

His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Teachings from “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*,” composed by Je Gampopa

At the request of many international students at the Great Mönlam Aspiration of the Glorious Unequaled Kagyü Sangha, the Kagyü Mönlam Chenmo in Bodhgaya in 2004, His Holiness gave six teachings on Je Gampopa’s “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.” The teachings were translated into English by Ngödrub Burkhar. The following is an edited transcript of the fifth and sixth of those talks. The photos of His Holiness taken during the Kagyü Mönlam Chenmo in 2007/08 courtesy of Khenpo Karma Namgyal.

Fifth Talk

Given that everything changes in every instant, the fact that we have the chance to see each other again is wonderful. In the spirit of this wonder, I extend my warm greetings to all of you. But I brought a gift back from my recent stay in Delhi – a cold! And I am worried that I might pass it on to you.

As I said previously, the intention of these teachings is to benefit you in direct and indirect ways, so I would like to encourage you to refresh your mind with the correct motivation for receiving these teachings.

The Working Basis: The Precious Human Birth – Chapter 2 of “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*”

In the earlier teachings on the first chapter of “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*” that deals with the primary cause to attain Buddhahood, we saw through examples and reasoning that all living beings without exception have Buddha nature and therefore they can attain enlightenment. Even though all beings are endowed with the potential for enlightenment, the Buddha nature, they do not all have the opportunity to appreciate and bring it to light. Beings can be born into what is generally categorized as lower and higher realms. Those born in lower realms are tormented by the many various kinds of suffering. Since their suffering is continuous and quite intense, they do not have the capacity to even think about liberation. The higher realms are those of humans and gods. Because of their karma, the gods experience an abundance of enjoyments and are tremendously attached to them. Absorbed in their attachment, they do not contemplate the possibility of attaining liberation. These different situations show that we not only have the potential for liberation but also need to have the right vessel to travel the path. Birth as a healthy human being is the right vessel to attain liberation.

In general, the right vessel for practicing Dharma and revealing the potential of enlightenment is the human body, but merely being a human isn’t enough. The teachings clearly state that a human needs to have certain prerequisites and favourable conditions so that he or she can practice the path to liberation. For example, when Jetsün Milarepa met the hunter who later became

known as Chira Gonpo Dorje, he said that even though human lives are said to be precious and rare, there was nothing rare or precious about a life like Chira Gonpo Dorje's before he became a disciple of the Jeshün. For it to be rare and precious, a human life needs to consist of certain favourable conditions, which are the eight pleasures and ten endowments.

The eight pleasures and ten endowments are favourable conditions that give us time and good circumstances to practice the Dharma. Essentially, that is what 'leisure' means in this context. There are eight things that could deprive us of leisure; free of them, we have eight ways in which we are able to practice the Dharma. These days, perhaps particularly in the West, people are always busy, so they have less time and less leisure. We are not talking about lack of time here. Even though people are very busy, they are not totally incapable of practicing the Dharma. Maybe the mundane things they pursue determine how they spend their time, but everyone still has the opportunity to investigate and practice what is really wholesome and beneficial.

The ten endowments or favourable circumstances are important conditions to lead a meaningful life. Five of them depend on oneself and five depend on external conditions. The ten favourable circumstances offer the opportunity to practice the Dharma, i.e., they are the necessary conditions for Dharma practice. In order to be a fit vessel to practice the Dharma, one must have the pleasures and favourable circumstances.

The mind also needs to have specific qualities, namely the three kinds of faith. The three kinds of faith are: faith of belief, longing faith, and pure faith. Faith of belief means being convinced that virtuous actions lead to happiness and non-virtuous actions bring on suffering. Faith of belief is having unwavering appreciation for the truth of cause and effect and knowing that mental defilements are the source of suffering. In general, having confidence in the truth of the Buddha's teachings is faith of belief. Longing faith is, for example, wanting to learn about the advantages of liberation and realizing how wonderful it would be to attain that state. Pure and clear faith is, for example, having uplifting certainty that visiting a sacred place or a monastery will be very beneficial. To traverse the path of liberation, one needs to have the physical pleasures and opportunities and one needs to mentally have the three kinds of faith.

The Condition: The Spiritual Friend – Chapter 3 of “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*”

The next point I want to discuss is having the necessary condition to reach liberation, which is the spiritual friend. One is endowed with the cause of liberation, Buddha nature, and has a good human birth with all pleasures and favorable conditions, but maybe one just hangs around and does nothing to awaken one's potential. One might have no intention to tread the path to liberation by making best use of one's abilities. Or one might understand that one has the potential and yearns for liberation, but one doesn't know about the path, what it actually implies, or how to practice. Therefore the guidance and instructions of a spiritual friend are indispensable when embarking on the path to liberation. In the third chapter of “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*,” Je Gampopa taught why it is necessary to have a spiritual friend and how he should be.

There are many reasons why one needs to rely on a spiritual friend. In particular, one can look to both scriptures and logic for reasons. In “*The Prajnaparamita Sutras*,” Lord Buddha taught that a

spiritual friend is like a guide who can show one an unknown path or he is like a boatman who can help one cross a big river. Common sense tells us that a spiritual friend is like a guide on a journey and should know more than we do. If someone knows less than we do, we can't ask that person what we need to know to get where we want to go and he can't tell us anything we don't already know. Therefore a spiritual friend cannot be someone who is less knowledgeable than we are. He can't be someone who knows as much as we do either; in such a case, we would probably know what he knows and he would know what we know, so our knowledge would not improve by relying on him. It is evident that the individual we need as a spiritual friend has to know more than we do. Then we can gain knowledge and progress.

For example, let's say we wanted to travel from Varanasi to Bodhgaya. The distance between Varanasi and Bodhgaya is about 400-500 kilometers. If we know that Bodhgaya is a very sacred place of pilgrimage but didn't know where it is located should we want to go there, or how to get there, or how long it would take, there would be no point asking someone who doesn't know. Neither would there be a point asking if we already know. If we didn't know and somebody else did, however, it would make sense to ask that person. On the other hand, if we can't find someone to ask for advice, we might as well try getting there on our own.

In the same way, there are different kinds of spiritual teachers: noble spiritual teachers and spiritual teachers who are ordinary beings. A spiritual teacher who is an ordinary being is most important for us. This is because we are beginners and as beginners our view is clouded by ignorance. We aren't really able to appreciate and interact with spiritual teachers who appear in the form of a deity, for example. So the best kind of teacher who can clearly show us the way to liberation is a spiritual teacher who is an ordinary being.

Having understood that we need an ordinary being as a teacher, we then need to know the characteristics that an authentic teacher should have. In a few words, he should have kept any vows he has taken, e.g., the refuge vows, and he should be able to present the teachings of the path to his students appropriately. While imparting the teachings, he should have genuine kindness and compassion for his students and not be deceptive. For example, if someone makes disparaging remarks towards him, instead of becoming angry and wanting to take revenge, he has compassion and is patient. He shouldn't only have these characteristics while in retreat or in a monastery. It makes no sense to think that a person we consider a spiritual teacher had positive qualities in the past and it doesn't matter if he doesn't have them anymore. Of course it matters. If he is an authentic teacher, his qualities will not diminish or be disrupted, no matter what. Looking at the past, we can take Jetsün Milarepa and Lotsawa Marpa as examples and contemplate what they were like, but since they are not with us now, speaking of their amazing qualities doesn't really change us. It's not good enough to say of a spiritual friend, "When he was in retreat, his qualities were intact. His character was intact when he was ordained in the monastery. I don't worry if his character isn't intact now. He's okay anyway." Students depend on spiritual teachers and relate more to him in the present than what was or might be. In this way, it doesn't help to say faults are only an appearance. The characteristics of a teacher must be present and intact. If someone has the characteristics of a spiritual friend or master, he has to live by them in the present. It's not enough to say someone had good qualities when he was in solitude a long time ago. He might even be the object of scorn, and when this happens, one needs to make sure that one doesn't get caught up in attachment and aversion.

Any of us might also do well in a solitary retreat, with no one annoying us, just sitting and being virtuous. What else would we be doing in retreat? If people who were in retreat came out and interacted with people and things, their qualities must remain intact. This is something we should keep in mind. Who doesn't face challenges? Who doesn't face difficulties? I have to deal with difficulties too. Sometimes I wonder what to say and do, or I think a problem must have a big purpose and meaning and therefore is worth dealing with. - That is enough for this evening. We have time for one question.

Question: "What is the difference between carrying the cause of the path and carrying the fruition of the path and what are the consequences of this?"

His Holiness: In a general way, we already carry the fruition of the path – happiness that is a result and suffering that is a result. This is what we are experiencing. We wish for happiness and freedom from suffering, so we try to attain happiness and get rid of suffering. We try to work with these, but it doesn't solve the problem, because we should be focusing on the causes of suffering and the causes of happiness. If we want to experience happiness, we need to create the causes for happiness. Mental afflictions and negative actions, which we are unable to eliminate, cause suffering. Virtuous actions and a wholesome view bring happiness.

Vajrayana is also referred to as "the path of fruition." We can't achieve complete enlightenment by only practicing Sutrayana, the path that teaches disciples to concentrate on the cause. It's only possible to achieve complete and perfect Buddhahood by engaging in the practices of Vajrayana. Therefore, in specific contexts, Vajrayana is referred to as "the path of fruition."

Sixth Talk

We looked at the characteristics that an authentic spiritual teacher should have. Our devotion and respect for the spiritual teacher we rely on are also decisive and very important.

A spiritual friend or teacher has both outer and inner aspects. The outer spiritual teacher is the person who gives his students instructions on what to do and what to give up. The inner spiritual teacher is the integration of his teachings in our lives. Therefore, an authentic spiritual teacher should be able to inspire his students not only to become virtuous disciples and deserving vessels, but also to revere him and to make the example he sets a part of their own lives. Through this, a genuine student-disciple relationship develops and grows.

The Method: The Teachings of the Spiritual Friend - Chapter 4

Next to the importance of serving our spiritual teacher, it's also necessary to engage in the methods of practice that he teaches. There are many different practices, for example, contemplating impermanence, the futility of worldly existence, and so on. Without going into details, I will share with you the essence of these instructions.

It is evident that hurting others causes suffering, yet people tend to do this. Some people even take pleasure in harming others, for instance, by hunting and killing animals. This shows that they have no understanding. In order to develop understanding, one needs to put oneself in the

place of other beings and ask, “How would I feel if someone thought that hurting me is fun?” Even if one doesn’t have a personal experience of specific pain, one can still imagine the pain and dismay harmful actions bring and thus one is moved to change one’s attitude and behaviour.

There might be a difference between the way a human and an animal experience suffering. Compared to animals, humans are much more sensitive and their experiences are more intense, but animals yearn for happiness too. If one watches them, one sees the way they scramble in search of food and are happy when they succeed. They are also constantly searching for happiness and freedom from suffering. Humans might have more intense feelings than animals and animals might have less intense feelings than humans, but they certainly have feelings and want to be happy. When we - because of our self-interest and greed - harm animals, we are depriving them of their freedom and their possibility of being happy. The practice of loving kindness and compassion is directed towards sentient beings in samsara, towards those that have a mind and therefore can experience happiness and suffering.

I personally feel that in the same way we develop loving kindness and compassion for sentient beings, we should develop loving kindness and compassion for the environment too. There are signs that the Earth is suffering. It may not be formulated by means of spoken or written words, but the signs are clearly there. As we make use of the environment, the Earth, it is our responsibility to protect it with loving kindness and compassion. The Earth and the environment are important to beings now and will be in the future. Destroying and harming the environment doesn’t occur because we are not in control nor is the environment abusing itself. We are doing the damage, so we need to change and start practicing loving kindness and compassion towards the Earth and our environment.

There are many different instructions on methods of practice in the fourth chapter of “*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*,” for example, the six *paramitas* (‘perfections’), and the four thoughts that turn the mind towards Dharma, but there isn’t enough time to talk about them in detail now. And besides, if I say too much about suffering, you will think Buddha’s Dharma only addresses misery. We are in Bodhgaya and I want you to be happy here.

The Result and Activities - Chapters 5 & 6

So, if we have the cause for enlightenment, the Buddha nature, the base of the precious human birth, and the very good condition of the spiritual friend, and if we put into practice the skillful methods he teaches, the result will be Buddhahood. This is Buddhist Dharma.

Usually when we hear of Buddha, we tend to think of the person who became the Buddha and taught the Dharma a long time ago. This is fine, but actually the word “Buddha” does not pertain to one being only. The term refers to realization of all positive qualities of being - complete elimination of negativities and perfection of one’s pure and abundant potential. If we ask, “Who achieved this?” the answer is “Lord Buddha.” Having attained Buddhahood, non-conceptual enlightened activities manifest spontaneously. Because these activities are spontaneous, we might ask if they arise without causes and conditions. This is not so. On the path towards Buddhahood, the Buddhas through their compassion dedicated the merit of their virtuous actions for the benefit of others. After achieving Buddhahood, their activities manifest due to their prayers.

‘The Jewel Ornament of Liberation’ is a big book, but it seems my talks became shorter and shorter. I do not know what you got out of these teachings. You came all the way to Bodhgaya, so I thought this could be like a present, but I don’t know whether this is so or not. In any case, I spoke with the hope that it helps you. Sometimes when you smiled, I thought what I said might be helping you and that makes me feel good. Apart from that, I only want to say “thank you for listening.” By listening and by being together here, we have made a connection and I truly hope it will be beneficial in times to come.

Questions & Answers

Question: “Your Holiness, since it was a very short teaching on Gampopa’s *‘Jewel Ornament,’* I have a question about the hell realms. As I understand it, the beings in the hell realms experience them as real and experience them right now. The suffering they experience is real to them. How does one develop compassion for this amount of suffering?”

His Holiness: The Buddha’s teachings speak about different hot and cold hell realms. The hot hell realms are said to be located in the center of the Earth, where there is a crater of lava. Wherever it is, in this situation beings experience intense suffering, so intense, we can’t even conceive of it. As humans, we could not stand this kind of suffering - we would be destroyed instantly. Beings in hell, however, can stay in this situation for a very long time because they have a greater ability to live through this kind of suffering than we do. They have this ability because they are experiencing the results of their very negative actions and therefore can experience intense suffering for a long time. Thinking about the intense sufferings these beings experience and what it would be like for us, I think we can cultivate strong compassion for them.

Next question: “What does Your Holiness see is the greatest general obstacle for a practitioner from the West, and do you have any suggestions in regard to dealing with that?”

His Holiness: I am an Easterner, not a Westerner. I haven’t been to the West and it’s difficult to see what something is like when you haven’t been there. Still, just an idea: Western countries are supposed to be the most developed countries, which means there are always new inventions that can be distracting and that you can become attached to. You might not be distracted by a next invention, but there seems to always be new things and eventually you might be distracted by them. That is what I think now, but when I go to the West, I will investigate and let you know.

Next question: “Your Holiness, is it true that all beings will become enlightened?”

His Holiness: The important thing is that all beings without exception have the potential to become enlightened, they all have the ability, but they don’t necessarily become enlightened. If all beings became enlightened, there would be no beings left for the Buddha’s compassion. In some Vajrayana teachings it is even said that when all beings become enlightened, new beings will appear. It depends on the motivation that you wish to develop and the dedication. If you want to focus on all sentient beings becoming enlightened, then that is what you should pray for.

Next question: “If you are practicing the yogas of the development of subtle channels, would eating meat create obstacles?”

His Holiness: Meat actually consists of different material and some might be harmful for certain Tantric practices. So, if you are doing these practices, it is best not to eat meat.

Next question: “According to Gampopa, there are ten Bodhisattva levels, but I read in other texts that there are thirteen.”

His Holiness: The Sutra tradition speaks of ten Bodhisattva Bhumis and Buddhahood as the eleventh. In the Vajrayana explanation, there are thirteen levels. The difference between these descriptions is based on activities, not realizations. There is no difference between the realization of Buddhahood that is achieved through these different vehicles. Buddhahood is complete enlightenment and there are no differences. To guide the variety of beings, though, different explanations of the levels that are attained are given. When Buddhas explain things to sentient beings, they explain things to some one way and to others another way; it depends on an individual's propensities and capabilities. So the explanations vary, but the realizations do not vary.

Next question: “Do you have some advice for us on how to develop Bodhicitta?”

His Holiness: Development of Bodhicitta depends on loving kindness and compassion. First of all, when we think about the suffering that beings are experiencing, we wish that they experience only true happiness instead, which is loving kindness. In the same way, when we think about the suffering that beings are experiencing, we wish that they experience freedom from suffering, which is compassion. Based upon these wishes, we develop the intention to achieve enlightenment in order to bring this about. This is Bodhicitta, ‘the mind of enlightenment.’

Next question: “If there is no self when we achieve Buddhahood, how can there be happiness if there is no self to experience it? If there is no self to experience an experience, what is there?”

His Holiness: In general, we have the idea of a self and this is fine. The problem is that we tend to think of the self and all other phenomena as independent existents. This isn't true; there is no truly existing, independent self. We perceive phenomena to be self-existent, but they aren't. We don't apprehend things the way they really are. If what we call “self” were an independent existent, we would have to accept it, but it only exists inasmuch as we think “I” and “me.” We do not see that the self we purport to be self-substantial is merely an imputation and doesn't exist inherently.

When a person experiences selflessness, then happiness and well-being occur simultaneously. Our present, dualistic mind cannot fathom what this is like. Even formulating the question what selflessness means is difficult because there is no reference. When we understand selflessness, we will see that happiness doesn't depend on the concept of a self and that our fixation on a self has obstructed us from experiencing true happiness. Since we haven't experienced selflessness, we are just speculating what true happiness might be like. When someone has realized selflessness and sees that the self is not an independent and true existent, then it's not the case that this person ceases to be. There is still an individual who has realized selflessness; he doesn't disappear into nothingness. – 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!

**Long Life Prayer for H.H. the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,
composed by H.E. the XIIth Goshir Gyaltsab Rinpoche, Dragpa Tenpe Yaphal**

༥ མི་ཐུང་རྟག་པ་རང་བྱུང་ཆེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ། །སྐྱུ་འཕྲུལ་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུར་བཞེངས་ཀླུ་པའི། །
གསང་གསུམ་རྩི་རྩི་ཁམས་སུ་རབ་བརྟན་ཅིང་། །མཐའ་ཡས་ཐིམ་ལས་ལྷན་གྱུ་བ་དཔལ་འབར་ཤོག། །

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.



The “Fifth Talk” appeared in the August 2004 issue (pages 4-9) of “*Thar Lam*,” published in New Zealand by Zhyisil Chökyi Ghatsäl Charitable Trust, an official branch of Palpung Sherab Ling. The “Sixth Talk” appeared in the December 2004 issue of “*Thar Lam*” (pages 4-7). Transcript revised slightly and arranged in 2009 for the Dharma Download Project of Khenpo Karma Namgyal at Karma Lekshey Ling Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal, by Gaby Hollmann of Munich (co-editor of “*Thar Lam*”). Photo of orchids taken and graciously offered for this article by Lena Fong of San Francisco. Copyright His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa and Karma Lekshey Ling Institute, 2009. All rights reserved. Distributed for personal use only.