instructions, which can be called "the ultimate instructions on mind training," were among the many teachings that Jowo Serlingpa imparted to Atisha. After having returned to India, Atisha accepted the invitation to visit Greater Tibet. He offered his services and stayed in Tibet for more than 12 years to establish a correct understanding of the teachings, whereby he emphasized the importance of the mind training instructions.

Palden Atisha had many followers and disciples. Although it's not certain whether he was a direct disciple, we can consider Geshe Chekawa a heart-disciple of Palden Atisha because he formulated and composed Atisha's teachings of mind training into *The Seven Points of Mind Training* as they are known to us. The closing words in the sacred text by Geshe Chekawa:

“Having awoken the karma of previous training and being urged on by my intense dedication, I disregarded misfortune and slander and received oral instruction on taming ego-fixation. Now, even at death, I will have no regrets.”

Having purified his negative past karma by practicing the mind training instructions and thus having benefitted immensely, Geshe Chekawa had great confidence in the ability to train the mind by following these instructions. He stated that, regardless of all difficulties, he practiced with much diligence and patience with only one thought in mind, to integrate these most precious teachings in his life. In the last line, “Now, even at death, I will have no regrets,” he tells us that he accomplished his aim.

Conclusion

We have completed the instructions on mind training and saw that our mind will mature positively if we practice them step by step. What is the benefit of training our mind and becoming better? If we are there for others and can help them, then we will experience positive results. We will experience peace if others are grateful. When only one person practices and is able to help 100 people who are grateful, then peace will have been established among them. If, through our mind training, we can help 1000 people and they are grateful, then peace will have been established among that number of individuals. If one person from among the 1000 helps another 1000 people, then the benefit will multiply and increase to 100,000 and eventually to a million. If things go smoothly, we would have peace on Earth. That’s the only way it functions. We won’t establish peace by walking the streets and shouting, “Peace. Peace. Peace.” We have to start with ourselves. But we needn’t think that we will be the only ones who will find peace through our practice, because anything we do affects our environment, our neighborhood, our associates, our friends.

There are various religious traditions in the world that followers believe in and practice. Many religious traditions teach their adherents to be of service to others, but there are also religious traditions that don’t. We can’t expect that a god or an outer source will bring peace to us and to the world. We can only become a better human being and attain peace by using our mind and by working on it. The only way to bring peace into the world is to change our ways and to become better than we are. The main concern of Buddhist practitioners is to look inwards and to become united with the teachings.

Scientific discoveries have provided much information about the outer world. We can make good use of the scientific discoveries and inventions, but often they cause problems. We can say that 75% are useless, if not harmful, and 25% have provided for better conditions and helped mankind live more comfortably. Many very negative machines and inventions have been produced that are polluting our environment and poisoning us, and many new sicknesses and diseases have arisen as a result. People working in the medical profession are bewildered when their patients are stricken with new diseases and they work hard to find a cure. Many new infectious diseases spread around the world very fast. No matter how hard they try, researchers can’t always solve the horrendous problems and, in their endeavor, more likely create worse conditions. We can say that modern-day scientific discoveries haven’t really contributed to peace in the world. It is a fact that outer phenomena can’t bring inner peace. We need to find peace within ourselves, which can never happen by way of outer things.

What do we have to do to find peace within ourselves? We have to use our intelligence and differentiate whether something is beneficial or harmful. We have to diminish and overcome our negative and harmful views and we have to develop and increase our positive and

wholesome views. Working on our mind in this way is what distinguishes Dharma practitioners from others and it is what makes Dharma practitioners special. Scientists are skeptical of spiritual endeavors, but they can't help people mature and become better. No matter which religious tradition somebody follows or which work they carry out, everybody has to work on their own mind if they want to become better individuals. Dharma practitioners or people who follow the teachings of the Buddha engage in the practices systematically; whereby pretending won't do. That's how it is.

* * *

I hope this 3-day seminar has benefitted you. Any goodness that arises from this seminar will increase if you practice and share your knowledge and experience of mind training with your friends and colleagues. You needn't discuss the entire text with people you know, but it would be good to speak about the one or other point with them.

We went through these teachings in the new little Karma Lekshey Ling Center in Germany, which was founded by Anneke. I hope this is an auspicious beginning for much peace in the world. I want to thank all of you who helped renovate the building. This center will grow and expand. More courses and seminars will be offered and more people will attend, thus more peace will come into the world. There are already quite a few Dharma centers in Germany, so there are many means to create more peace. We all hope that this little Dharma center helps bring more peace. The possibilities in this small center aren't really big, so it would be wonderful if everybody offered their help and invited their friends to visit us and to attend courses here so that Germany benefits and peace is established. Thank you very much.

Dedication Prayers

Through this goodness, may omniscience be attained
and thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara
that is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then
Lead every being without exception to that same state.
May I give rise to precious and supreme Bodhicitta,
And may Bodhicitta that has already arisen in my mind never decline,
But increase 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 its extent.
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities, may I and all living beings without exception
swiftly establish the levels and grounds of Buddhahood.

The Long Life Prayer for H.H. the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Naturally arising Dharmakaya, unchanging and ever-present,
Karmapa, you appear as the form kayas' magical illusions.
May your three secret vajras remain stable in the realms
And your infinite, spontaneous activity blaze in glory.



Photo of Lama Phuntsok presenting the teachings offered in this article at the newly established Karma Lekshey Ling Center in Weißenthurm, Germany, in October 2009; on the same photo: Hannelore Wenderoth, our translator, Karma Gyalphur, Rinpoche's attendant, and Anneke Bouwmann, who we thank very much for having organized this most wonderful event. Sacred Tibetan script courtesy of Venerable Khenpo Karma Namgyal. Root text translated by Ken McLeod, in: *The Great Path of Awakening*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1987. Photo of precious flowers taken in Pokhara, Nepal, by Ursula Bollinger and generously offered for Lama Phuntsok's article. In reliance on the fabulous simultaneous translation of Tibetan into German by Hannelore Wenderoth, these teachings were translated into English, edited, and arranged by Gaby Hollmann, responsible and apologizing for any mistakes. All persons and institutes mentioned here have copyright for their contribution. Lama Phuntsok's article is made available for personal use only by the Dharma Download Project of Khenpo Karma Namgyal at Karma Lekshey Ling Institute in Kathmandu, by Karma Chang Chub Choephel Ling in Heidelberg, and by Karma Sherab Ling in Münster; it may not be reproduced in any form nor be published. All rights reserved. Munich, 2009.