



## **Venerable Khenpo Karma Namgyal**

### **Madhyamaka**

Khenpo presented these teachings mostly in English  
at Kamalashila Institute in Langenfeld, December 2009.

Let me greet you kindly and thank you for spending the weekend with me. Before we begin this seminar, let us recite the *The Short Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer*.

### **Talk One**

The topic of this seminar is *Madhyamaka*, the Sanskrit term that was translated into Tibetan as *dU-ma*, which means ‘the middle.’ I think we should always be in the middle in every situation and at all times, otherwise it becomes a little bit difficult. For example, we become drowsy or sleepy after we ate too much and also aren’t in a good state of mind if we don’t eat enough. But, what is the middle? It refers to the view. If we don’t have the middle view and don’t take the Middle Way, we will run into problems reaching Buddhahood, which Buddhists aspire to attain.

Before discussing the Middle Way, I will briefly speak about Acharya Nagarjuna, who established the Madhyamaka. Actually, the Buddha taught the Middle Way, but there are no distinct texts on this topic as he taught it that we can follow. Nagarjuna formulated the

Buddha's teachings on the Middle Way and composed the texts of Madhyamaka that we study. I cannot speak about the entirety of these texts, but I thought I would speak about a few points that are important for us. Should I tell a long story of the life of Nagarjuna or a short story?

*Student:* "Middle-length."

*Khenpo:* Middle Way.

It is said that approximately 500 years after the Buddha, Nagarjuna (*klu-grub* in Tibetan) took birth in a rich family in India. An astrologer told the family that their boy would only live 7 days and that if they made offerings and engaged in good deeds, the boy would live 7 months. Furthermore, if they made really great offerings, the boy would live 7 years. The family did as the astrologer said and, since they didn't want to see their child die, shortly before he turned 7, they gave the boy enough gold and sent him on a journey with many servants. The party arrived at Nalanda, the most flourishing Buddhist monastic university in India of those times. Nagarjuna met a master and spoke to him about his problem. The master gave him a specific long life practice. He didn't want to die, so I think he really did the practice day and night and attained the power to live a long life. It's said that he lived for 600 years, but I don't know.

Nagarjuna became a great master of learning and practice at Nalanda University and, because he lived for 600 years, he worked a lot for Buddhism. He had great difficulties with the views, though. When we study the texts, we read that he encountered two main groups who had the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism (*rtag-pa'i-lta-ba* and *chäd-pa'i-lta-ba*). He taught not to hold any extreme view and thus established the Madhyamaka, the Middle Way.

When I study the texts, I don't have the feeling that there were really two philosophical groups at that time, rather, that the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism refer to our attitude and way of thinking. When we were young, healthy, and happy, we were carefree and had the feeling that we could do whatever came to our mind and whatever we wanted, which is one extreme attitude. In Buddhism, we speak about a past life and a future life. Most people only believe what they can see with their eyes or what they can test through experience, so it's not easy for them to believe that there are past and future lives. I think that only believing things that can be perceived or experienced is what having a nihilistic view means. I'm sure that we aren't nihilists because we are interested and are engaged. But if we have the tendency to be nihilists, then we won't be inclined to engage in virtuous activities and won't be interested in abandoning non-virtuous activities. If we are aware of *rten-'brel* ('dependent origination, interdependent causation'), then we won't hesitate to engage in virtuous activities and will abandon non-virtuous activities. Let's do a short meditation now and look at our mind to see whether we believe in past and future lives or not. If you have any questions afterwards, you are welcome to ask.

It's good to look at our mind from time to time and see how much we believe in a previous life and a continuation into a next life. If we don't believe in rebirth, we won't go the Middle Way and will probably steer our car too far to the left and land in a ditch. For example, we can read in the newspaper or see on television that many people commit suicide when they can't solve their problems. I'm not 100 percent sure, but I can say that committing suicide is due to having a nihilistic view and thinking that suffering ends after death.

*Student:* "What about Japanese Buddhists who commit hari-kiri?"

*Khenpo:* Of course, Japan is a Buddhist country, but I'm not sure if all Japanese study Buddhism and believe in it. For example, Tibet is also a Buddhist country, but times have changed and only few people in Tibet know about Buddhism. Nepal and Bhutan are also

Buddhist countries, but most people just work to make money. In the West, many people are becoming interested in Buddhism. So, one day in the future, I think that people will have to come here to learn Buddhism.

Let's do a short meditation, about 5 minutes, and then talk about rebirth. (Short meditation.)  
Any questions?

*Student:* "The force that drives us from one life to the next is the wind of karma, isn't it?"

*Khenpo:* Actually, *karma* means 'actions.' It's a Sanskrit term that was translated into Tibetan as *läs*. As long as we have karma, whether good or bad, we are bound to *samsara*, 'the cycle of conditioned existence.'

*Next question:* "Does this mean that it's because of karma that someone is born with a sickness or handicap?"

*Khenpo:* Normally, people say that a child is born with a handicap due to a deficiency in the mother's womb, but I can say that it depends on karma from previous lives. I will talk about my experience: When I was a child, I always thought that someone was setting up rules and regulations when I heard about karma, but it's not like that. Karma occurs naturally. Does anybody have a question about previous lives? No? Everybody trusts that they had past lives? That would be very good.

*Question:* "If I understood correctly, as long as we create karma, we will continue wandering around in *samsara* and so it's natural to be sick. Does this mean that it won't ever stop because we will always be creating karma? Does it mean we will never get out?"

*Khenpo:* The Middle Way teaches us how to stop creating karma. But before we stop creating karma altogether, we learn that it is first necessary to stop engaging in negative activities and thus to stop creating bad karma. If we then only create good karma, have a good body and mind, and have a good motivation, then it's said that we will find the possibility to stop creating karma altogether. Taking it a step deeper, the *Madhyamaka* presents the example of dreams to illustrate this. We all have experiences of dreams. The images that appear to us in our dreams don't really exist but are connected with our daily experiences. For example, if during the day we got angry with somebody, wanted to beat that person up and hit him in the nose until it bleeds, sometimes we dream of doing what we wanted to do during the day, but nothing really happened when we dreamed. This shows that dream-appearances are occurrences of the mind. I think everyone has had experiences like this in dreams, not boxing, but related to daytime experiences. Nothing is there in the dream. We don't know this until we wake up and then realize that the images that appeared in our dream were merely dream-appearances.

The main practices in Mahayana are the six *paramitas* (*phar-phyin-drug*, 'the six transcendent virtues'). The six *paramitas* are: generosity (*sbyin-pa*), ethical conduct or morality (*tsul-khrims*), patience (*bzöd-pa*), joyful endeavour (*brtsong-'grüs*), meditative concentration (*bsam-gtän*), and discriminating wisdom-awareness (*shes-rab*). The sixth is the principal tool that stops us from creating karma. If it is taught in the beginning, somebody might develop a nihilistic view. That's why we don't speak about it in the beginning. To have wisdom-awareness, it's necessary to practice the methods of the first five *paramitas*. If we practice the first two, generosity and morality, then our negative activities will diminish. It's said that if we are very generous, we will be wealthy in the future, and if we have ethical conduct, we will always be born in a high realm of existence. If we engage in these two *paramitas*, we will be able to accomplish meditative concentration through calm-abiding practice and then it will be much easier to attain wisdom-awareness. If we don't have the good background of having practiced the first *paramitas* and only have negative karma, it will be impossible to develop

and have wisdom-awareness. That's why the Buddha taught the paramitas in that order, and the first is the basic transcendent virtue.

*Next question:* "If we knew our former lives, we could learn from our mistakes. Why do we forget our past lives? How did the Buddha come to remember?"

*Khenpo:* I think it depends on our daily activities. For example, sometimes I have very nice ideas of what I want to teach while I'm teaching, but when the translator is finished, my ideas are finished, too. Then I meditate with the group. We already had one meditation session, so we can't have another one, otherwise you'll think that I forgot what I wanted to say. In any case, we need a strong background of practice to remember our past lives. I have met and heard about 80 and 90-year-old Dharma practitioners who clearly remember everything they did in their present lives, but I think it's usual that people become like children and lose their memory when they are old. We haven't worked with our mind very much but do what we think and don't follow the instructions of persons who have experience. I think that's the problem.

In some aspiration prayers, we formulate the wish to remember our previous life. If we remember, we couldn't possibly become nihilists. I have a friend in Neumünster who has health problems. He does Vajrayana practice everyday and told me, "I could never become a nihilist." He said that he remembered the pain he felt when he was in his mother's womb, which isn't a previous life but near to it. As long as our mind isn't clear enough to remember our childhood, I don't think that it will be easy to remember our previous life. In the aspiration prayer, we make the wish to remember our present life in our next life and to be interested in practicing. So, maybe we can make this kind of aspiration when we have the good chance. It will really help. I can say that not only practitioners remember their past life. We hear about people who aren't Dharma practitioners speak about their previous life, in the West, too. I have a friend who isn't a practitioner but is a teacher. When he was about 5 years old, he always told his parents, "I want to go home." He described his home in his past life and told his parents how to get there. They took him there and found everything just like he had described, so now he has two properties.

*Next question:* "Did I understand correctly that nihilism means believing that nothing exists because everything is impermanent? Is it correct that reincarnation means that there is something that is permanent and continues?"

*Khenpo:* We will discuss this later and should speak about nihilism first. No matter how nihilism is described in the texts, we think that something is there and cannot really become free of this thought. I don't think it's that bad. We have been clinging to a self since time that is without a beginning, which is a bad habit that all beings living in samsara have. Being an alcoholic or smoking is nothing in comparison. Cigarettes have probably been on the market for 100 or 200 years, but it's difficult to overcome the habit. When we think of our karma, we think there is a creator, which isn't very good. We should go the Middle Way. A great master said that believing in eternalism isn't good, but being a nihilist is worse. Those persons who believe that something is there that truly exists try to do something good in life, whereas a nihilist endangers himself as well as others. In brief, a nihilist denies everything and does what he likes, whereas an eternalist believes that a creator really exists and creates karma. Both views aren't very good. If we think like that, we should try to change by practicing, reading about it, receiving teachings, or observing our daily experiences. The Middle Way goes between nihilism and eternalism, so, to go the Middle Way, we should know about nihilism and eternalism.

## Talk Two

Do you have any questions about nihilism? If not, I will speak about having an eternalistic view, *rtag-pa'i-lta-ba*. It is based on clinging to a self, *bdag-'dzin*. The thought that a permanent self truly exists is deeply rooted in our mind and is merely an imputation, *kun-rtag*. Since we have become deeply accustomed to this thought, it's very hard to give up this belief that goes back to ancient times. People in India strongly believe that a self is created by someone and that a truly existing creator determines whether people experience happiness or problems and pain.

*Question:* “Is there a difference between ego and what we call ‘soul,’ which we consider the permanent aspect of a person? I think that the soul passes from one life to the next, can develop, and dissolve into nirvana, while ego is connected with the body and doesn't pass into another life.”

*Khenpo:* In Buddhism, it's taught that what we call “self” is a concept, a thought, *rnam-rtog*. It doesn't pass from one life to the next because it isn't a self-existing entity.

*Same student:* “So which part of us goes from one life to the next? How can there be reincarnation if there is no self?”

*Khenpo:* A permanent self doesn't truly exist, but we cling to the assumption of a truly existing self because of our habitual tendencies, *bag-chags*, which are karmic imprints that we have accumulated for countless lifetimes and that are deeply anchored in our mind. Many great masters have written expositions and explained in great detail that our deeply ingrained habitual imprints or karmic traces that are stored in our ground consciousness cause us to think that a permanent self truly exists. For example, in former times there were magicians and I think they had a special mantra with which they cast a spell over their audience. Do some of you know about magic? The texts state that magicians had a stone or another object and through the power of a mantra that they spoke over that object, they caused their audience to see an elephant, people, or something very nice. When their power over the object stopped, the audience couldn't see the magical illusion anymore. Nowadays, we can compare magic shows with a movie on television. When all conditions are present, e.g., a television set, electricity, and so forth, a movie appears on the screen. If anything is disconnected, the show will not appear on television. In Buddhism, we say that if we know how to disconnect from creating karma, it won't appear.

Even nowadays people believe that the world and living beings are created by somebody, but if we examine carefully, I'm sure we will find that the world wasn't created by somebody. For example, these days the global warming crisis is crucial and everybody is worried. I'm sure it wasn't created by somebody, rather, by the negative emotions that people have and by their subsequent actions. In Buddhism, we believe that all sentient beings created the world and that it appears to them by virtue of their actions. I remember having watched many Indian movies when I was staying in India for a few years. Most movies showed that people suffered greatly and that they had many problems. I remember one movie. The movie star went into the temple and complained to the god that he believed in, asking, “Why did you make me have one leg only? Why didn't you make me have two legs?” His big problem was that his girlfriend had left him, so he complained to the god he believed in, crying, “Why do you make me suffer like this?” Many people believe that someone is responsible for their life, but Buddhists don't think like this.

*Question:* “If there are three people who adopt the Buddhist view and give up the view of a creator god and there are seven people who continue believing in a creator, wouldn't the world be dominated by those seven people?”

*Khenpo:* I don't understand what you want to ask.

*Same student:* "Would samsara continue as long as people believe in a creator god?"

*Khenpo:* Would you please formulate your question again?

*Same student:* "Will the three persons out of ten who gave up their view of eternalism be able to attain liberation while the others remain in samsara? Will samsara continue?"

*Khenpo:* It would be very good if only seven people are left in the end. Let me give the example of the piece of paper on the table. Only people who know that a piece of paper is a piece of paper can apperceive it as a piece of paper. Those people who never saw a piece of paper before and have no impression of it in their mind won't see it in that way; they will see it as something else. I'm sure if an ant or a mouse stands on that piece of paper, they will see it differently; they might think it is a big ground that ends at the edges. The way we apperceive things depends on our connection with those things. If the three people you mentioned have the connection to see samsara the way it is, I think they can see it.

There's a lady in Hamburg who is studying Buddhism. She told me that it's really like that. She said that when she has a new idea of something, then she sees it. For example, before she bought a new car, she never noticed that model anywhere in the city. After she bought it, she noticed that many people were driving the same car. We don't see things as long as we haven't created the concept to see it, rather, we just see things come and go. But we have many concepts, which is the reason we aren't careful. When we realize that we experience what we have created in our mind, then we realize that what we see is connected with our mind. That's the reason we do many visualizations in Vajrayana. If we engage in visualization practice in a good way, we have the good chance to realize what we visualize.

Thoughts of "good" and "bad" depend on our mind. For example, pork is considered the best meat in Bhutan and is very expensive. In Nepal, goat's meat is considered the best meat. If somebody from Bhutan has goat's meat, they will be disturbed. But meat is meat. We create the thought of what is good and bad. Usually we feel disturbed when we see somebody we think is our enemy and aren't happy when we remember that they spoke harshly to us, whereas we are happy when we see nice family members and people we think are our friends. The same person who makes us sad and unhappy is probably seen as a friend by other people, and the same person we think is a friend might be seen as an enemy by other people. So, what is termed "enemy" and "friend" doesn't truly exist and isn't an ultimate reality. If somebody is a friend ultimately, everyone would see him or her in that way. We all see the Buddha as a great teacher, but during his times the non-Buddhists didn't like him. I can say that the main point is to change our mind and then there will be less problems.

*Question:* "So, the appearance of the world depends on concepts. Is letting go of concepts the way to nirvana or liberation?"

*Khenpo:* You are very high, but I don't think that nirvana simply means not having concepts. For example, we don't have thoughts when we knock our head against the door or when the doctor gives us an injection. I like electronic apparatus and go to Media Markt or Saturn whenever I can. I think that all the nice things I see there are merely a collection of atoms, but I ignore what I know and instead try to collect money to buy many of those things. We have really good experiences. For instance, we know that a sack filled with gold that is shown in a movie is an illusion, isn't real, and doesn't truly exist. I'm 100 percent sure that we won't jump into the screen to snatch it. In that way, a good practitioner won't feel attached to the new Apple laptop that he sees in a shop, but he will see it is an illusion.

I heard about a practitioner who is pretty old and is too lazy to go to the bathroom. He owns one pot and uses it for his meals, too. He has no concepts of good and bad and therefore isn't

attached to them. There's nothing to accept or reject for persons who aren't attached to their thoughts, but they let things come and go. Similarly, we need to practice *rnam-rtog-med-pa*, 'non-conceptuality.' We are free of thoughts when we are in the dream-free state of deep sleep, but we become involved with discursive thoughts again when we wake up.

*Same student (summarized):* "A master of Shamanism told me that there is a positive and negative aspect to all things and emotions. Is this opinion connected with the Middle Way? A master of arts told me that we can only see what we know. Is this what you are saying?"

*Khenpo:* It's not exactly the Middle Way, but it can lead there.

*Next question:* "When all concepts are said to be merely concepts and everything depends on the mind, how do we know where to go, what not to do, and what to do?"

*Khenpo:* Since all experiences depend on our mind, therefore the Mahamudra practice is to look at our mind. When we think about it, we think that our mind is something that is there. If we think like that, we can search for our mind, but I don't think that we will find it. We can't say that our mind isn't there either because we have many thoughts and talk, which depend on the mind. But we can't point to our mind because it isn't located anywhere. That's why the practice is not trying to stop our thoughts and not trying to suppress them, but just letting them go, without following after them, and thus not becoming involved in lots of discursiveness. I can say that it's too early for beginners to practice in this way.

The main thing in Buddhist practice is to know that bad karma leads to bad existences in samsara, in which case we won't be at peace. As long as we aren't at peace with ourselves and the world we live in, we won't be able to see the nature of samsara. That's why it's necessary to stop creating bad karma. We create bad karma due to our three main mind poisons, which are anger, attachment, and ignorance (*zhe-sdang*, *död-chags*, and *gti-mug*). Whenever we are attached and angry, ignorance is present; it's never separated from the other mind poisons. Until we attain enlightenment, the main focus of our practice is to pacify and overcome our three main mind poisons. We won't create any bad karma when we have relinquished them and we will have good possibilities when we have good karma. That's why we do calm-abiding meditation and why the Mahayana teachings stress the practices of loving kindness and compassion. I don't think that we can become angry if we are experts at these practices. Our loving kindness should be like the loving kindness that a mother has for her little child; she can never become angry with her little child, no matter what it does. Mahayana disciples do many practices to develop loving kindness and compassion. If someone becomes very proficient, they can do unto others as a mother does for her little child. But, it's not easy. When I go to the supermarket, I see lots of very good chocolate. But it's no problem for me because I don't like sweets. I wouldn't mind and wouldn't get angry if somebody steals the very expensive chocolate from my bag that somebody gave me.

We have lots of attachment and therefore we meditate the impurities of our body. It will really help if we see the ugly aspects of our body and then we won't be attached. For example, I'm not informed about the sewage system in Germany, but in Nepal we have septic tanks that need to be emptied regularly. It's not easy during that time. Even though some insects might enjoy it, everybody knows that the contents of those tanks are impure and will have no attachment for it. For example, Bhutanese crave pork. When I was in South India for a while, I noticed that a riksha driver didn't care about the money he could have earned but got out and left a passenger who had pork in his shopping bag sitting in his risksha. So, if ever we run into problems of being overly attached, it would help meditating our body's impurities. I'm trying to meditate ugliness of laptops and don't have as much attachment as I had a few years ago.

We have big problems with thoughts about good and bad and should try to become free and relaxed. Of course, we should respect the tradition of the societies we live in.

Sometimes meat is offered in specific Vajrayana practices, which can be misinterpreted. It would be wrong offering meat in a ritual practice to be able to eat it afterwards. In the past, Indian people offered bad meat that nobody wanted in their ritual practices. They did this to overcome their concepts of good and bad. Or practitioners living in ancient India offered the meat of a cow that had died a natural death and that they wouldn't eat anyway because they believed that it was a reincarnation of the mother goddess. In the meantime, Indian businessmen export beef. Koreans think that the meat of a dog is a delicatessen. A friend of mine worked in Korea and his boss invited him to a restaurant. After they had dined, he remarked, "The meat was delicious. What kind of meat was it?" He was shocked when his boss told him what he had eaten. If he had no concepts, he wouldn't have become disturbed. His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa has initiated that no meat be offered in Vajrayana practices anymore and that fruits should be offered instead.

I don't think it's a good way to think that everything is merely a concept; it doesn't change them. It's better to change our way of thinking slowly. For example, we can't turn around on the freeway when we missed the exit we wanted to take. In that case, we have to take another exit. Likewise, we have already created many concepts, can't stop them all at once, but just let them come and go. I can say that concepts cause difficulties, but we have to change them slowly. Once I saw a movie that women who have small feet are considered beautiful in China, so they wrap the feet of little girls up tightly so that they won't grow; it's very painful. It's still thought to be good to be fat in Tibet and Bhutan, so people eat very much and never exercise. I thought that way when I was young and always looked forward to being fat. I ate a lot and slept a lot, but nothing happened. Our family is sad when we visit them and they see that we aren't fat. They think we aren't getting enough to eat. Now I think we also have to do something for our body. I have a friend in Hamburg who has lots of concepts about good and bad, especially in relation to food. He nauseates after he ate something he thinks isn't good. Does this happen to you? No? Good. It happens to me sometimes. Let me tell a story.

There was a very rich man in Tibet who had a personal doctor. The rich man was sick for many months, but nothing his doctor prescribed helped. He was a very heavy-built man and really shouted at the doctor for not curing him. The doctor got scared. He hadn't been able to bathe during the cold winter months in Tibet. When he was frightened because his patient was shouting at him, his body became very warm and he started sweating. He rubbed his skin and in that way rolled the dirt on his body into the form of a black pill. He told the rich man, "Okay, today I will give you better medicine than I have ever given to anyone. Today you are really upset, so I will give you this special pill." The rich man was really happy, ate the dirt that looked like a pill that the doctor had given him, and became well. This story illustrates that our concepts of good and bad, of clean and dirty, of happiness, peace, and suffering, and so forth aren't ultimate. If we realize this, I don't think that what we consider good, bad, etc. will cause us to suffer.

I have travelled to the West many times and friends took me for walks in cemeteries, which are more beautiful than many parks. Is anybody afraid of cemeteries? No? People here take a flower, place it on the grave of a loved one, and cry a little bit. People in the East are even afraid of going to a cemetery during the day. They think they will see ghosts and actually see them because they have those concepts. Although a cemetery is a cemetery, I don't think that anybody is courageous enough to go to a cemetery at night. Being scared really shows that we create our experiences with our concepts.

We must find out which concepts are greatest in our mind and that aren't necessary. We must search and not try to stop them all at once, but we should try to reduce them. If you have any questions, please ask.

*Question:* “Isn't attachment a matter of identifying with our body, mind, and feelings? Is there a method to reduce identifying with our body, thoughts, and feelings?”

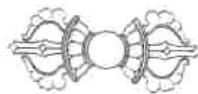
*Khenpo:* It depends. It depends on dependent arising. Normally, we create attachment and karma in dependence on three factors. When we perceive an appearance, we give rise to an emotion and focus our attention on it.

Let's do a short meditation together and search in our mind for the most unnecessary concept that we have and that impedes us from living in peace and harmony.

### Talk Three

During the Kagyü Mönlam Chenmo last year, His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa taught us an easy meditation that I want to share with you. It has to do with our body, so it's very helpful. In our head, we imagine a white cloud, which represents ignorance. From our neck to above our heart we imagine red flames, which represent anger. From our heart reaching down to the lower part of our body we imagine blue water, like a big lake, which represents attachment. We then imagine Buddha Shakyamuni, our Root Guru, or Guru Rinpoche before us and imagine that white light radiates from his forehead and touches our forehead, cleansing us of the clouds of our ignorance; and so we have perfect wisdom. Red light radiates from his throat and touches our throat, extinguishing the flames of our aggravation and anger; and so we have a peaceful mind. Blue light radiates from his heart and touches our navel, drying up all the water of our attachment; and so we are free of any kind of attachment.

Some people press their brain to remember something that they forgot. So the white cloud fits well to our brain and is easily blown away by doing this meditation. Our heart is full of blood and when we are angry, it's easy to remember that we should extinguish the flames of our anger by doing this meditation. The third is a practice that makes it easy to visualize drying up the water of our attachment. We have the three main mind poisons, so this practice is easy to remember and do. Let's do this meditation for a short while together.



I'm discussing nihilism and eternalism. Having an eternalistic view means clinging to objects as though they were permanent and real. The discourses on Madhyamaka state that both nihilism and eternalism need to be abandoned, so the instructions on dependent origination are presented for this purpose.

Acharya Nagarjuna composed the root text on Madhayamaka that consists of 24 chapters. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche taught for many years in the West. I'm sure he knows that people in the West are very busy, have no time, and are smart, so he wrote a commentary on Nagarjuna's root text. The first verse of the first chapter, which is entitled, “Examination of the Causal Condition,” is:

*“When you examine the causes and conditions  
of desirous and angry thoughts,*

*you find the unborn, beyond fabrication.  
So know that thoughts have no inherent nature.”*

I think it's very important to check our anger and attachment. It's written in the text that they don't really exist and we won't find them if we search for them. But if we don't take care, we will get high blood pressure. Let's look at anger first.

Sometimes I see two small dogs barking at each other, which isn't a problem in the West because they are held on a leash by their owners. There are so many stray dogs in India and Nepal and I don't know why they bark so much and hurt each other. There's no benefit; both are harmed when they bite each other. In the same way, sometimes we get angry and any actions we carry out in anger aren't beneficial. Since it is adventitious, I don't think that we will find our anger if we look for it when we are angry. I don't think that we will have the time to meditate when we are angry, but we can after we aren't angry anymore. I think we need to control our anger just like Western owners control their dogs by keeping them on a leash when they are out for a walk.

Our anger depends on something else. Anger as well as attachment don't reside in any location and no surgeon will find them if they dissect our body. Our anger isn't like a tumor that grows. Since we haven't tamed our mind, it manifests when specific conditions prevail. For example, a colourful rainbow only appears when there is sunshine and water drops in the sky; if one factor is missing, a rainbow won't appear. Like that, we have no control over our mind and so our anger arises when unpleasant conditions prevail. If we become involved with our anger, then, just like the dogs that hurt each other for no reason, we do senseless things. Therefore, we should look at our anger, see how it is, and examine where it is located. We will find that it doesn't truly exist but is just dependent.

There are two methods to relinquish anger. In Mahayana, we practice loving kindness and compassion and, although it helps us not to become angry, it doesn't suffice to remove anger by the root. If we see the people we are associated with just like we see our family and friends, we won't become angry with them. Nevertheless, we still have an angry mind. We can only overcome our anger fully by looking at the essence of anger and realizing that it has no true existence. When we realize that anger doesn't really exist, that its essence is emptiness, we will have uprooted it fully and then we won't cause anymore harm. But it's necessary to develop and practice loving kindness and compassion to get to that stage.

If we hear a terrifying sound while in an abandoned old house in the middle of the night, take a bright torch, and find nothing after we searched, we won't be frightened anymore. Just thinking that nothing is there when we are terrified won't uproot our fear. Let me tell a true story. There was no light in the village where Venerable Chöje Lama Phuntsok lived when he was young. He was on his way to another village after dark, saw a man standing on the road, and became very scared. He took another route, but when he returned to his village during the daylight the next day, he saw that the image that had frightened him was only an old tree. He wasn't scared anymore because he realized there was no reason to be afraid as he had been. In that way, if we realize the essence of anger, we will not suffer. Until then, we should exert effort to practice dealing with our angry mind. It's not possible to eliminate our anger fully, but realizing that we are angry when we are angry helps us not to fully give in to our anger and stops us from following after it.

In Buddhism, we separate samsara into three worlds or categories of being. They are: *'dod-pa'i-khams* ('the realm of desire'), *gzugs-khams* ('the form realm'), and *gzugs-med-kyi-khams*

(‘the formless realm’). Human beings are in the realm of desire, i.e., the desirous realm of attachment, so it’s natural that we have attachment. The Buddha taught that we should be content and satisfied with what we have. I think it’s a good way to wisely deal with our attachment. I don’t think this means to say that we should be satisfied with just eating and sleeping, rather, that we shouldn’t always think of getting what we don’t have and exhausting ourselves in our ambitious attempts to keep what we have and to get what we think we need to have. We can check whether we are content or not. For example, I bought an expensive new handy last year and have to lock the door to my room very carefully every time I leave so that nobody steals it. People who have lots of possessions need to pay lots of attention to protect their belongings. I don’t think we will have problems like that if we have less attachment and if we are content. I think we need to realize that what we perceive with our senses isn’t different than appearances in dreams and then we’ll have less problems. A friend told me that he had bought a new car and that he and his wife were invited to a party. Because he couldn’t find a guarded parking lot and the children in Nepal always play around with new cars, he sent his wife to the party while he stayed in the car until the party was over, keeping watch over his car. I think we have too much attachment to things and turn ourselves into servants of our possessions. A main problem that human beings have is being attached to things, never getting enough, and never being satisfied.

When we speak of cause and fruition in Buddhism, we learn that just using all our energy to acquire possessions won’t go well. Having a good background of being generous, everything will go smoothly when we work at achieving an aim. It’s important to practice generosity, which doesn’t mean that we have to give everything away, but we can help animals and the needy with little things. If we aren’t content and generous, we won’t ever have enough but will always need more and more.

In Tibetan, we say *dbang-gi-‘död-chags*, ‘the power of attachment.’ In former times, people were slaves of kings and couldn’t do anything but work for the king of their region. It’s like that: If we give attachment and anger full power, then we will always be enslaved by them. It’s nearly like my relationship with my handy. We need some things, but we shouldn’t be like the friend who didn’t go to the party but stayed in his new car to protect it. We need the Middle Way – not too much and not too little.

There are two kinds of attachment, inner attachment (like a girlfriend and boyfriend have for each other) and attachment to possessions. As is the case for anger, the best way to uproot our attachment is by realizing its essence. I don’t think we will be attached if we have become proficient at meditating on the impurities of our body. It’s written in texts that when great practitioners had meditated in this way and went into town, they only saw skeletons instead of people walking around. I don’t think we will have inner attachment if we see skeletons.

It’s important not to succumb to unnecessary anxiety and suffering. There are a great number of ways to suffer and they all arise from being deluded about appearances that are empty of reality. When we realize the true nature of appearances and experiences, we won’t be subject to unnecessary suffering. As long as we don’t realize the true nature of things, we will remain victims of our misconceptions about the true nature of things. It’s important to know the methods to cut through our misconceptions. Transitory happiness and suffering aren’t our inherent nature; they are due to our ego-fixation. Being free of ego-fixation, we wouldn’t hurt but would be kind to each other and thus would be practicing the path to Buddhahood.

In Buddhism, it is taught that every living being has the Buddha nature, which is obscured by our negative emotions. I don’t think we will suffer a lot when they have been dispelled. We

need to understand and realize that phenomena don't inherently exist and aren't non-existent, but naturally appear when all causes and conditions are present. This applies to happiness and suffering, too. They arise in dependence on causes and conditions and are mere appearances of causes and conditions, which is how *karma* ('cause and effect') functions. When we have realized interdependent causation of all things, *rten-'brel*, then we will have come closer to realizing the essence. Do you have any questions?

*Question (summarized):* "Why are dependent origination and emptiness so important?"

*Khenpo:* Because emptiness is the nature of all things that arise in dependence on other things. Whether we believe in Buddhism or not, everything arises in dependence. Actually, a friend of mine had a very good life, a good job, a nice car with not a single loose bolt, a healthy body, and no mental anguish for many years, but now he has problems. He is always saying, "Why are all bad things happening to me now?" I can say that nobody is causing him problems. When we have a good life, we think it's natural and happens automatically, but this isn't so. It depends on our background. If happiness were ultimate, then everyone would have a smooth life. It's the same as having enough money. If we just enjoy life and don't collect more, eventually we will run out. So, I think it's important to use our money to have a good life and to invest some of it for the future.

When many negative things happen at the same time (e.g., when we become sick, lose the key to the car, signed a deceptive document, etc.), our good karma is exhausted. Somebody who believes in a god might go to the statue and complain, "Why are you treating me like this?" So, I think it's necessary to create good karma. No matter what we believe, karma occurs naturally. Two things can happen when things go wrong. Nihilists commit suicide because they want to put an end to their problems, but there is no end. Eternalists complain. We try to do better. The Buddha said, "I am my own enemy – I am my own friend." If we try to do good, we will be in the company of our good friend and can deal with any situation. If we don't take care, we will be in the company of our enemy and can't deal with situations.

I get angry, too. Sometimes I can control my anger and often I can't. When I realize that I'm angry, I contemplate that many people experience much suffering as a result and I make the aspiration, "May all living beings be free of anger." Making an aspiration prayer like this when we notice that we are about to become angry or have attachment is very helpful. But it's very difficult to realize that we have attachment because we are in the realm of desire.

*Next question:* "It's good to hear that even somebody like you becomes angry from time to time. Does somebody who is totally free of negative emotions and is enlightened see upcoming anger or attachment like bubbles of water?"

*Khenpo:* No. Since they have realized the nature of the mind, negative emotions never arise to an enlightened being. The nature of our mind is not negative but replete with qualities. We haven't realized the nature of our mind because it is obscured by our negative emotions. When we have dispelled our obscurations, they will never arise again. Instead of being emotional, an enlightened being has realized the essence of all phenomena. Let me exemplify.

I cared about marbles very much when I was a child and was very happy when I had about 10 or 20. My family scolded me if I bought marbles instead of chocolate with the money they gave me. They said that marbles are nonsense. I didn't think so then, but now I think that they are because I know that they are only for entertainment. Now I wouldn't be angry if somebody stole marbles from me or I wouldn't be happy if somebody gave me marbles. Things come and go. In that way, when we realize the essence of everything, we won't be angry or attached to anything. I had an uncle who was my age and who became furious when

I shot the marbles around. When I look back, though, I had lots of attachment to my marbles and was mad when he broke them. Right now I'm thinking that I need to tame my attachment to my laptop just like I relinquished my attachment to my marbles. This experience shows that we fabricate the thought that things are very important, but they aren't.

*Next question:* "I understand what you mean about not being attached, but how can I not be attached to my sons? Is it only a concept to think that I am a mother and my sons exist?"

*Khenpo:* Although the words "mother" and "son" are concepts, I don't think that it's possible to be a mother and son unless there's a karmic connection. I don't think it's good not to be attached at all, just like it's not good to have too much attachment. We suffer when we have too much attachment. The best a mother can do is to show her child a good way.

*Next question:* "I have a similar question. I have attachment for my son, for my job, for daily responsibilities. I feel fear of life when I contemplate that my daily routine ends."

*Khenpo:* Let me give the example of dreams. Sometimes we suffer when we dream and we can only become free of our suffering when we wake up. Then we are relieved that we only dreamed. Since we are in samsara, we have to engage in daily activities, but we can use our work as a practice. For example, when we are cleaning, we can think that we are purifying our bad karma and are making a good karmic connection. There is the story of Shri Tilopa pounding sesame seeds to win oil. I don't know which meditation method he used, but it was his practice. We can think that we are eating when we have a meal so that our body is healthy and strong for our practice to achieve Buddhahood. We can think, "If I don't eat and have a job, my body won't be well. If my body isn't well, my practice won't be good. If my practice isn't good, I won't achieve Buddhahood. That's why I eat, have a job, and work." I think practicing this method is the best way.

## **Talk Four**

There are the practices of Hinayana and Mahayana, and within the Mahayana, there are the practices of Sutrayana and Vajrayana. There are three aspects of practice in every Mahayana practice text. They are: the preparation, the main practice, and the dedication. If we engage in these three aspects of the path, we will not have wasted our time and the merit we accumulate will not be lost until we achieve Buddhahood.

The first aspect of the path is giving rise to *Bodhicitta*, 'the mind of awakening.' There are two aspects of Bodhicitta, ultimate and relative. At this time, we just think that we want to do something to achieve Buddhahood for ourself and others. I don't think that it's possible for us to presently help others, but it will be possible if we give rise to Bodhicitta again and again. Aspiring to attain Buddhahood resembles making plans to travel somewhere, e.g., to Hamburg or Berlin. Buddhahood is our goal and it means being free of suffering, and every sentient being wants to be free of suffering and have happiness. If we have the strong feeling of Bodhicitta and focus our attention on achieving Buddhahood, then I think we will achieve our aim. All enlightened beings who achieved Buddhahood commenced their journey by giving rise to Bodhicitta and are now able to engage in activities that truly help others. In everyday life, we need hobbies, and everybody has different hobbies. Everyone focuses their attention on their hobbies. In Buddhism, the right hobby to have is to achieve Buddhahood and so we direct all our activities towards achieving this goal.

The second aspect of the path is the main practice. If we don't concentrate our attention on the main practice, we will lose our wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all living beings. It doesn't matter how long or short our main practice is, because doing sitting meditation,

listening to the teachings, contemplating them, helping others learn the teachings, or circumambulating sacred sites are creating good karma. It's important not to have negative emotions while engaging in the main practice and not to be distracted by worldly concerns while repeating and counting mantras on our mala. Actually, it's better than nothing, but I can say that it isn't proper. There's much recitation, chanting, and playing musical instruments in Vajrayana practice, which is all calm-abiding meditation and concentration is the main practice. Even repeating a mantra once can be a main practice. The third aspect of the path is dedicating the merit. This practice can be compared to depositing our savings in the bank, not in a corrupt bank, though. Dedicating our merit can never be corrupt; it's a safe bank. We conclude every practice by praying that any good we have been able to do is dedicated to the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering.

All three aspects of the path are included and are very important for our daily practice, no matter which practice we do. It isn't necessary to recite all the words, but it's important to think them sincerely. Sometimes we recite a text but don't get the meaning, so having the meaning in mind is very important.

Looking at the verse of the second chapter of the root text by Acharya Nagarjuna, which is entitled "Examining Coming and Going," it is:

*"The mind thinks a variety of good and bad thoughts,  
but since their coming and going are imperceptible,  
know that thoughts' true nature is free from coming and going and  
that thoughts are dependently arisen mere appearances."*

We talked a little bit about thoughts concerning good and bad. Actually, good and bad, coming and going, big and small, long and short, fat and thin are examples of discursive concepts. We think that we need what we think is good and think that we don't need what we think is bad. We think that what we think is good really exists and can make us happy and what we think is bad really exists and can make us sad. Therefore our activities are based on these thoughts. Good is only good in relation to something that is bad, i.e., there can be no good without bad. These terms are difficult to explain because we have so many concepts of "good" and "bad." Let me exemplify by asking whether the right stick in my hand is longer or shorter than the other one. Do you know?

*Student:* "It's relative."

*Other student:* "Medium."

*Khenpo* (pulling the other stick up from his fist): Actually, our designations depend on other things. When on its own, nothing is short or long.

*Other student (summarized):* "Scientifically, everything is measured according to a scale, like the temperature."

*Khenpo:* Scientists fixed the measuring rods and scales according to some human beings and not according to all living beings, e.g., most human beings feel that 0 degrees Celsius is cold. There are many yaks in the Himalayan regions; they need cold temperatures and get sick if they are brought to the warm plains where cows feel comfortable. Tall and short people are seen differently in the East than in the West. Standing alone, nobody is tall or short. If something isn't set in relation to something else, it isn't long or short, so the designations "long" and "short" are just concepts that aren't established in their own right and therefore don't truly exist. Because we have become experienced thinking in a specific way for quite a long time, most of us have very strong concepts of what we think is good and bad. Just like the concept "short" depends on "long," the concept "tall" depends on the concept "short" and

good and bad depend on each other. Therefore nothing that we perceive with our sense faculties really exists the way we think. Can you accept this?

*Student:* “Is it like the relation between a table and the wood that it is made of, which comes from a tree in the forest?”

*Khenpo:* I didn’t really get the question, but there is a relationship between the table and the wood it is made of. We recognize that the table is a table, but we realize that a table isn’t a table as such when we examine. The same applies to what we refer to as “a self,” which only exists the way we think in relation to others. For example, we define our self in relation to our body, which depends on many things. This doesn’t mean to say that a self doesn’t exist; it just doesn’t exist the way we think. There’s a difference between emptiness and being empty, like a void. I can say that it’s a good result to realize that what we consider tall depends on what we consider short, that good depends on bad, and so forth.

*Next question:* “In Buddhism, are there singular entities that don’t depend on other things and are non-dual?”

*Khenpo:* No. For example, even though we can see our face in a mirror, it’s merely a reflection. The image appears in the mirror but is empty of reality. Why can the image appear? Because all necessary causes and conditions prevail; if any factor were missing, the image couldn’t appear in the mirror. This is so for all objects that we can perceive (sights, sounds, scents, tastes, tangible objects). Like the image in the mirror, no object that can be perceived has inherent existence, but everything appears in dependence on the presence of all the necessary causes and conditions that enable the object to appear. We engage in activities and accumulate karma by grasping at the images we perceive and apperceive. We won’t accumulate karma when we stop grasping and clinging to the images that appear in our mind. Is the nature of the image reflected in the mirror identical with the nature of the image that is reflected or different?

*Student:* “Different.”

*Other student:* “Is this material for students who have been studying for 15 years?”

*Khenpo:* It might sound high, but the meaning is there.

*Same student:* “What exactly is emptiness? How is it defined?”

*Khenpo:* The image of our face in the mirror isn’t a true existent and therefore it is empty of inherent existence. Since its nature isn’t established at any time, it is emptiness. Let me give another example for clinging to things as though they truly exist.

When they look into a mirror, cats and dogs scratch at the image they see; dogs even bark at it. I’m sure they see something and cling to what they see as a real existent. But we are humans and even 15-year-olds know that a reflection in a mirror is just an appearance that is present in dependence on many things. We certainly won’t punch at the image we see in the mirror because we know it isn’t real. Yet, because we cling to outer appearances as real, we have many difficulties. If we learn and realize that things we perceive aren’t different than reflections in a mirror, we won’t be like a dog that barks at its image in a mirror.

There’s a story that happened in Bhutan of a shepherd who heeded yaks. The shepherds always live in the forest with the yaks and don’t live in houses. Once a shepherd came into town to sell meat. At that time, a movie was being shown on a large screen in the army camp near my village. The shepherd came to the movie and saw that a man was treating a woman badly. He jumped from his seat and shouted, “Please, don’t do that.” Because they need to cut their way through the woods, shepherds always carry a knife. He pulled out his knife, ran to the screen, and cut the screen to protect the woman who was being molested. In his mind, he clung to the images in the movie as real. Shepherds are really honest people. They never lie

but always speak the truth, so they can be very protective when they see something happening. Let me tell another story. A shepherd went to a shop and ordered a beer. The shop owner poured the beer from the bottle real fast, so there was lots of foam that filled three whole cups. The next time the shepherd went to a shop and ordered beer, the shop owner poured the beer from the bottle carefully and there were only two cups. The shepherd got very angry and told the shop owner, "You are cheating me."

*Question:* "Comparing the reflection in the mirror with samsara, what happens when one wakes up from samsara?"

*Khenpo:* I will tell you when I am enlightened, so you will have to wait a little bit. It is our topic. Samsara and nirvana depend upon each other. We are in samsara as long as we have much attachment and thus experience much suffering. When we are free of our attachment and have dispelled our negative emotions, then we aren't somewhere else but experience nirvana. We are in samsara and therefore think nirvana is somewhere else, but nirvana isn't outside of us. I can say that when we realize the essence of appearances, we won't perceive them delusively. Let me tell you what happened to my sister.

My sister was very sick when she was young and was always very scared. She said that something was coming towards her. We were with her and didn't see anything, but it was a reality for her. If what she saw really existed, we should have been able to have seen it too, but we didn't.

*Student:* "Maybe she was enlightened."

*Khenpo:* No, she was sick and was very scared, telling us that something was coming to beat her up. It is due to their karmic connection. Have any of you seen anything that others couldn't see?

*Student:* "Was it a vision?"

*Khenpo:* Nearly like that.

*Other student:* "Under specific circumstances, I can see people who have died. Is it imagination?"

*Khenpo:* I can't decide.

*Same student (summarized):* "Four weeks ago, I was practicing in my room, smelled a certain perfume that nobody else smelled, and learned that my father-in-law had used it when he was alive. I had never met him in life, though."

*Khenpo:* I cannot decide, but I can say that it's possible to see a person who has passed away if there is a karmic connection. When did your father-in-law die?

*Other student:* "1991. Maybe it's possible to experience the deceased if they haven't found their way after death."

*Khenpo:* It might be the case, but the karmic connection of dependent origination or your strong thoughts caused you to see.

*Student:* "I was doing the Bardo practice."

*Khenpo:* Is it helping?

*Same student:* "Yes."

*Khenpo:* As long as we aren't enlightened, we have many concepts and therefore we do these things to each other. There's a Lama in Boudhanath who can see ghosts and can describe them; it's nothing special for him, so he isn't scared. If this continues happening, maybe you can make butter-lamp offerings in his name. A friend had a similar experience with his deceased uncle, who always appeared to him in his dreams. If he were Buddhist, he would not have been accepted by the British army, so he is a Hindu. A Lama told him to offer butter-lamps at the Stupa of Boudhanath and after he had done this, his uncle never appeared to him again in his dreams. If you do something like that, then it will not happen again. For example,

even though I think that everything is a concept, I can see you all. We have created many concepts that we hold in our mind. Just like we have the same dream again and again and know that it is only a dream, we see it. In the same way, just because we think that things aren't real and have read many books about this, we will see the way we do because of our karmic connection.

*Same student:* "I have had similar experiences since I have been 3 years old and my family told me that I was fantasizing. When my father-in-law appeared to me 2 years ago, I told him that he is dead and told him to go to the light. Afterwards he didn't appear again."

*Khenpo:* I will not speak about the ultimate truth of emptiness, but I'm sure that on the relative level other beings are walking around in front of us and that we don't see them. If we have a karmic connection, then we can see them. In brief, nothing really exists ultimately. Until we have realized emptiness, we see, hear, touch, feel, etc. the way we do. Until we have realized the ultimate truth, we should continue accumulating good karma. You are the second person who has told me that he can smell.

*Same student:* "If I told other people, they would say that I'm crazy. It was very impressive."

*Khenpo:* Let me tell a story about being crazy, which is related to Madhyamaka. Once upon a time, there was a king in India. His astrologer told him that in a week it would rain heavily and anybody who drank the rainwater would go crazy. The king saved water for himself and didn't drink the rainwater, but everyone in his kingdom had done so and they became crazy. Because he acted differently than everybody else, they pointed at him and said, "You are crazy." He was so discouraged from dealing with people that he drank the rainwater, also became mad, and everything turned out.

*Next question:* "The reflection in the mirror is empty and it's like the concept I have of myself, which is also just a concept. It's only possible to say that something is empty if there is something that is full, like short and long. If something is empty, what is left?"

*Khenpo:* It's a good question. Actually, emptiness doesn't mean things aren't there. Things that appear are there, but they don't have ultimate existence. It's said that we will only realize the ultimate nature of reality when we have perfect wisdom. The ultimate truth can be misinterpreted, so let's make the aspiration to realize it correctly real soon.

## Talk Five

I don't think it's easy to realize what we have talked about or read. That's why there are many methods and this has been a fraction of what we can know. Even if we have doubts about the Middle Way and the meaning of emptiness, we have created a good connection and will some day realize and understand. We will slowly be able to see emptiness.

If we have a strong experience of dependent arising, I think we'll like the peaceful deities that are discussed in the Bardo teachings. If we have a strong experience of emptiness and realize that all appearances arise in dependence on our connection and therefore aren't real, I don't think we'll be that scared of the wrathful deities while in the Bardo. The teachings say to recognize the Bardo we should try to recognize that we are dreaming while we are dreaming. Sometimes we might be able to, but normally we can't. We should ask ourselves whether we can. Is there anybody here who can?

*Student:* "Sometimes."

*Khenpo:* Do you want to hear a dream that I recognized? I was 14 years old and then my pockets were always empty. I always thought about money and dreamed that I got lots of money, but I had no special box to put in a safe place. I dreamed that I put the money under my pillow and when I woke up, I checked but nothing was there. Whenever I had this dream again, I knew it was only a dream because nobody was there to give me money.

To recognize that we are dreaming while dreaming, we should practice seeing things like a dream while awake. It's said that we'll never recognize that we are dreaming while dreaming as long as we don't see appearances we perceive while awake as dreams. I don't think it will be possible to recognize that appearances are dream-like during the Bardo as long as we don't recognize that we are dreaming while dreaming. Maybe we will be able to if we have a good karmic connection or if we make aspiration prayers.

We can dream that we are climbing up a mountain or are working and then we really sweat. We can dream that we are sitting in a comfortable chair or are driving a nice car and feel happy. Whether we feel good or bad, nothing really exists in a dream. Although nothing is there, we can feel peaceful or suffer. When we feel peaceful and happy in a dream and wake up, we think, "Oh, I wish I could go back to sleep and continue dreaming." But I don't think it will last long. When we suffer while dreaming and wake up, we know that there was no reason to feel that way. I think our dreams are connected with the thoughts we had during the day. Maybe they are connected with experiences we had in a previous life, but I can't say anything about this. One surprising thing happened to me in a dream, though. When I was in South India where I studied, I took a bus with a friend on our afternoon off and we passed through the village that looked just like the village I had dreamt of many times. While we dream, our mind is very active and we can see a nice car, for example, but I don't think that there is an automobile factory. Or we can dream that we are eating food, but I don't think that there is a kitchen. We can be happy or suffer while dreaming and I can say that the images in our dreams are appearances of our habits.

To exemplify karmic connections: The teachings say that there is lots of iron in the hell realms, but I'm sure there's no steel factory there. I'm sure no gas is delivered from Russia to the hell realms, which would be very expensive. But beings who have the karmic connection can see what is in the hell realms. Another example: I don't think that people wore glasses a thousand years ago. If they had problems, they saw things falling down. I have eye problems and before I received help, I saw everything blurred, as though people had four eyes. When somebody told me, "No, people only have two eyes," I didn't believe them. Ever since I have glasses, I know that they are right. It's like that. Beings born in the hell realms see fire. We are human beings and, because we have the karma, we can say, "This is a pillar. That is a car. This is a house," etc. We wouldn't know if we didn't have the karma, even if we knew Madhyamaka and emptiness very well. Let me give another example. When I was 15 or 16, I washed my hair about every 2 months. If I felt an irritation, I pulled out a louse from my head. I see my head as my head, but my head was a home for the louse. When I took it out, it probably felt, "Somebody is taking me out of my house." Let me tell a story.

There is a village near the large Drepung Monastery in Tibet. The Geshe from that monastery are very good. But the villagers never take in a Geshe because they always debate and the people always lose. There are no hotels in that area, and one day a Geshe knocked on a lady's door and asked if he could spend the night there. She asked him, "Are you a Geshe?" He made her feel that he wasn't, so she let him sleep in her house that night. The woman's daughter was looking for lice in her hair and when she found one, she ran to her mother and said, "Mama, I found a louse." The mother told the girl, "Take it out and put it in a place where it cannot die." The Geshe heard this and could not refrain from commenting, "If there is a place where we will not die, please throw me out there." The woman then knew that he was a Geshe and asked him to leave.

*Student:* "I don't understand."

*Khenpo:* He wanted to add his comment because Geshes are always debating. What I want to say is that we are related with others through our karmic connection, otherwise we wouldn't spend time with them.

I can say that we should try to know what phenomena are really like. That is why the Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. When the Buddha turned the Wheel the first time, he showed how to purify and stop creating bad karma and how to create good karma. We will always experience suffering if our karma isn't good enough, and if we suffer all the time, I don't think we'll have the chance to realize the nature of phenomena. That's why the Buddha said that we have to create good karma so that we have the background and then everything goes smoothly. We create much karma, both good and bad. The source of bad karma is ego-clinging. Therefore, the main focus of the Second Turning is to cut ego-clinging, and the method to do this is taught in the Madhyamaka. The teachings of the Third Turning can be misinterpreted as eternalism. In order to realize the teachings of the Third Turning, I think it's very important to be heedful of good and bad karma and to engage in the three aspects of the path, the preparation, the main practice, and the dedication.

When we are awake, we have strong clinging to things as real, and when we dream, we have strong clinging that appearances in our dreams are real. One master said that it's very difficult to recognize a dream while dreaming. Just as our dreams arise in dependence on other things, likewise, appearances we perceive while awake arise in dependence on other things. Nothing will arise free of dependence on other things.

Any peace we experience will not last long. Any suffering we experience doesn't last long either. Sometimes we have a peaceful life, sometimes our life isn't peaceful, but those moments only arise in dependence and aren't real. What we need is lasting peace. As long as we chase after transitory peace, I think we will be very far away from having lasting and reliable peace. If we have a good teacher and make a little effort to realize that the appearances we perceive while awake aren't different than appearances in dreams, I don't think we will suffer, not even if somebody steals a gold cup that we own.

Let me say that I don't think just knowing the teachings will help. It's said that Dharma is like medicine. But we have to take it so that it helps. We need to practice. I'm sure there will be a result if we practice. If we don't practice and experience no result, we might say, "Oh, Buddhism isn't helpful." It is my wish that everyone stops creating bad karma, will always create good karma, will realize the nature of reality, and become enlightened very soon. So it's my wish that we all practice the three aspects of the path.

*Question:* "After these teachings, I have a nihilistic attitude and was waiting to hear you speak about what is there other than the things that arise in dependence. What isn't impermanent? What doesn't arise in dependence?"

*Khenpo:* We need to start from the beginning. When the Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma a third time, he spoke about a quality that all living beings have. It is genuine joy and happiness that isn't dependent on anyone else. This quality isn't a void and it has nothing to do with eternalism. It's ineffable. If we practice well, we will experience the inner quality that we all have. It's like tasting chocolate that is there and that's why we practice. We can't talk about this in a short time, but you can study the very good text, *The Uttaratantrashastra*. We study this text for one year in the monasteries. The Buddha didn't speak about this quality in the beginning because he saw that it could easily be misinterpreted as eternalism. So, he spoke about it at the end. If we have realized the first two Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, we will easily realize the third.

*Next question:* “In Christianity we are taught that we humans are so weak and small that we can’t reach the point of realization but receive it as a gracious revelation from Jesus or god.”

*Khenpo:* In Buddhism, we learn that all living beings have the same nature as the Buddha and that they can realize it if they practice. Before the Buddha became the Buddha, he was just like us. He practiced the six paramitas for many lifetimes, realized the nature of phenomena, and became a Buddha with many qualities. Every living being has the same qualities as the Buddha, but they are concealed. Your question is related to the question above, so you will get the answer from the same book. I remember one story. There was a crazy yogi in Tibet who never prostrated to anyone. He travelled around and finally came to Lhasa. When he was in front of the Jowo Statue of the Buddha, he spoke with the statue, saying, “Oh, Mr. Jowo, *tashi-de-le*. Actually, we were once both the same, but you achieved Buddhahood because you were very diligent. I’m a little bit lazy. That’s why I’m here and I will make three prostrations to you.” I think the difference is diligence and laziness. Of course, we need to go the right way.

*Question:* “When we return to our daily life after this course, we are still confronted with the attitude that Buddhism is thought of as nihilism. What sense does it make trying to be a Bodhisattva?”

*Khenpo:* The best way is to make aspiration prayers from time to time and to dedicate any virtue from having engaged in good activities. I hope it will help.

*Question:* “I have a question about Chöje Lama Namse. I’m always confused about nirvana and parinirvana. It’s said that Lama Namse died but that he is in meditation. Where is he actually, in the Bardo?”

*Khenpo:* If he is in meditation, I don’t think he is in the Bardo. Nirvana is just a concept; it isn’t a place where one goes and stays. If we can stay in the state of our mind and realize the nature of our mind, I think that is nirvana.

*Same student:* “I still don’t understand. He is dead.”

*Khenpo:* Only his breathing has stopped.

*Same student:* “Is it like it is said about His Holiness the XVIth Karmapa, that his heart was still warm after he had died?”

*Khenpo:* I think so. It’s amazing and it confuses scientists. One master in Bhutan stayed in meditation for many years after he had stopped breathing. There’s no difference between samsara and nirvana for somebody who has realized the nature of the mind.

We will stop with this very nice question and call to mind the line from *The Short Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer*, which is: “Grant your blessing that the indivisibility of samsara and nirvana will be realized.” 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 very state!  
May precious and supreme Bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so  
And may precious Bodhicitta that has already been never decline but continuously increase!

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 Khenpo Karma Namgyal during the Gagye retreat in the shrine room of Karma Lekshey Ling in Kathmandu in 2009 courtesy of Khenpo. Beautiful photo of Fuji apple tree taken at an organic farm in Hokkaido, Japan, in 2007 and graciously offered for this article by Lena Fong. When Khenpo did not teach in English, in reliance on the fabulous simultaneous translation of Tibetan into German by Hannelore Wenderoth, the teachings were either transcribed and only edited slightly or translated into English as well as arranged in the form of this article by Gaby Hollmann, responsible for any mistakes. Everyone specified here has copyright for their contribution. This article is made available for personal use only by the Dharma Download Project of Khenpo Karma Namgyal at Karma Lekshey Ling Institute and by Karma Sherab Ling in Münster; it may not be reproduced or published anywhere without prior consent from all those acknowledged here with heartfelt gratitude for their altruistic generosity. All rights reserved. Kathmandu and Munich, 2010.