



## His Eminence Khentin Tai Situ Rinpoche

### Nectar from the Stream – IV

A selection of teachings presented during the transmission of *The Rinchen Terdzö* - ‘*The Precious Treasure Teachings*’ of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye the Great, held at Palpung Sherab Ling Monastery, India, in 2006. Photo of His Eminence in 2009 courtesy of KKCW-Taiwan.

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### Mindfulness and Awareness

The mind’s essence is emptiness and its characteristic is clarity. The essence is ineffable, while everything manifests from it. Not even the Buddha can describe the mind’s essence, and it cannot be altered or changed in any way or by anyone, not even by a most evil person. It is incorruptible, incomparable, and indescribable - that is how the mind is. Now people like us, who are practicing our level to the best of our abilities, don’t have much maturity or realization. For this reason, it’s very good for us to be mindful and aware.

We are wanderers roaming in samsara. It doesn’t matter whether we are a renowned citizen in society or not, whether we own a house or not, whether we have property or not, we are wanderers. In this life, we wander on Earth. Why do we wander? Because our mind isn’t settled. As a result, our mind roams about and our life is unsettled. We are human beings now, but our next life may be as an animal on Earth, perhaps as a human being, or as a god, or as a being living on another planet in the solar system or universe. This depends on our karma.

Developing mindfulness and awareness is the first step and the beginning of our journey to discontinue wandering and to become settled. When we reach the destination, we will have realized and brought our innate potential, which is Buddha, to maturation. Cultivating our mindfulness and awareness is the beginning of our journey towards this destination.

When our mind isn't settled, we have many thoughts and emotions. We follow after and act upon them, getting into all kinds of suffering. Some people call suffering "problems." Other people call problems "obstacles." People call this all kinds of things, but it is suffering that arises because of not being settled. Not being settled, we wander and have no mindfulness and awareness. I believe that mindfulness and awareness are the greatest antidotes to obstacles. If we want to do something and it doesn't work, we say that there were obstacles. A Dharma practitioner's obstacle is that his or her practice is not going well. If we have mindfulness and awareness, then we will be able to avoid many obstacles.

By not thinking about too many things, we will not do as many things as we are doing now and we won't speak as much as we do now. When we don't speak too much and don't do too many things, then not many things will happen to us. The less we do, the less will happen. So, the first step towards recognizing the natural mind will always be maintaining wakeful awareness of being. Let me give an example: We are quite aware of our plane ticket and our passport when we embark on a flight, because we know that we will get into much trouble if we lose them. In the same way, we need to maintain mindfulness and awareness of what is going on around us, wherever we are. We shouldn't be like a nervous jet pilot who is always tense and becomes mad very fast, rather, we should be aware in a very simple, natural, and relaxed way. We make our way over mountains and difficult terrain by going slowly. Awareness and mindfulness mean just relaxing and being wakefully aware. That's it.

Students of the Dharma can make good use of anything they are doing as a means to cultivate mindfulness and awareness. For example, we can visualize ourselves as being Noble Chenrezig when sitting in an over-filled bus. We can radiate positive light, positive energy to the many people in the bus, so they are blessed by our compassion. This is very easy to do. Also, we don't need to talk when we take a walk and can just repeat Chenrezig's mantra, which is OM MANI PEDMA HUNG.

You always have a chance to practice the Dharma. For example, when you visit a Buddhist monastery, it's very good karma to circumambulate a Stupa or temple clockwise, because all the mantras and sacred objects are placed inside them in such a way that it's necessary to go around them in that direction. Going anticlockwise is putting the sacred objects upside down, which is bad karma. If you want to go to the other side of a Stupa or temple, you go clockwise to get there; when you return, you come back by simply making a clockwise circle. So, don't make bad karma but good karma.

Whenever you are free and aren't gossiping or involved with idle chatter, you repeat the mantra OM MANI PEDMA HUNG. And when you are resting, you just rest in the nature of your mind, maintaining wakeful awareness of your mind. This is wonderful. This makes you a very wise and happy person. Then you can see any problem that you might have very clearly. Interesting things happen when you see problems clearly. If you look at a problem that you have, it becomes a good thing and not a problem anymore. What happens to you if nobody bothers you and doesn't cause problems anymore? You become spoiled. Being bothered and having problems enable you to practice mindfulness and awareness, and then you don't stay a spoiled person. Like this, anything that happens in life can be used positively, anything, practically anything.

What I am saying here will help you, because situations become very serious in the absence of mindfulness and awareness. For instance, I have never heard Tibetans who have become sick or whose friend died say, “Why me? Why him?” Maybe it’s hard to spell in our language, but I’ve heard such things said everywhere else. When people lose money, they ask, “Why me?” This implies that they think, “Why not somebody else?” Thinking and speaking in such a way is very negative and bad – it’s a kind of super-ego, the manifestation of super selfishness. I can only answer, “Why not you? You have a head, so you can get a headache. Why not? You have a stomach, so you can get a stomach ache. Why not? You have money, so you can lose it. Why not?” So, in situations like that, you should learn to think, “Why not me?” instead of thinking, “Why me?” These are examples for not being mindful. If we look into it, it’s very simple.

Everyone created the causes and conditions for their own karma themselves, for their sickness, too. When sick, which is the purification of past karma, it’s necessary to take medicine. Sickness is the negative karma of not having been nice to someone, or of having caused somebody much anguish or pain, or maybe of having beat somebody up in a past life. As a result, we become sick in this life. So, that’s a very simple and natural way to understand.

What I mean to say is that it’s necessary to be mindful and aware in order to make everything positive, to realize the potential and the good of everything. Cultivating mindfulness and awareness is a very important step towards recognizing the nature of the mind.

### **The View, Meditation, Action, and Fruition in Vajrayana**

In Vajrayana, the view is beyond any dualistic concepts and thoughts. That is the highest and most perfect view. Holding on to a philosophical view means holding on to something. There is a story that illustrates this.

Two yogis had engaged in the meditation practice of Vajravarahi. Having accomplished the practice, they were both able to go to her Pure Land. They didn’t have to die to go there, but they could go with their bodies. At that time, Vajravarahi manifested a red staircase leading into the sky. One of the two yogis was very poor and owned nothing. He just went up the stairs. The other yogi owned a wonderful mala and turned back to get it. When he returned with his mala, the staircase was gone. He had to wait another lifetime to go to the Pure Land of Vajravarahi. In the same way, once we have a correct philosophical view that is an antidote for an incorrect view, we have to let go of it and take the next step.

Clinging to a wrong view is like poison; we will die if we swallow it. The correct view is like medicine; we will get well if we take it when we are sick. But we have to stop taking the medicine after we have recovered, otherwise we will become very sick and die from the sickness that the medicine caused after we got well but continued to take it. In the same way, our view has to be free of any dualistic perceptions that we cling to. That’s the Vajrayana view.

Meditation means leaving the mind unaltered, uncontaminated, ‘as it is.’ That is correct meditation. Of course, we need a very complicated meditation. Why? Because we are very complex. The antidote for our complicated mind is a complex mandala with 900 deities, a mandala within the mandala, a mandala on top of another mandala, and a visualization practice for each of the 900 deities. Each deity has an own mantra in the heart chakra, and

each deity has a head chakra, a throat chakra, a chakra in different places in the body - and everything is in action. It's very complex; there are lots of offerings and many rituals. Why is this? Because our mind is like this and is always so busy. The Buddha's complicated manifestation of his wisdom is an antidote to our complicated ways and will purify us of our complexities.

Not recognizing our very simple, profound, and sacred essence causes defilements. There are five main defilements that we act upon (ignorance, attachment, aggression, jealousy, and ego pride). Therefore the Buddha's wisdom manifests as the five Buddha families. We practice meditating the five pure manifestations in order to purify our five main defilements. In fact, practicing is not only purification but is also transformation. It's very important to appreciate and acknowledge this.

Our attachment, anger, jealousy, and other defilements are not wisdom. Therefore we have to know about our essence. The defilements, the shadows, are one side of the coin; light is the other side. Not recognizing that the defilements are like a shadow means not recognizing our attachment. Recognizing and realizing that we are attached to a self and to things is wisdom, so we have to keep our attachment tied to a short leash. We cannot let it free and do whatever it dictates, because that isn't manifesting wisdom.

It's very important to understand and appreciate the view, meditation, and action. Action is described as *rang-byung* in Tibetan, which means 'spontaneity, to occur in and of itself, self-liberating.' It's very important to understand *rang-byung*. Of course, in our day-to-day life and because we aren't at that level, we have to have mindfulness and awareness. If we just act without principles, without precepts, then we will be totally lost. Therefore, it's important to do our best from our level. But we should make use of the opportunities at our disposal to understand the profound, ultimate view.

Fruition is nothing more and nothing less than realization of the base, of the ground. What do ground, path, and fruition mean? Is there a base for saying, "I wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings to attain enlightenment"? Or is that wish baseless? There is a base for it. What is the base? It is the essence of all sentient beings, their innate Buddha nature. My essence is the Buddha nature, and every phenomenon is my dream, my illusion and your dream, your illusion. That is the base. So, all sentient beings will become a Buddha, of course, because that is their base. I will become a Buddha because that is my base. Since some of us don't get it right, it might take a long time. Some of us get it right very quickly. Jetsün Milarepa got it right more than 1000 years ago, while we are still wandering around, waiting for something to happen. So, it depends how long it will take, but I guarantee that no sentient being in the entirety of existence will rest until they reach Buddhahood. Even if they have to go to hell for countless lifetimes, they will reach Buddhahood. Even if they have to be born as a god, they will reach Buddhahood. But they won't rest until they do. That is the definition of *samsara*, 'going around in a circle.' No sentient being will rest until they reach the destination. And the destination is realization of their ultimate, limitless, primordial potential. This way, fruition is realization of the primordial potential.

Our view has to be as profound as possible, and it can never be deep enough. It has to leave us space to progress, like climbing a ladder. We can't be attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> step of the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of a 10-storey building if we want to get to the top. If the building is 10 stories high and each has 20 steps, then we will have to climb 200 steps to get to the top. If we become attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> step, we would be stuck right above the 1<sup>st</sup> step and wouldn't get further. We would be like the yogi who got stuck because of his mala. Instead of attaining realization in

Vajravarahi's Pure Land, he got realization of his mala. So, this way, our view has to be as high and as realistic as possible, and our meditation has to be a most correct one. And nobody can know you better than you yourself.

Often people come to me and ask, "Who is my yidam?" How should I know who their yidam is? Of course, I can lie and answer, "Oh, your yidam is Avalokiteshvara," or "Your yidam is Vajrayogini," or "Your yidam is Hevajra." But I'm not allowed to tell a spiritual lie. An ordinary lie is bad enough, but a spiritual lie is extremely bad. For someone who has the monk's vows, telling a spiritual lie is the same as killing a human being. We break our vow by telling a spiritual lie. So I respond to people who ask me and say, "I don't know." But the main yidam of the Kagyüpas is Hevajra, because Marpa Lotsawa's main yidam was Hevajra. The main yidam of the Karma Kagyüpas is Vajravarahi. Which yidam will really be the easiest, most convenient, and most beneficial for all of us? Noble Chenrezig. His mantra, OM MANI PEMA HUNG, is the best mantra. If we repeat Chenrezig's mantra, supplicate and pray to him to attain realization and to become like him, it will be most beneficial for all sentient beings - nothing is better. We don't need anything else. So, that's how I answer people who ask me.

When people show interest in a certain yidam and ask me for help, of course I help them get teachings so that they can practice. But I can't tell anybody who their yidam is. To be able to do this, I would have to have the ability to see their mind. I don't even have the ability to see my own mind, so why do people expect me to see their mind? But I have to deal with many people, so I have some kind of "know how." When somebody comes to me and says something, almost from the first moment I know what is going on, because ever since I was very young I have experience dealing with people. So, it's quite easy for me to know people, especially when I put on my glasses. But beside that, I'm not omniscient.

So, knowing the view, meditation, action, and fruition is very beneficial for us. It's also important that we do our best and in accordance with our level. You know who you are better than anybody else. I know who I am better than anybody else. Therefore, doing our best, we can practice and apply the great teachings that we have received from our Lineage Gurus and from our precious Root Guru. We can and should apply the teachings that we have received.

### **Making Everything a Practice**

Since we are tantric practitioners, we have to be able to do our best to make everything a practice. For instance, when we eat, practically we offer food to the Nirmanakaya, which naturally goes to the Sambhogakaya, the 100 deities of our body. It's the same when we dress and when we clean ourselves. We have to do all these things in a natural, in a very simple and genuine way, not in an eccentric, strange, and distorted way. If we do things in a simple, natural, relaxed manner, everything will be okay, ultimately. With this in mind, we conduct ourselves naturally and practice Tantra naturally.

Tantra is very sacred, not secret. Most people don't have the capacity to understand that Tantra is sacred and as a result they turn it upside down. They look at Tantra as some kind of undesirable, negative, dangerous thing. This is very wrong. Many people look at Tantra as something they would never accept or will ever agree with. This is a very wrong attitude.

Why am I a monk? Why don't I practice Tantra in the same way that the Mahasiddhas Marpa Lotsawa, Jetsün Milarepa, Dombi Heruka, Shri Tilopa, Shri Naropa, and Guru Rinpoche did? It's not that I'm superior, but because I'm inferior to them. In order to practice the way they

did, I'd have to be free of all defilements and free of perceiving dualistically. Since I'm not free, I don't have the ability to practice like they did.

Compared to the tantric commitment, the Bodhisattva vow is very easy. Compared to the Bodhisattva vow, the vows of *vinaya* (the Sanskrit term for 'discipline') are very easy. Keeping the vinaya vows makes life very good - no headache, no tension. I have no tension. I have no headache. I'm totally free of all the causes and conditions that bring tension and these and those problems about. Because of having the vinaya vows, I'm free of all these complicating things. I have and will continue having all the time on Earth to do what I have to do. If everything goes well and is okay, I'm happy. If everything falls apart, it's okay. Since I'm a simple monk, I'll just walk out with an umbrella and a begging bowl when things aren't okay. That's it - very simple, nothing complicated. So, being a monk or nun is very easy. It's an enormous privilege and is wonderful.

The Bodhisattva vow is much more difficult to keep than the vinaya vows. Whereas, being a tantric yogi is extremely difficult. So, why do I continue being a monk? Because I don't have the ability to be like Marpa Lotsawa, Shri Tilopa, Shri Naropa – that's why, no other way around it. This has to be understood very clearly, otherwise we try to be a better monk or nun and in the process create the worst bad karma. Because we have ego, so much ego, we don't have the capacity to practice the Greater Path, yet we look down on the Lesser Path.

Taking myself as an example, if I continue practicing the Dharma the way I do now and if I progress the way I presently am, it will take me many lifetimes to be able to practice like Shri Tilopa and Shri Naropa. Therefore, in this life and in many future lives, I will be a simple monk, with big responsibilities. I don't see my big responsibilities as problems, rather, I see them as sacred and honourable. It's quite difficult because the world is quite difficult. But I don't look at these difficulties as stress, rather, I look at them as a challenge. It gives me tremendous honour and pleasure to run into big problems. I look at them as blessings, in that the purification of my defilements will be faster if I surmount bigger obstacles.

Practicing Tantra is like swimming across the Atlantic Ocean, from one coast to the other. The only difference between the Atlantic Ocean and my swimming pool is that my pool has clean water and not salty water. Having to paddle a lot to stay afloat, practicing swimming in my pool will help me progress faster. Once I'm good at this, then I will be able to float across the Atlantic Ocean effortlessly, because salt water enables one to float better. That's how I look at all the challenges in my life, as a blessing and because of *vinaya* ('discipline'), I think.

I'm giving this example from my life so that you understand better. I'm a tantric practitioner, so my body, my speech, and my mind are Vajrayana - all Vajrayana from head to toes. But my legs are weak, so I need two sticks. One stick is *vinaya* and the other stick is *Bodhicitta*, *byang-chug-kyi-sems*, 'the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.' With two sticks and my two weak legs, I'm able to stand up, to walk, and to do my duties. It is a great honour. And monks and nuns as well as lay practitioners, who are practicing Vajrayana Buddhism and who are upholding and cherishing very dearly their vinaya vows or their lay-practitioner's precepts, have great, heart-felt respect for Tantra and for tantric practitioners like Shri Tilopa and Shri Naropa. Our abilities are slight, so it will take us many lifetimes to be like them. You know, we don't have to drag anyone down because they are weak and lack abilities. Do you understand? This is very important to understand, otherwise even a good monk or nun will create worse karma by disrespecting their vows. That is very wrong.

So, we should be very happy and very grateful that Lhaje Gampopa laid the foundation of our Lineage with the *vinaya* (the ‘rules of discipline’). There was no vinaya in our tradition during the times of Marpa Lotsawa and Jetsün Milarepa. Lacking vinaya, I don’t think I would be able to practice effectively. And because of having vinaya, I am able to practice very happily. This is due to the greatness of Lhaje Gampopa, who introduced the Lineage of Vinaya into our Lineage of Tantra. Therefore, we have three things together - the practitioner whose oral and physical precepts are vinaya, whose motivation is Bodhicitta, and whose liturgy and meditative procedure of practice (*Sadhana* in Sanskrit) is Tantra. That's what we have. You should know this. I’m sure you do, but you need to be reminded of this from time to time.

### **Signs of Knowing the Dharma Truly**

Diligent Dharma students hear many teachings, read many books, and learn the Dharma. What should happen as a result? They should have become calm and serene, be balanced, content, and at peace with themselves. It’s a good sign to have learned and to know something about the Dharma. But it doesn’t mean pretending and playing a role, like an actor on stage. Any good actor can easily act like the Buddha or like Jetsün Milarepa. They can play many roles, even the role of a Bodhisattva. After the show is over, they are exhausted and need to take a long rest. Being calm and serene isn’t like that. Whether we are alone or together with others, it means being truly calm and at ease as a result of having gained knowledge and learning. Whether anyone notices or not, we are at peace and at ease.

If we don’t become calm and serene through having gained knowledge and learning, then the more we try and the more we know, the more egotistic and discontent we will be. These aren’t good signs. They show that we haven’t really learned anything. I wanted to mention this so that you can examine for yourself whether you truly know the Dharma.

Having come to know the Dharma truly and as we learn, we have to practice it and recognize the signs of whether our practice is going well or not. Students and disciples sometimes ask me, “Do you think my meditation is going well? Do you think I’m doing the right practice?” It’s hard for me to answer. How should I know if your practice is right or not? This is very difficult to know. The only way for you to know is whether your practice has made you transform your defilements or not. You have to check whether your attachment, your anger, your jealousy, your ego pride, all these defilements have decreased. You have to check whether you are controlled by your defilements or whether you control them. This way you find out whether your practice is going well or not. Just as I said, you should become calm and content and in harmony and peace due to truly knowing the Dharma. You learned that attachment is meaningless, anger is meaningless, jealousy is meaningless, and you know that they are harmful, don’t truly exist, and are an illusion. So you learned. You can check and find out for yourself whether you have become calmer and are more content.

As a result of practice, you also know whether your desire, your anger, your jealousy, and other defilements have transformed into wisdom. If I, for my part, can overcome 1% of my defilements, then my wisdom has increased 1% in this life. If I overcome my defilements 100%, then my wisdom will be 100%.

### **Minimizing Unnecessary Activities**

Beginning practitioners know the preliminary practices, but we need to stabilize them with our body, with our speech, and with our mind in order to progress and mature.

We should minimize unnecessary physical activities. For example, if we look at our daily activities and investigate what we have accomplished up to today, most of us already have grey hair and won't last that much longer. What did we do in this life? We check very carefully, sincerely, and honestly, without feeling guilty and without trying to boost our ego. For the sake of goodness, we are just honest with ourselves and check how many of our activities are really necessary and how many are really unnecessary. We realize that we have wasted much time by not using it effectively. Having checked, we let go of our unnecessary activities. As a result, much tension and most obstacles will naturally be eliminated. For example, if the rope that holds a hay stack together is cut, the stalks will fall and lay on the ground, remaining 'as it is.' Our physical activities should be something like that. We should minimize unnecessary activities as well as all other worldly activities.

What we have said in this life until now could fill hundreds of books on story-telling. How much was really meaningful? Most of what we said was not only gossip but brought on negative effects. What we said harmed others and ourselves, too. We planted many seeds of suffering with our speech. Therefore, we should not only minimize our negative speech but stop. The example is becoming like a guitar with broken strings, in which case it can't make much noise anymore.

Our mind should have a minimum of unnecessary mental activities. Even if we don't engage in many physical activities and don't say much, our mind keeps on thinking and thinking, and then things get worse. Our mind can even drive us crazy, which won't be beneficial in the least. Therefore, we shouldn't indulge in unnecessary thoughts but know what is really necessary to take to mind.

Thoughts of the past should be like the trace that a bird left behind after having flown across the sky; birds leave no traces. Present thoughts are like the baby-talk of a clown in a circus or a magician while he performs his act. Lots of things happen. They pass, and practitioners shouldn't cling to them. Thoughts concerning the future should be like a pipe with which it's possible to bring water to a tank. But the tank is broken, so the water doesn't flow into the future. Thus, we shouldn't feed on thoughts of the future, should not cling to present thoughts, and shouldn't dwell on thoughts of the past. This is what we should try to do, and it's an important preliminary practice.

### **The Purpose of Tantra**

Mind is limitless - the body is limited. Why does our mind end up in this body that is like a prison? How come? Because of our karma. Every sentient being has been our father and mother countless times. And each one of us has been the mother and father of every sentient being a countless number of times. Therefore, we are connected to all sentient beings in this way. Now, from among all sentient beings, we have a more recent connection and therefore a closer relationship with our present father and mother, which is the reason why we became the son or daughter of our father and mother.

How did the mind that has no form, no dualistic reality, become trapped inside a body that is obviously a very dualistic entity? The finest form of relative reality is air. The mind that did not recognize itself and thus has not attained realization is called "consciousness" and becomes mind-consciousness at conception. When the mind-consciousness became involved with air, which is the finest energy of the universe, the mind-consciousness entered into what developed into the body. After 29 days, the central channel of the body, which cannot be seen, starts developing. As a result, we grew and became a person. If we are injured in the middle

of our body, we have very little chance of surviving, unless we are near a super hospital with the best medical specialists. If we are injured somewhere else, like the hands and legs, then we have a very good chance to survive. Actually, we can live without hands and legs, but we can't live without a heart.

When practicing the Dharma, the first thing we need to do is overcome our attachment to our body. It's the first step, because it's our strongest weakness. We are very attached to our body and do so many things to satisfy its needs, actually unnecessary, unnecessary needs. That's why we have to vanquish our attachment to our body. When we have, the second step we need to take is using our body, speech, and mind to help all sentient beings by practicing the six *paramitas*, the six invaluable qualities (generosity, ethics, patience, joyful endeavour, meditative concentration, and discriminating wisdom-awareness). Finally, we have to transform our body into the body of the deity, the body of the Buddha, our speech into the Sambhogakaya by repeating the mantra, and our mind into the Dharmakaya by realizing primordial, pristine wisdom.

Where there is life, there is death. What is death? Death means our body becomes an unsuitable vessel for our mind, so our mind and body separate when we die. There are many ways to die. The best way to die is mentioned in *The Rinchen Terdzö* many times. It is the prayer: "May I not have terrible pain when I die, but may I die peacefully. After I have died, may I become one with Buddha Amitabha." That would be an ideal death, dying without pain, without being sick. It's impossible to die without being sick, though. We will be sick before we die, but we pray that it's a simple sickness, that we die without much pain, and that our body and mind separate immediately.

In the first moment of dying, our mind falls asleep and is unconscious while still in the body. At that time, it is possible to realize the first clear light of the *bardo* ('the state of mind between death and rebirth, also between waking and sleeping, etc.'). So, as our mind is in the process of separating from our body, we have the chance to become enlightened by recognizing the clear light that appears to us. Then, while dying and when we wake up again, it seems as though we are in a cave of a mountain. We try to get out because it's so dark. We see many doors and then, as a practitioner, we have to close all our doors except the crown chakra. So, we have to leave our body through our crown chakra. When we do and if we then recognize our mind that manifests as the clear light a second time, we attain enlightenment. If we don't recognize the appearance of this brilliant clear light, then we will become very frightened. Bardo is very terrifying and frightening. Why? Because we have no security. Right now we are very secure in the two yards of our body. We call it "My body," and we call its limbs, "My arms," etc.

Now, this vessel is not just a physical body that we think it is. It's actually like our mind. Our mind is Buddha, but we don't recognize this. Therefore, it becomes what we call "My mind." The same with our body. We don't recognize that it is Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya and call it "My body." The purpose of tantric practice is to transform our body, speech, and mind. The only way to attain enlightenment in this life is to transform our body, our speech, and our mind from the relative, karmic fruit into the ultimate, primordial nature and not into something else.

### **Non-Triplicity**

What is triplicity? The threefold concept of subject, object, and action, which is called '*khorgsum*' in Tibetan ('the three focal points'). When we do something positive, then we are the

positive subject, the recipient and what is being given are the positive objects, and the action is the positive act. When we refrain from doing something negative, then we are the subject that doesn't hurt or harm anyone, those who aren't harmed as well as the negative action that isn't committed are the objects, and avoiding that action is the act. When a practitioner tries to realize the nature of the mind, there is the person who tries to realize the nature of the mind, the practices that he or she carries out to accomplish this aim, and the act of accomplishing the aim. These three focal points are actually non-dualistic, i.e., non-triplex. How is this?

After we take a first step, we take a second step. Then we take a third step. When we reach the third step, we have to go beyond it. Going beyond triplex is exemplified with the image of trying to tie a knot out of space. It can be any kind of knot, simple or complex, but it's a knot made out of space. But it's impossible to make a knot out of space. Interestingly, due to the power of the karma that we have accumulated for countless lifetimes, we have managed to make a knot out of space and ended up being in samsara. Now we have to untie this knot by simply realizing freedom from the three focal points, which is freedom from duality. This is the meaning of non-triplicity.

### **Four Important Dzogchen Terms**

There are four important terms that describe realization in the Dzogchen Tradition. They are: *chös-nyid-rnam-song*, *rnam-gor-ba*, *rig-pa-thse-pa*, and *chös-nyid-säl-ba-snang-ba*.

*Chös-nyid-rnam-song* means something like 'direct experience of Dharmata.' *rNam-gor-ba* means something like 'development of realization' or 'progress of realizations.' *Rig-pa-thse-pa* means something like 'primordial awareness' or 'maturity of awareness.' I'm quite sure that *chös-nyid-säl-ba-snang-ba* is 'accomplishment of the Dharmata' or 'completion of the realization of Dharmata' in English.

From time to time, different terms are used in Mahamudra and Maha Ati (Dzogchen). They cannot always be 100% the same, otherwise Maha Ati will end up being Mahamudra and Mahamudra will end up being Maha Ati. These four descriptions are specific to Maha Ati. There are other terms and descriptions specific to Mahamudra.

Direct experience of Dharmata is the experience that everyone and everything always has been and is Buddha and his pure mandala. We normally don't experience this, but we are able to experience this as the result of practice. Then we see this directly, not only with our mind but also with our eyes. How can this be? Ultimately, our eye and our mind, our ear and our mind, the objects that we see and our mind, as well as our other sense faculties, sensory perceptions, and their respective objects (tastes, scents, and palpable objects) aren't separate and distinct. They are interdependent manifestations in that they appear to us in dependence upon each other.

Furthermore, having attained direct experience of Dharmata, we are able to see the limitations, the restrictive limits of what we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch and the limitlessness of how things really are. We are able to see that, to experience that. And once this happens, then, just like every experience, this experience evolves and grows. It isn't realization; it's experience. Since we have two words – "experience" and "realization" -, we should make correct use of them. Experience comes first; realization comes later.

So, the experience of Dharmata improves and becomes deeper and deeper. Once this experience improves and becomes deeper and deeper, then realization of the primordial state,

which is realization of primordial, pristine wisdom (often referred to as “wisdom-awareness”), reaches maturity. An experience comes and goes, but it is certain that realization progresses. So, the experience of primordial wisdom-awareness becomes realization of primordial, pristine wisdom as we progress in our practice. When we have reached maturity, there’s nothing more to realize. There’s no more experience. There’s nothing left to purify and nothing that needs to be accumulated. The fallacy of our *alaya* (‘ground consciousness’) is manifest. Thus, there’s nothing more to experience and nothing more to realize.

Now, these four terms are very important in Dzogchen. Being practitioners and if we are in a pure, natural, and harmonious state of mind and environment, we can and will have a natural experience of primordial, pristine wisdom. For example, from a cynical point of view, holy places like Bodhgaya consist of rocks that are made into temples like the one at Bodhgaya. Just like all other rocks that are used to make other buildings on Earth, somebody who is cynical thinks that they aren’t special and that the Bodhitree at Bodhgaya is like any of the millions of Banyan trees on Earth. But when you sit in front of the Bodhitree at Bodhgaya, then all your feelings and your mental perception are transformed, at least for a short while and for the time being. And that experience is the reality of Bodhgaya. If, on the other hand, you find yourself on a battlefield, in the midst of shooting and killing, the stones and trees you see there are the same as those in holy places, but you are afraid, angry, desperate, and don’t feel inspired to have devotion and compassion. It’s a totally opposite feeling and a different experience than the one you have at Bodhgaya. Which one is real? Which one isn’t real? When you look at it, you discover the fallacy of your *alaya* consciousness and see that it is you yourself who experiences these two things differently. It’s the same material, but you feel that they are different.

The real essence of things cannot be affected by anything. As practitioners, we progress through the second and third stages described in Dzogchen and experience that every place is holy, everyone is sacred, every moment is peaceful and harmonious. And that’s a good experience.

When we continue practicing, when we go deeper and deeper and accomplish the fourth stage, *chös-nyid-säl-ba-snang-ba*, every place is the *mandala* (the ‘center and surroundings’) of the Buddha or deity, every sentient being is the deity of our meditation practice, every activity is the enlightened activity of the Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya deities. Instead of using the word “deity” here, I should use the Dzogchen terminology, which is “Primordial Buddha,” *Kungtu-bZangpo*, *Samantabhadra*, *Adi Buddha*, ‘Universal Goodness,’ i.e., good to all, everywhere and at all times. In Mahamudra, we call the manifestation of the Primordial Buddha *Vajradhara*, *rDo-rje-‘Chang*, ‘Vajra-Holder.’ Although the terms are different, both Buddha Samantabhadra and Buddha Vajradhara represent the essence of the Buddha’s realization of enlightenment.

### **Initiations**

What is an initiation or empowerment? What is its nature? How is it defined? Through an initiation, our primordial, pristine wisdom is empowered and thus doesn’t fall under the power and isn’t influenced by other things. This raises the question, “Are those persons and beings who haven’t received an initiation under the power of something else than their primordial essence?” In principle, nobody is under the power of anything except their primordial essence. But relatively, we are under the power of our ego, our attachment, our jealousy, and so many things. And we work like a slave of our attachment, of our jealousy, of

our ignorance, and other defilements. So, the purpose of receiving an initiation is to free us of being a slave of our defilements.

*gNes-tshig* is the Tibetan term for ‘definition.’ *gNes* means ‘certain, certainty,’ *tshig* means ‘word,’ so *gnes-tshig* means ‘certain word or word of certainty.’ Although I’m not 100% sure if it’s correct, I translate it as ‘definition.’ Using this word, the definition of initiation is ‘bringing our primordial wisdom-awareness to self-sufficient maturation.’ What should happen when this occurs? We are not only no longer under the power of other things, but things are under our power, i.e., we are no longer empowered by things but we empower them. How? We don’t cause others to be afraid, we don’t own lots of things, but we simply manifest and transform things. This means that we are not only no longer influenced by our defilements but our defilements become wisdom. That is the definition of initiation and empowerment. So, first we are empowered and then we empower.

We know that there are usually four steps in an initiation, but sometimes there are five. Since I explained them earlier, I will speak briefly about the four.

The first initiation is called *bum-pa*, ‘the vase,’ which is empowering the outer aspect of everything about us. This means empowering our body and our defilements, which manifest as our body. This initiation is planting the seed of the *Nirmanakaya* (‘the emanation body of a Buddha that manifests out of compassion to help ordinary beings’).

The second initiation is called *gsang-ba*, ‘secret,’ which is empowering the inner aspect of our body (*nada*, *prana*, and *bindu* in Sanskrit). It is deeper than the outer transformation of our body, speech, and defilements. Prana, nadi, and bindu are the inner aspects of our body that are always present, even after we die and are reborn. So this way, the second initiation is planting the seed for the realization of the *Sambhogakaya* (‘the body of perfect enjoyment,’ which is the semi-manifest form of Buddhas who are endowed with the five perfections of teacher, retinue, place, teachings, and time and which is only perceptible to Bodhisattvas.)

The third initiation is called *shes-rab-ye-shes-kyi-dbang*, ‘primordial wisdom empowerment.’ It is the empowerment of the most essential aspect of basic joy, our basic nature. It’s natural for all sentient beings to enjoy being happy and not to like to suffer. It’s also natural for everyone to want to be free and to not like limitations. Even though there are large differences between individuals, all living beings (from those living in the highest heaven to those living in the lowest hell realms) have in common that they all want to be happy and don’t want to suffer. Everybody wants to be free and doesn’t want to be restricted. This is common. How come? Because the essence of everything and everyone is perfect and not limited or bad; it is joy, limitless freedom, freedom from suffering.

When someone makes a mistake, it is a Tibetan custom to say, “That’s the human nature.” It’s not true. The nature of humans or humanity and of everything is perfect, not faulty, not corrupt, not negative. We can never find negativity or evil in anyone on the ultimate level. We find lots of negativity and evil on the relative level, though. For example, there is pain and suffering on the relative level of existence, but it’s impossible for there to be pain and suffering on the primordial, ultimate level. So this way, the point is realizing happiness and emptiness inseparable. We, as simple and not enlightened practitioners, can find happiness and emptiness in union.

We are content when we are able to say, “What I am is what I am. What I have is what I have. I’m going to do everything I can with what I am and with what I have. I’m not going to bother

about what I am not and with what I don't have." When we are able to be like that, then all chapters of our life are closed, except one, the chapter of peace, harmony, contentment. Otherwise we have so many chapters, chapters of greed, chapters of ambition, chapters of jealousy, chapters of competition, all kinds of chapters. It's a matter of simply going from contentment and determination to the higher state of transforming happiness and joy into the state of stainless, primordial, non-duality. Otherwise, our life consists of eating good food, going to nice places on holidays, having a nice home, all those kinds of things. But such things will not give us primordial, non-dualistic joy that will lead us to realization. They won't. We want to reach stainless, non-dualistic, primordial joy - joy and emptiness inseparable. Let me give an example.



Let us look at the Buddha Maitreya statue with a pure and open heart. The Buddha Maitreya statue is consecrated, is not a person, does not talk, and doesn't expect anything from us, therefore we don't expect anything from him. The statue is blessed. He is always peaceful. He always smiles, and so we can have a pure and genuine blessing of joy and compassion by looking at him. If we look at our joy, it is emptiness. But it's not just nothing. It's very much there. We feel happy. We feel content. We feel harmony. So, this is one example of joy and emptiness inseparable.

The fourth initiation is called *tshig-kyi-dbang*, 'sacred word empowerment.' It's the transmission of the ultimate essence. It isn't transmitted through joy or through anything, but is the transmission of directly realizing the essence itself. This happens. Of course, it should happen in a most appropriate, most positive environment. But sometimes it happens in a quite forceful way. I will tell you the story of Shri Tilopa and Naropa.

Naropa was more than a worthy disciple of Tilopa, who was already an enlightened great master when they met. Naropa followed Tilopa for many years and to many places. Tilopa didn't seem to be transmitting the final teaching to Naropa. It looked like he was avoiding Naropa, giving him a very hard time. There were twelve major tasks that Naropa had to go

through. For instance, one day Naropa was following Tilopa, finally caught up with him, and asked him to impart the most decisive transmission. Unfortunately, or fortunately, it took place on a canyon cliff. Tilopa told Naropa, "Okay, I'll teach you, but first you have to jump off this cliff." Without hesitating a moment, Naropa jumped off the cliff and landed at the bottom of the canyon. Most of his bones were broken, so he was in complete agony. A long time afterwards, Tilopa came, looked at his disciple, and asked him, "Are you in pain?" Of course Naropa was honest with his Guru and told him, "It hurts so much. I think I'm dying." Tilopa responded, "Okay," put his hand on Naropa's head, and Naropa recovered completely. He had no broken bones anymore, not even a scratch, and everything was fine. Then Tilopa walked away. Naropa had to chase after him again.

Those of you who consider me your Guru should know that you don't have to worry that I will ask you to jump off a cliff. But I want to warn you that if for any reason I tell you to jump off a cliff, please don't do it. I'm telling you in advance, because if I lose my mind, I might ask that of you. Just because Tilopa could heal Naropa by merely touching his head, I guarantee you that I won't be able to fix your bones. We would have to call an ambulance, and it would be very hard to get one at the bottom of a cliff. Therefore, if I ever tell you to jump from a cliff, don't, okay. But if I tell you to practice the Dharma seriously, then you should do so. It won't break your bones. It will break your ego. It will break your jealousy. It will break your attachment, but it won't break your bones.

The final transmission that Tilopa gave Naropa took place in a very dramatic way. Naropa chased his beloved Guru to all different parts of India. Finally Naropa caught up with him and requested transmission. Tilopa reacted with rage and showed a fit of bad temper. He took off his sandal and hit Naropa's chin, knocking him unconscious. When Naropa gained consciousness, he was enlightened. That's what it took for Naropa to attain realization of his mind's true nature – a very big blow on this chin with Tilopa's sandal. So, that's what it is.

I want to tell you something I experienced. It's very interesting, because it shows that people hear differently. One day one very sincere disciple came to me with a dead fish. He asked me to hit him on his chin with the fish and make him enlightened. I wondered and asked him, "What are you saying? Are you making fun of me?" He answered, "No. Once in this center you told the story that Tilopa had hit Naropa on the chin with a fish and Naropa got enlightened." I told this disciple, "My dear friend, it wasn't a fish. It was a sandal." The disciple insisted, "No! You said it was a fish!" He couldn't admit that he'd heard wrong. So, different people hear different things, you know.

Anyway, that was the event that caused Naropa to attain realization. But it wasn't the blessing of the sandal. There are so many sandals out there; everyone has a pair. You won't get enlightened by being hit in your face with them. But between a master like Tilopa and a disciple like Naropa, it happened at that particular time.

It's very inspiring for all of us, for me at least. I don't think we can really understand that the last step to the state of enlightenment doesn't have to be like that of Shri Naropa. But it can be like that. Prince Siddhartha showed us that it doesn't have to be like that when he attained enlightenment under the Bodhitree by himself. He was meditating in the evening, was challenged by the maras, and, shortly after dawn early the next morning, he attained enlightenment, relatively speaking. I say "relatively speaking" because ultimately all of us are Buddha, including Prince Siddhartha. But on the relative level, he became Buddha at the dawn of that day. And we will become Buddha whenever it will be.

## The Discipline of Debates

There are many schools of philosophy in Buddhism. If we look at each philosophical tradition in an unsophisticated way, we will think that they are all different. We will find that they are all correct if we studied and understood them well and if we are mature. I will speak about the philosophical traditions briefly.

Scholars belonging to a specific philosophical tradition say that phenomena have no true existence. Others teach that the essence of every phenomenon is ineffable and immeasurable. Followers of other traditions say that if we have awareness and conduct ourselves with awareness, then everything we do will be spiritual practice. Some traditions teach that such-and-such activities are non-virtuous and therefore negative and such-and-such activities are virtuous and therefore positive. They speak about positive and negative, like black and white, and say, “This is black and that is white. This is paper and that is ink.”

All Buddhist philosophical schools are right if we understand them correctly. For example, it's wonderful when someone teaches that everything is practice when acting with awareness, because we are what we are aware of - awareness of mind as the Dharmakaya, awareness of speech and movements as the Sambhogakaya, awareness of our body as the Nirmanakaya, and awareness of our surroundings as the mandala of the Buddha. They teach that if we have such awareness, then everything is a practice and is like a *Ganachakra*, *tshogs-kyi-'khor-lo*, ‘a feast offering.’ If we have such awareness, everything we say will be like speaking a prayer and anything we think will be like meditating. Having such awareness of body, speech, and mind is Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya. So, this is a very sacred view, a very sacred understanding, and a very sacred practice, but it's terrible if we get it wrong. Let me give an example of how terrible it is to misinterpret the sacred view and to practice wrongly as a result. The example is: A hunter will be very attentive and aware when he is hunting a deer and will approach it slowly and quietly to not startle and scare it away. He will aim his weapon very carefully at the deer, making sure the deer is dead when he shoots it. So, the hunter is very aware, but it isn't good – it's very bad.

When it is taught that everything is practice by being aware, we have to clearly know what is good so that we don't do anything bad and hurt others. The same with good and bad karma. It's very good to know that ultimately there's no such thing as good and bad karma, but relatively there is, i.e., as long as we are dualistic and can't differentiate the ultimate and relative truths, we have to be very mindful and aware of what we do. It doesn't mean that anything good we do is ultimately good and anything bad we do is ultimately bad. Should that be the case, we'd be finished and would never reach Buddhahood. Why? We brush our teeth every morning, and we all know very well that this means killing many germs. How many lives did we take when we brushed our teeth once? Tens of thousands of germs. We have to die one time as a result of having killed one germ. How will we be able to purify such negative karma if it is ultimate? How will we reach Buddhahood and become enlightened if we don't purify our negative karma and accumulate positive karma?

Even though nothing happens ultimately, relatively it does. So we should do our best to not engage in non-virtuous activities and thus accumulate negative karma and to engage in beneficial activities and thus accumulate positive karma. At the same time, it's most important to overcome duality, which is only possible by practicing meditation. This is how we purify ourselves of negative karma and accumulate merit. Therefore, meditating on the true nature of the mind, which has the same essence as everything, has two philosophical sides to it.

It's also good and correct for a philosophical school to teach that there is no thing that truly exists. When we really understand that all things are empty of inherent existence, we will know that relatively not even our mind truly exists. By understanding that nothing truly exists, we know the meaning of selflessness and emptiness. But, if we misunderstand and think that there is nothing when there is something, then that is having a nihilistic view. Emptiness refers to how things are, namely, empty of inherent existence, and doesn't mean that things that are there don't exist. The essence of all things is emptiness, which is what lacking true existence means. Getting it right is having a correct philosophy; getting it wrong is having a nihilistic philosophy. So, it's important to get it right.

It's also very important to clearly understand the sacred view that the essence of our mind is the essence of everything and that the true nature of our mind is the Buddha nature. While its essence is emptiness, metaphors that illustrate our mind's nature are: It's as vast as the vast expanse of space, as deep as the deep ocean, as stable as a stable mountain, as unfathomable as wind, as all-pervasive as air, and as powerful as the blazing sun. When we realize the essence and nature of our mind, we will have attained Buddhahood, and that is good. But if we misunderstand and think that our mind exists in a dualistic way, then that's having an eternalistic view. Believing in either nihilism or in eternalism makes it impossible to progress. Both philosophical views are wrong. Therefore, it's very good to understand both philosophies clearly and correctly, and it's not good if we don't.

There are many Tibetan books that elucidate each philosophy. We also have the custom of engaging in debates. During the official debates, called "Guncho," in a very pleasant environment and in a very supportive way, students debate with one another. Each party tries to prove that their philosophical view is superior. This is a very common practice. The debates aren't held to belittle others' philosophies or to show that they are wrong and we are right. No. Debates are a method to clarify that our view is correct. That's all.

In order to really know and be convinced that our view is better than the views of everyone else, we have to know, in the depths of our being, that our philosophy is right and that it is wrong if we got it wrong. If we see that we are mistaken, then we should wish to clarify this and win the right view. That's why other philosophies are helpful, and that's the reason we engage in debates.

Debating in Vajrayana Buddhism or Buddhism in general is one of the nine noble disciplines. Debating is having a debate and isn't having an argument. I saw that our word for "debating" is translated in many books as 'arguing.' I saw it written that our discipline of debating means someone will argue with somebody else about their philosophy. That's wrong. The term should be "debate." It means that we understand other philosophies and respect people who have other views and think differently than we do. Debates are carried out to clarify our own view and to understand our philosophy better and correctly. Debates are held with respect, with the sacred outlook of others, and don't mean being against other people's views and ideas. It's very important to appreciate and acknowledge that all philosophies are correct in their own way, which is only possible if we understand them correctly and if we know that it's wrong to misinterpret and to think of them wrongly.

### **Vegatarianism**

Some people who are participating in the empowerments of *The Rinchen Terdzö* and those who are sponsoring the meals for monks, nuns, and Dharma practitioners during this event might be wondering why meat isn't being served.

Actually, ever since the Eighth Tai Situ established Palpung Chökhör Ling Monastery in East Tibet more than 300 years ago, meals of our Lineage monks have been cooked in the main kitchen there. In Tibet, monks and nuns aren't served food every day, as is the case in India. A daily meal is only provided to everyone during the Pujas and during the large religious gatherings, which last for weeks or months. Otherwise, family members or participants have to make provisions. The Eighth Tai Situ made the rule that no meat may be cooked in the kitchen of Palpung Monastery. I wasn't able to implement this rule at Sherab Ling Monastery satisfactorily up to this year. Now we are continuing this tradition. We have two main kitchens at Sherab Ling Monastery, one for students of the Shedra and one for the members of the Great Assembly. Starting August 4<sup>th</sup>, no meat will be cooked in the main kitchens. I'm only having this done because it's the tradition of the Eighth Tai Situ.

I'm not saying that people who eat meat are bad. And I'm not saying that eating vegetables doesn't cause bad karma. Of course, eating meat is very bad karma, because breathing animals are taken to a place and killed. Then people eat the dead animal's paws, legs, ribs, and every piece of the killed animal. This goes for every creature. Big birds eat small birds. Tigers eat deer. Animals eat each other. Regardless of whether it's natural or not, it's crude to eat meat and is bad karma.

But we shouldn't ignore the fact that eating vegetables and rice also creates bad karma. I know about these things for two reasons. Firstly, my parents and ancestors were farmers. Secondly, I grew up in Sikkim where everybody farms. I saw that many insects were killed in the rice fields and that one bowl of rice made for one bowl of killed insects, if not more. I'm not exaggerating when I say that one bowl full of insects are killed while one bowl full of rice is won. That's possible.

In the old days, there were vegetables called "insecticides." Nowadays, scientists have invented new insecticides. The insects who consume them die from the inside, while the vegetables aren't harmed. This is very bad, but we do it. We have to eat something, otherwise we will be dead. So this way, eating vegetables and rice is also accumulating bad karma. I'm not telling you to be vegetarian. That's up to you, and it's fine if you are and okay if you aren't. I'm also not saying that I'm vegetarian and am very good and you all should be vegetarian. I'm not saying that. But I respect vegetarians and vegetarianism, or whatever you call it. It's a good thing. But we shouldn't ignore the fact that millions of insects are killed when vegetables are grown and harvested.

We have to pray for all the insects and bugs that are killed so that we can eat vegetables. We have to pray for them, not pray to them, but pray for them. In any case, if I were an animal to be slaughtered and there were someone like the Buddha, or Shri Tilopa, or Shri Naropa who wanted to eat meat, I'd definitely want to be their food, not anybody else's who wouldn't appreciate my meat. The Buddha and the Mahasiddhas would at least pray for me if they had my meat for a meal and I would at least get their blessing. That's our age-old tradition.

### **The Long Life Blessing**

Having imparted *The Long Life Empowerment of Buddha Amitayus*, I want to speak about the meaning of a long life blessing and immortality. I want to do this because I feel that there is some sense of strange understanding of a long life blessing. For example, there is somebody who has lots of blessings and you beg and do all kinds of things to get the long life blessing from him and finally you get it. Or you think that I give you the blessing for one year, then for

three extra years, and then for twenty more years. You think that I can give you immortality. People have this sort of misperception. It's okay to think like this, but if you think about it very seriously, then you will see that it's terribly wrong. If you want to relate to the Lineage by receiving the blessing, then it's okay. Otherwise it's a corruption to think that somebody who has lots of power can give you extra years merely for the asking and just because you think you are special. Thinking that a long life blessing is like that, you would conclude that very rich people will live long, because they can buy extra years and poor people won't live long because they can't.

In my experience, many of the rich people that I knew lived much shorter than many of the poor people that I knew. Why? There can be many reasons, but one of the most common reasons is that people with lots of money eat whatever they want and don't work hard because they don't have to. As a result, their heart becomes covered with fat and they die an early death. This is the opposite of what the basic perception of blessings should be. Therefore I want to clarify this.

What is immortality? Ultimately, nobody was ever born and nobody ever died or dies. All of us are immortal. I'll give you a very simple example to understand this. Everyone sleeps every night and dreams almost every night. These days, many people have extra sleep by taking naps twice a day, not one time but two times a day. So, when they have regular midday naps two times a day, they dream two times a day. And in all of their dreams they go all over the place and go through many things. In their dreams, they were in the Amazon Forest and died from drinking too much rum-like liquor called "pinga"; they were in the Himalayas and were chased by yetis, and so forth. Did all of this happen? None of that happened. It was only a dream. This life is exactly like that. The only difference between dreams and this life is that this life lasts a little bit longer, maybe 50, maybe 80, or maybe 90 years. And a dream lasts an hour or maybe 3 hours. That's the only difference. When we die, it's exactly the same as waking up from a dream.

Immortality means reaching realization of the ultimate essence, the ultimate truth, the primordial wisdom - it is reaching beyond time. When we have reached beyond time, then we will have reached the deathless state. Immortality doesn't mean living forever. Do you want to live in this body forever with the eyes, with the things that you have? Definitely not. To live in this body for 10,000 years, my goodness, that would be very boring. If I had a choice, I'd want to change this body, but I don't have a choice, so I don't worry about it. Because I'm over ½ a century old, we all already are, the change will happen sooner than expected. So this way, you have to understand immortality and blessings very clearly.

What is a blessing? A blessing is the natural purification of all negative karma. By having pure devotion and genuine compassion, it will become the accumulation of merit. If a blessing is accompanied by sacred Dharma practice, "sacred" meaning in accordance with the Lineage, then it's a support for a diligent devotee to reach a certain level of realization, a certain level of maturity. That's what we call *byin-brlab*, 'blessing.' If it weren't like this and if it were possible for the Buddha to bestow immortality, Buddha Shakyamuni would be the most stressed person, because he vowed to liberate sentient beings as innumerable in number as space is vast in extent. How many sentient beings on Earth are praying to him? About 700 million Buddhists on Earth are presently praying to him. It will not only be stressful, but it will also get mixed up. Somebody from here asking for something, somebody from somewhere else asking for something, and in all the stress and confusion, people feel fine about it and think everything is okay. Lord Buddha is like all-pervading space and his loving compassion embraces everyone. His wisdom is primordial and pristine, therefore he is always

ever-present. His qualities are limitless, so his blessings are all-embracing, but devotees need to be open and ready to receive them correctly. I think you need to understand clearly what a long life blessing and immortality mean.

### ***bsKyed-rim and rdZogs-rim***

*bsKyed-rim* means ‘visualization,’ and *rdzogs-rim* means ‘the completion.’ What is the base for *bskyed-rim* and what is the base for *rdzogs-rim*? Why do we practice visualization? Why do we visualize Buddhas? Why do we visualize deities? Why do we visualize and repeat mantras? Why do we do that? It’s very simple.

We’ve been visualizing during all our countless lifetimes. We’ve engaged in the completion stage during the countless times we died. And where did it get us? Here. Where will it take us? It depends, but it keeps us in samsara. *Samsara* means ‘going around in circles.’ There are many kinds of circles. One is vertical and rotates up and down. One is horizontal and rolls around and around. We are on both levels of samsara. Sometimes we are born as a god. When that karma is finished, we are born in hell. When that karma is finished, we are born as a jealous god. Sometimes we circle around horizontally and are born as a human being who is intelligent. Sometimes we are born as a human who isn’t so smart. Sometimes we are born as a human who isn’t kind. Sometimes we are born as a human who is happy. Sometimes we are born as a human who isn’t happy. We take birth in a great variety of existences in the never-ending circle of samsara.

Prince Siddhartha, who became the Buddha, did not invent visualizations that we practice. They are the compassionate expression of his realization and manifest in five forms of enlightenment. These five forms of a Buddha are our transformed five defilements. We are filled with the five defilements (ignorance, attachment, aggression, jealousy, and ego pride). When they are transformed, they are five wisdoms. And those five wisdoms pertain to all visualizations that the Buddha manifested for the benefit of sentient beings. Whether we visualize a single deity or a thousand deities, the five Buddha families and their respective five wisdoms are always included.

Since the visualizations that we practice aren’t an intelligent fabrication that Prince Siddhartha invented but are the compassionate manifestation of his realization, we have his unbroken Lineage of transmissions and blessings that we appreciate and know are real. They aren’t an imagination. My definition of “real” and “imagined”: the imagined is deplete of blessings; the real is replete with his blessings. That’s what I mean.

Visualizations also have to be transformed. We don’t want to turn into visualization champions. What does it matter if we do? Actually, we can’t keep on visualizing forever and shouldn’t hold on to visualizations. They also have to end. Therefore, in order to reach perfect Buddhahood, we engage in *rdzogs-rim*, the ‘completion stage.’ We are practicing so that we don’t remain practitioners and don’t need to practice for all times. This is the purpose of the completion stage, which consists of four points. I’m not sure how efficient my translations of the four Tibetan terms of the four points are, but I’ll do my best.

The first quality of having perfected *rdzogs-rim* that is mentioned in *The Rinchen Terdzö* is that a practitioner is totally relaxed. But what does it mean to be relaxed? In order to know what makes us relaxed, we have to know what makes us un-relaxed. As it is, we are bundled together and thus bound by duality, resembling a hay stack held together tightly with a rope. When the rope of duality has been cut, then the stalks fall to the ground and just lay there

naturally. Being relaxed is like that. We have to become free of duality in order to be relaxed. This is the first point.

The second point is that there is nothing to meditate and there is nobody meditating, therefore it's the quality of being ordinary, i.e., it's the sacred, ordinary state of being. If we are able to have the two qualities of being relaxed and ordinary, then the third completion comes naturally. It is termed "primordial," which means uncontaminated, unpolluted, not altered. If we have these qualities, then we are perfect. In fact, being ordinary, everything is perfect in the ultimate, primordial state of being. The fourth quality is being fresh. It means not having thoughts. This doesn't mean being neutral or spaced-out. When we have thoughts concerning virtue and non-virtue, we aren't being neutral, rather indifferent about what we think is good and bad. What, then, is "fresh"? It's the state of having transcended and of being beyond perception and time, which is the union of everything. That is what fresh means in this context. By cultivating and maintaining these four qualities, we get closer and closer to recognizing and realizing the essence of our mind, the essence of phenomena, the essence of everything - the essence of a Buddha.

There isn't one single word in our vocabulary that can adequately describe incomparable realization. The term shouldn't be restricted to limitations, and it would need to be most comprehensive, most all-pervasive, and, leaving no hint that could imply exclusion, it would need to be all-inclusive. I don't know a suitable word that fully does justice to all these qualities. But I think that the four terms that describe perfection of *rdzogs-rim* are simple and very profound, which is why I thought it would be beneficial to share them with you.

Finally, no matter what happens, relatively things occur, but ultimately nothing occurs. Where is the threshold from the relative to the ultimate? Where is the thin line? Any line is drawn from a dualistic vantage-point and is relative. Being non-dualistic is ultimate. Yet, we don't become non-dualistic by knocking our head against a wall. If we do that, we will black-out.

I had a very funny experience when I was just beginning here, which was about 30 years ago. Lots of Europeans, New Zealanders, Australians, and people from Oceania visited me. Of course, Australians don't want to think that they belong to Oceania and say that their country is another continent. When it's said that the world consists of seven continents, then Australia is counted as one continent and Oceania as another. Anyway, many people from other continents came here. One man told me that he had learned from some Buddhist master, who said: "The source of all the suffering in samsara is the 'I,' the 'self.'" So, this man took the vow never to say the words "I, me, mine." You know, it was really hard to communicate with him, because he refused saying, "I'm going to Dharamsala," or "I want something," etc. He never used the word "I." I think he became a little bit mentally disturbed in the end. That's not how to overcome duality. Simply not saying "I" will actually make it more "I," because you always have to remember: "I'm not supposed to say 'I.'" It becomes three "I's": "I'm thinking that I'm not supposed to say 'I.'" So, even though you don't say it, in your mind you are saying it three times every time you don't. Therefore it becomes worse.

We can't become non-dualistic by wanting to be non-dualistic. We become non-dualistic by accumulating merit. We become non-dualistic by purifying our defilements. We become non-dualistic by meditating. We become non-dualistic by becoming one with the deity that we visualize through the practice of *skyed-rim*. We become non-dualistic by perfecting the four qualities that arise from practicing *rdzog-rims*. We become non-dualistic by meditating on the nature of mind. We become non-dualistic by beginning to give up things that make us more dualistic and by adopting things that diminish our duality. For example, developing

compassion for all sentient beings weakens our dualistic perceptions of a self in opposition to others. Developing devotion for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas weakens our dualistic perceptions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as opposed to us. These are the ways we take many baby-steps so that our steps will become elephant-steps. In the end, it will be a primordial-step.

### **The Ultimate Bodhicitta Vow**

The basic Bodhisattva vow consists of two aspects. One is Bodhicitta of aspiration and the other is Bodhicitta of application. In *The Rinchen Terdzö*, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche presented a third aspect, which is the ultimate Bodhicitta vow. It is described in the verse:

*“I and countless sentient beings,  
since primordial time, have always and ever been Buddha.  
Knowing that the ultimate essence of all sentient beings is primordial Buddha –  
This is ultimate Bodhicitta.”*

### **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 all living beings become Dharmakaya Buddhas.

May the Glorious Lamas and Khenpos live long.  
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as countless in number as space is vast in extent.  
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,  
May all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of Buddhahood.



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