

THE HEART SUTRA
THE BEST METHOD
FOR ENDING
SUFFERING AND
ITS CAUSES

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CONTENTS

1. <i>The Heart Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom</i>	4
2. The Setting and Structure of <i>The Heart Sutra</i>	8
3. Understanding Karma, an Example of Dependent Arising	11
4. Understanding Attachment, the Main Voice of Ego-Grasping	37
5. How Ignorance Grasps at the I	49
6. You Cannot Find the I Anywhere	59
7. Bodhichitta Is the Best Medicine	73
8. Dedicate in Emptiness	84

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Painting of Lord Buddha by Jane Seidlitz.

1. THE HEART SUTRA OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

Homage to the Holy Perfection of Wisdom!

COMMON PROLOGUE

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.

SPECIAL PROLOGUE

At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called “Profound Perception”.

BUDDHA BLESSES THE MINDS OF SHARIPUTRA AND AVALOKITESHVARA

Also, at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.

SHARIPUTRA’S QUESTION

Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara:

“How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?”

AVALOKITESHVARA’S BRIEF ANSWER

He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Sharadvatiputra.

“Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom should look upon it like this, correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.

AVALOKITESHEVARA’S EXTENSIVE ANSWER

“Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.

“In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness are empty.

“Shariputra, likewise, all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled.

“Shariputra, therefore, in emptiness there is

THE FIVE AGGREGATES

“No form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness;

THE SIX SENSE CONSCIOUSNESSES

“No eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind;

THE OBJECTS OF THE SIX SENSE CONSCIOUSNESSES

“No visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon.

THE SIX SENSE BASES

“There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element.

THE TWELVE LINKS

“There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

“Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path;

“There is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.

“Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana.

“All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awoken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.

THE MANTRA OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

“Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared:

TAYATA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA

[TAYATA OM GO! GO! GO EYOND! GO PERFECTLY BEYOND! GO TO ENLIGHTENMENT! SVAHA]

“Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that”.

BUDDHA’S APPROVAL

Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: “Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice”.

EVERYONE REJOICES IN THE BUDDHA’S WORDS

The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Sharadvatiputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan.

This completes the Ārya-bhagavatī-prajñâpâramitâ-hridaya-sûtra.

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2. THE SETTING AND STRUCTURE OF THE HEART SUTRA

KHENSUR RINPOCHE JAMPA TEGCHOK

The prologue to *The Heart Sutra* is called “a basis for the discussion”, meaning the background or setting for the sutra. For example, in the case of some of the monastic precepts there is an explanation about how a particular precept came to be given. This can include a description of how a certain monk made a mistake and how, when the Buddha came to know of this he said, “This is something that the monks and nuns should not do.” From that point on the monks and nuns had to follow that precept. The background to how and why it came about is called the *ling.shi* or prologue.

COMMON PROLOGUE

The prologue to this sutra begins with: “Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.” This is the common prologue.

SPECIAL PROLOGUE

The next two lines form the special prologue, “At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called profound perception.”

The common prologue describes how the Buddha was sitting with a great community of monks and bodhisattvas. The special prologue, that he was absorbed in a concentration called profound perception, means that the Buddha was himself reflecting or meditating on emptiness.

BUDDHA BLESSES THE MINDS OF SHARIPUTRA AND AVALOKITESHVARA

Meanwhile the bodhisattva, the great being, the noble Avalokiteshvara was contemplating the profound discipline of the perfection of wisdom. He came to see that the five aggregates were empty of any inherent nature of their own. The Buddha meditates on emptiness and throughout most of the rest of the sutra, starting from “Then, through the power of Buddha”, the Buddha blesses and causes a change to occur in the mental continuum of two of his disciples, Avalokiteshvara (Tib. Chenrezig) and Shariputra. He blesses their continuums so that Shariputra asks Avalokiteshvara a question. The rest of the text is Avalokiteshvara’s answer.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF BUDDHA’S TEACHING

The blessed word Both question and the answer arise through the blessing of the Buddha and are called the holy word of the Buddha. There are different types of word or teaching of the Buddha, and one is called “the holy word that comes through the blessing of the Buddha” or “the blessed word”. Although spoken by Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara, with the question coming from Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara giving the answer, it is still referred to as the Buddha’s word. Specifically, in this case it is the Buddha’s word that comes through his blessing these two beings.

Buddha’s own words The words at the very end of the sutra – “Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice” – are Buddha’s holy words spoken from his own mouth.

TO SUMMARIZE

Although more detail is possible, this gives a rough idea of the structure.

To recap, a question comes from Shariputra followed by Avalokiteshvara's answer, and both are the word of the Buddha called the "blessed word". Later where the Buddha says, "Well said, well said", he confirms that what Avalokiteshvara said about emptiness is absolutely faultless. That is also the Buddha's word, specifically that spoken by the Buddha.

Thus there are three sections. In brief, *The Heart Sutra* has three points: 1. the question from Shariputra, 2. the answer from Avalokiteshvara, and, finally, 3. the Buddha's approval.

Taught by Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok at FPMT's Saraswati Buddhist Group, Somerset, England, August 2007. Edited by Andy Wistreich; with some changes by Robina Courtin, including the headings.

3. UNDERSTANDING KARMA, AN EXAMPLE OF DEPENDENT ARISING

VEN. ROBINA COURTIN

Buddha says that we all have the potential to be free of suffering and its causes. If that's true, we need to know what suffering is so we can identify it, and what the causes are so we can stop them. Pretty reasonable.

We know very well when we make tables, thermoses, grow gardens, become a pianist, we need to be very precise, define our terms. You don't just cross your fingers and hope for the best. We need to have very clear techniques and logical procedures, much discipline and practice. For the Buddha, it's same when it comes to understand suffering, its causes, the mind, etc.: we need the same precision and clarity and depth of analysis, rigour and discipline.

WHAT IS SUFFERING?

What does Buddha mean by "suffering"? This is the First Noble Truth. There are three levels of suffering. The Suffering of Suffering, which is when the bad things happen, basically, which is exactly what we don't want. The second kind of suffering, called the Suffering of Change, which, depressingly enough, is what we refer to as happiness and which is basically when we get what we want. The third is known as All-Pervasive Suffering.

THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING

In order to really understand them, we need to look at them in the context of the Second Noble Truth, the causes of our suffering. There are two: karma, the law of cause and effect, and delusions.

We can see in the materialist world that we are geniuses at understanding the laws of cause and effect. What is the cause of a table, a rose, a computer? We're brilliant at this, we know the laws, and so we can get a table every time. We know the laws of botany, so we can do incredible things with botany. The more we know those laws, the more we can manipulate them to get what we want. We understand this.

But when it comes to happiness and suffering, it seems we haven't got a clue. Check your own life. You know that if you know the laws of botany you can tell someone exactly how to get a rose, and you'll get a rose every time. But what are the causes of a moment happiness?

Our life proves that we don't understand the laws of cause and effect in relation to happiness and suffering: no matter how hard we try we can't seem to sustain our happiness and avoid the suffering. Which implies we haven't got the causes right yet.

Believers in a creator religion have their answer: happiness is what you get when you go to heaven with God. Let's look at what Buddha says. He agrees that cause and effect is the law that runs the show – gardens, architecture, computers, and happiness and suffering. What he's saying is, though, when it comes suffering and happiness we don't only not know the real causes, we actually believe the wrong ones.

So if François gives me a punch in the nose, you ask, "What's wrong Robina? What caused your suffering?" As far as I'm concerned, there's only one cause and that's François.

Well, Buddha's saying, "Yes, I saw that, you're right, but you're completely exaggerating his role". You can't deny that he plays a role in Robina's scenario of suffering, but there's no way he's the main one – it's exaggerated.

Now let's say that I play the piano well and François is my teacher. "Why are you so good at piano, Robina?"

"It's François' fault because he taught me". Now that's exaggerated, it's not the whole story. Mr. Steinway plays a huge

role here – without a piano how can I play the piano? And how kind of Mr. Bach to write the music so I could learn it and play it – he plays a big role.

For the Buddha, yes, there are many conditions that have to come together for me to play music: Bach, the piano, the teacher, in just the same way that many conditions have to come together to produce a rose: the soil, the water, the air, the sun.

But we all know that the main cause of me playing the piano is my potential and my hard work, and the main cause of the rose is the rose seed. We are proud and honoured to own the ability to play this music.

Same with suffering, Buddha says. My past action, my past karma, compelled by our delusions, is the main cause for that punch; François, the punch itself, are secondary causes. The view of ego is that we are innocent victims. “I didn’t ask to get born”; this instinctive view that it’s not my fault.

“Why are you happy, Robina?” Same thing: “It’s François’ fault. He was kind to me”.

The view of the ego is to dump all the responsibility on something outside ourselves. The Buddha is saying that this is irrational, unrealistic, it’s not the whole story.

Given that there are many factors that have to come together to produce happiness or suffering, he brings it to two main ones: the main causes.

TWO MAIN CAUSES OF SUFFERING: KARMA AND DELUSIONS

The first is called karma and the second is called delusion. Simply speaking, given that his consciousness is a continuity that goes back and back and back, and so is mine, we have some history together. That’s how come we’ve bumped into each other now. And the fact that he punches me is an indication that, two and a half lives ago or whatever, I had done something similar to him.

Same with the good experiences. There's no way we could just bump into each other if we didn't have a history. There's no way you couldn't be kind to me if I hadn't been kind to him. There's no way I could have harmed him if he hadn't harmed me.

If I look at my garden, and I see a weed and flower, I know logically, whether I remember it or not, there must have been a seed there. Karma is a Sanskrit word that means action. It has this dynamic meaning of implying a reaction. Cause – effect, action – reaction, seed – fruit. Buddha would say that karma is a natural law that occurs in every mind, is done by mind, and is the basis for all happiness and suffering.

Every split second of every thought and every action of body and speech is a karma. It is an action that necessarily leaves a seed in that consciousness that will necessarily ripen in the future in that consciousness as the experience. If we look into our present life, every split second of every experience, internally and externally, is necessarily the fruit of seeds we have planted in our mind in the past. This is a natural law. The Buddha didn't create it, it just occurs. And he, like any other scientist, has by his observation found it to be so – this is how it is. It's not punishment, it's not reward, no one does it to us, no one is up there pulling the strings; there is no punisher and no rewarder, not for the Buddha. This is what the Buddha says.

I AM MY OWN CREATOR

The point the Buddha is making is that the main cause of our own being, our tendencies, of what happens to us or how we interact with our environment, is the seeds we planted in our mind in the past.

This is fundamentally different from our materialist view. It takes some thinking about it to fit it into our minds. Crucially, of course, (it's important) to see the experiential implications finally in our day to day life; as far as practice goes, the experiential implications are that we give up attachment, give up anger, give

up blame, give up hopelessness, give up low self-esteem and know that we can change and can become perfect. Our views now of anger and attachment and fear and wars and depression and all the ups and downs are all the voices of ego – jealousy, pride, wars, violence, divorce, blah, blah, blah. The Buddha says that they're all fundamentally misconceptions, wrong views, mistaken philosophies.

Karma is the law that the Buddha says runs everything. Who does the karma, who creates it? What creates karma is minds. That's us – each of us individually. You could really say that Buddha is saying that each of us is the creator of our own lives, our own happiness, our own suffering, etc. So clearly the experiential implication of this is amazing. I can change – it's up to me.

So here I am walking through life thinking that someone else made me, I'm an innocent victim, didn't ask to be born. I've never met François before and out of the blue he punches me in the nose. What am I supposed to think? Of course, I'm going to get angry. Who does he think he is? I'm allowed to get angry. So I punch him back – sue him, divorce him, kill him – whatever I like.

It's the same with happiness. I'm just walking along, an innocent victim, I didn't ask to be born, not my fault. He comes along and he's kind to me. Of course I'm going to grasp at it. I'm going to smile back at him, be kind back, pat him on the back and give him things.

Just this point is so powerful. If it is true that my mother really did make me, how can I change? And if I can change, which we all know we can, even if we do believe our mother made us, it argues with that fact. Where did my personality come from if my mother made me? Where did it begin? I mean, this is why we're so confused in the West.

WHAT DEFINES AN ACTIONS AS NEGATIVE?

Let's keep running with Buddha's view. Let's look at what a positive and a negative state of mind are. What makes them that? This is a very interesting point.

I remember asking a Catholic friend, a Jesuit priest: "What is it that defines something as a sin, a negative action?" He said, "That which goes against the will of God". Now that makes sense if God created me – completely reasonable. Obviously not the Buddha's view . . .

So like when you're a child, and your mother says, "Don't come near the fire". And probably, because we're a little smarty pants, we'll probably say, "Why not?" She would say, "Because I say so". Now that's good enough for a child, however, if at the age of sixty-three, you would think I have a mental problem if I don't go near the fire because my mother said so. Eventually my mother would want me to discover that the real reason she doesn't want me to go near the fire is because it would harm me.

Now we can see how we misuse this philosophy – I'm not blaming Christian philosophy. It's the view of guilt and blame. So we get guilty when we do a bad thing – God will punish us, mummy will punish us, or we give the blame to someone else. The Buddha says that when you realize that lying, stealing and killing would harm you, you don't do it any longer. Who would want to?

But the most basic level of what it is that defines something as good and bad is that a bad action is what harms another and a good action is one that helps another.

Like junior school level of practices, zip your lip and keep your hands to yourself – don't harm others. The first level of practice and it's good enough – the world would be a blissful place if we did this. And as the Kadampa Lamas say, "When you're with others, watch your body and speech. Watch your behaviour". Just like your grandmother tells you.

So when you're on your own, you watch your mind. The first level of practice – there's no great philosophizing here. Use your common sense, do your market research, and you'll find out that others don't like being killed, don't like being lied to, don't like being stolen from, abused with speech, being gossiped about – so refrain from those things.

At this very first level of practice, a negative action is one that harms another but the main reason you don't do it is for your own sake.

There's this nice analogy in Buddhism – a bird needs two wings, a wisdom wing and a compassion wing. Junior school and high school level of practice is the wisdom wing. The compassion wing is the ability to benefit others, that's university; and then there's even post-graduate: tantra.

The crucial thing about the wisdom wing is to begin to get mature enough and develop enough self-respect to see that lying and killing and stealing and bad-mouthing and anger and jealousy and depression harm myself. We can see that by looking at the world that we're totally lacking in this. It shows an unbelievable lack of intelligence. We know so well that if I eat that food, I'll get sick. We've got intelligence when it comes to this. In other words, we understand very well out of self-respect that there are consequences to certain actions. But with laws of morality– “I'm allowed to be angry! It's his fault!” Listen to how insane that is.

It's sort of like, he put a knife in my heart and someone suggests, “Robina, you should take the knife out! It's causing you suffering”. “Why should I – he put it there!!” That's how we think now – our anger, our jealousy, our depression, our blaming, our raging, our killing, our stealing – we're allowed to have these things because someone harmed me – we think it's good. It's totally insane! This is the behaviour of ego. The irony of ego is a self-hating person. Our own neuroses abuse us. We're not talking

about the future yet, we're talking about right now. Observe a person who is really angry.

It's clear we're having a mental breakdown, but because in our mind we so believe the philosophy that he did it to me, we do not notice that the having of that anger itself is a nightmare. This is the samsaric view. As Lama Yeshe puts it, "We're schizophrenic, so cut off from ourselves and our own experiences that we cannot see this evident fact". And it's reinforced by these other beliefs – I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, someone else did it. Look at us, talk about victims – and this is reinforced by your belief that it's all the brain. It's not my fault – it's the chemicals, my parents, it's George Bush, the Catholic nuns. Listen to how we talk. This is the philosophy of the world, we say it as scientific fact.

There are two main characteristics that the negative mind possesses, and these are indicated by the two terms that are synonyms for the negative states of mind – disturbing emotions. Look at it – anger, jealousy, low self-esteem: unbearable pain. Because of the schizophrenic philosophy we have, we cannot see that these emotions are the cause of our sufferings. This alone is already outrageous.

None of this denies that he did in fact punch me, or that there's a war in Syria. This is not denying it. But with this dualistic view we have of the world, we think, "Of course I'm angry – he punched me". We see it as a direct relationship between these two things and that it's healthy to be angry. So we fiercely support our right to be angry.

Well, that's interesting. He punched me because he was angry. So my response should be, "Well done François, thank you very much, you have the right to be angry!" You go to any therapist on this earth and you tell them you want a method to get rid of all anger, all jealousy, all attachment, all pride, they will tell you're insane, they will give you a pill and they'll lock you up.

So we know that these experiences are painful, just do your market research. We are dying to find methods to stop doing those things. At the same time we fiercely defend our right to have them and claim they're normal and healthy.

You can't have both ways. You've got to make a decision.

So if you make the decision that it's healthy and normal, then you should rejoice when he gets angry with you. That's perfect logic. But we clearly don't. So we need to look freshly at why we think anger is so bad. If he is wrong to be angry with me, then I'm wrong to be angry with him. We've got to be consistent.

The first point I'm making here: the Buddha is saying that a negative action has got nothing to do with the fact that he exhorts us not to do it. It's a natural law. If you observe the world, it's evident that people don't like being lied to, killed, harmed; that's enough to say it's a negative action. That gives you a check list of what to avoid doing.

In the first phase of practice, the reason to cultivate this is out of self-respect. Begin to develop the recognition that there are consequences to you of lying, stealing, killing, etc. etc. That would mean, the experience right now, learning to see how that is suffering in itself, but the main one, is the long term result, each split second of what you say, do and think leaves a seed in your mind that will ripen in the future in this very consciousness as your own experiences similar to those seeds. So harming others causes suffering in the future. Why others are suffering at the hands of you is because they harmed you in the past.

Look at the world – all the people being harmed – bombed, killed, raped, just necessarily the fruit of their actions similar to that. It's not punishment and no one is doing it to us. Buddha says this is a natural law.

So for all the happiness too – right now, we're sitting in this room relatively peaceful except for my loud words. With reasonably healthy bodies, pleasing environment, people are being kind to us. This is the result of unbelievable virtue. But it's

kind of interesting – we agonise – why do bad things happen to me. But we never agonise about why good things happen to me. Just give me more. It’s my human right. But the bad stuff, excuse me, that’s not my human right. Well, that’s not consistent either. The laws of botany apply to flowers and weeds. If you’re happy to own the flowers, you better be happy to own the weeds as well. But we only think about the bad things when we think of karma, like a big stick to beat ourselves with. Again, that’s just the deluded ego talking, a misconception.

The thing we’re saying here is that in general we’re describing (what is) negative and that’s a good enough reason not to do it – don’t harm others. I mean the rats and the cockroaches and the world will thank you. But the reason to cultivate this is that you don’t want that kind of suffering in the future, not to mention the pain in your heart right now.

I remember years ago, some of the people we work with in prison on Death Row in Kentucky, one of the guys there who was Catholic – he told me that this old Catholic guy comes to visit them there regularly. And this old guy, his daughter was murdered like thirty or forty years ago. For those thirty or forty years he was full of rage. As we can all see, we take this as reasonable – his daughter was murdered and of course, he must be angry. We assume we don’t have a choice. It comes along with the grief and the sadness – there’s no question. But we don’t separate those emotions.

So there he was, full of rage for all of those years. Slowly it dawned on him that the real reason he was suffering for all of those years was his own rage. So he went back to mass, used those tools to help himself change, and became this loving, kind person. Of course, still sad about his daughter, but the rage finished and so the suffering finished. And he would even go to those people on Death Row and share his daughter’s rosary beads with them.

So it's an interesting point that our own neuroses cause our pain. But contrary to our held beliefs in this materialist world, the Buddha says that these negative states are not innate to our mind and can be separated from the positive ones and thus can be removed. Even though in the West, we have lots of examples of people that just don't have a lot of anger, we think of them as the exception. We think it's normal to be angry, even though it's breaking our heart and we don't even think that we can get rid of it.

So this gets us to the second characteristic of the negative states of mind – it's the real tasty wisdom teaching of the Buddha, his very particular way of talking about how the mind works. This other characteristic is indicated by the word “delusion”.

FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS

1. THE FULLY-RIPENED RESULT: THE TYPE OF REBIRTH

Let's look at this more. You could say there are four ways in which our past actions ripen in the present: more fundamentally, you could say that one of the laws of karma is that if you have a fruit, it must have come from a seed and if you have a seed, it will become a fruit. The four ways our past actions have left seeds in our mind that are now ripening in the present: the first is called the “Fully-ripened Result”. This is the name that they give to the realm of existence you were born into, human, animal, whatever. Here there are a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of rebirth.

Buddha would say that there is not an atom of space where you won't find minds, that is, sentient beings, that is, *sem-chens* – Tibetan for sentient beings, meaning “mind-possessors”. Under your armpit, even, what a zoo it is! One person told me that Lama

Yeshe said one time that just by doing this (waves arm through the air), you harm a great number of sentient beings.

So you can divide all of those minds into two categories: buddhas and sentient beings, and among the sentient beings you have superior beings and samsaric beings. You become a superior being, an *arya*, from the first moment of your non-conceptual realization of emptiness; from that second forward you are making serious progress in getting out of samsara and into your nirvana.

SIX REALMS WITHIN THE DESIRE REALM

Among samsaric beings there is a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of rebirth. One grouping is called the Desire Realm. Within that there are six types of rebirths. Buddha calls them realms of existence.

They are all states of mind that come with their own level of physicality, their own “karmic appearances”, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it; their experiences.

GODS The top-end suburbs within samsara are called the God Realms – there’s a couple of those. It’s equivalent to what the Muslims would call Paradise or the Christians would call Heaven. Rebirth as one of these beings is the fruit of virtue; we create it ourselves, no one sends us there. There’s no such concept like this in Buddhism; the realm of existence we’re born into has nothing to do with Buddha or a Superior Being sending us there. Our actions determine our rebirth.

HUMANS Then there is the human realm, which is pretty gross in comparison with the god realms, whose beings have very subtle light bodies. Their minds are super blissful, and it lasts a long time. But Buddha’s view is that you’re not out of samsara yet and the karma will run out.

The human realm is also the result of virtue, much more gross with much more suffering. Nevertheless, it’s a better type of rebirth to have because you’ve got enough common sense to do

something about it, you can change yourself and become enlightened.

ANIMALS So now we're getting into the crummy suburbs: the next one is the animal realm. We can certainly see there's plenty more of them: probably in one summer you have more mosquitoes out there than there are humans on the planet. All the fish – two thirds of the earth is the ocean so we can't even conceive of how many fish there are out there. They're all in the animal realm. There is really intensive suffering if you're reborn as an animal – whether you're a giraffe or a lion or a little fish.

SPIRITS Further down the spectrum, with even more suffering, is what they call the spirits. This word is used very differently than the way we usually use it – a spirit is an extremely deluded being who has intense suffering. There's a group of these called the Hungry Ghosts, who are often mentioned in the teachings.

HELL BEINGS Now we have the worst suburbs of all and these are called the hell realms, and you have many of these. In spite of all the materialist views these last few hundred years, in every culture you have variations of people's experiences of different realms of existence. They might be called differently, the cause of them is different but there's a lot of common experience.

Again, no one is sent to these realms; we create them ourselves. As Lama Zopa puts it, "We are all experiencing our own karmic appearances". As Lama Yeshe said, "Hell is not some place where the devil is waiting. It's the manifestation of the past negative energy of those sentient beings".

The Buddhist take on this: countless sentient beings, their minds are all beginningless, never created, endless and at any given moment, all of them, without exception, experiencing the fruit of their past actions. It takes time to think of it this way since we're so used to think of it as punishment and reward. It's deeply engrained in our mind, Buddha would say it's a function of ego, this dualistic belief that we're made by others, happiness

comes from others, suffering comes from others, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault - in other words, that's Ego. Lama Yeshe would refer to it as the "self-pity" me. We all have this view instinctively. This is the Samsaric view, it's only a view, something we've made up and we've believed for eons. And he says it's a mistake.

The first way of these four in which our karma from the past has ripened in the present is that we are human beings – forget the ones under our armpits. The Buddha would say it would blow our minds if we realized how hard we had worked in past lives to accumulate all the appropriate causes and conditions that have ripened in our simply getting this reasonable human life – it would blow our minds.

In one nice book called "The Tibetan Art of Parenting", one lama says that at the time of a male and female human being having sex, billions of consciousness that have just passed away – and not all of them human, obviously; there aren't that many! – are all hovering around desperate to get in". Well, we got in! It's like we've won the lottery.

Taking Buddha's view as our hypothesis, even just comparing with the ones we can see, animals, creatures, fish – if they're all sentient being and they all possess mind like we do, it's obvious that it's easier to get one of the animal ones. So looking at how much more suffering it is just having the limited possibility to change – it's kind of mind blowing.

The main cause of just getting a human life, and Mother Teresa and Hitler had one of these, is the accumulation of morality. And morality specifically here means non-harming, especially not killing.

So we must have accumulated a lot of virtue. They say that at the time of our past death, which is probably not more than seven weeks before our present conception, very strong morality karma, like a seed, would have ripened. It would have become the "throwing" karma. It literally threw our consciousness on auto

pilot to find our way inexorably to our human mother's womb. There has to have been a strong history with that mother and father from past lives. It propelled our mind to that new mother's womb. So don't blame them – they're just lying there minding their own business.

So, that's the first way karma ripens – in our case, getting a human life.

2. THE SECOND WAY KARMA RIPENS: ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE

So now we get to the differences between all the various human being, which is the second way our karma ripens which is called "Actions Similar to the Cause". This refers to all of our tendencies – personality, characteristics, intelligence, kindness, if you're good at music or murdering or lying. This is where Buddha completely disagrees with materialistic view that says that your parents made you. It's sort of comfortable to say you're similar to your parents – we say it must be the genes. However, I'm sorry - when it comes to somebody like Hitler or Mother Teresa, where's the evidence that that little old Austrian housewife was the cause of Hitler?

So, we must look into this since it certainly argues with our currently held view. It doesn't mean that your father beating you doesn't play some role – it doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean that Mozart's piano teachers didn't play a role in him being a good piano player. Or that Mother Teresa's upbringing didn't encourage her goodness. The key point of karma is that unless Mother Teresa had the goodness within her, unless Mozart had the music within him, unless Hitler had those tendencies within him, it doesn't matter how much training or external conditions there were – they never would have developed those qualities.

3. THE THIRD WAY THAT KARMA RIPENS: EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE

The third way our karma ripens is called “Experiences Similar to the Cause”. And that’s all the stuff that happens to us – the punches in the nose, the kisses. We’ll talk about that one.

4. THE FOURTH WAY THAT KARMA RIPENS: ENVIRONMENTAL RESULT

The fourth one is interesting – it’s called “Environmental Karma”. It’s the way we interact with the external environment – not just the moon and the stars, but it’s also the buildings we live in, the suburbs, the country, whether it’s nice or bad, whether it smells bad or good, etc.

HOW TO PURIFY KARMA

So as Lama Yeshe puts it, we create negativity with our mind so we can purify it by creating positiveness with our mind. We can see one of the consequences of all of these delusions is that we really do believe that we are innately bad. Especially if we’ve really done harmful things, we feel this terrible sense of hopelessness. We basically exaggerate our badness. We feel stuck in it. There’s this guilt. It’s useless – it’s not taking responsibility. That’s exactly what we do to others – we exaggerate their badness, we define a person by their badness. We blame them.

So it’s really hard to know that we can change, to forgive ourselves. We think it’s impossible. It’s really hard to see others differently because it’s really hard to forgive them. But the Buddha would say that there’s not one single karma that cannot be changed. Not only that, but as we’ve been saying from the beginning, there’s not one single negativity that we cannot change.

So the other thing that makes it so hard to believe that we can change, is this belief that we must be forgiven by someone else. So of course if we’re Christian or Muslim, it would be God that

needs to forgive us. But in the materialist view, we think it must be the person that we've harmed that forgives us so that we have the impression that we've changed, don't we? But then what happens if they don't – you know if we regret the harm that we've done to our parents and they're dead already. Or if we've killed a person – how can that be forgiven, the person's dead.

In the Buddha's view, since we've not been created by somebody else, then purification of negative karma or negative actions has nothing to do with being forgiven by a superior being. Of course Buddha forgives – he's a nice guy. But that's not the point – it's up to us to change our own mind. It's obvious that we can't the action we did, we can't make the person come alive again – that's obvious.

But we can remove from our mind the seed that we planted from when we did that action so that it doesn't ripen in the future as our own suffering. And we can have compassion for those that have harmed us and have a strong desire to only benefit others. We can do some very tasty practices that can powerfully weaken those seeds. And then we can make the determination to never do it again. This is purification, the Buddha says.

This practice has been formalized, in particular by the Tibetans. You can see that there are all of these different Buddhist teachings and practices that have developed over the centuries and with the various cultures that have been developed but they can all be traced back to the Buddha.

So it's up to us. We create karma, so we can purify it.

This particular practice is called the "Four Opponent Powers", The four Rs: Regret, Reliance, Remedy and Resolve. You can put them in different order and also you can call them different things.

THE FIRST OPPONENT POWER: REGRET

So regret – what's that? When we hear regret, we hear guilt. What is the difference between regret and our usual rubbish

guilt? Guilt is looking in the past and saying, “I did this, I did that, I did this – and I’m a bad person”. This is the voice of ego – self-pity. Like all the delusions it’s a sense of complete hopelessness. It’s kind of impotent and it just digs our hole deeper. It reinforces this hopeless ego, I am good/I am bad, etc.

Then as His Holiness said, regret is looking in the past and saying, “I did this, I did that, I did this – but what can I do about it?” It’s not just sort of a cute difference – it’s profound. If you look at blame or anger – you did this, you did that and you’re a bad person. And it builds up and up and it results in more anger and more blame.

We can see that like all of these deluded voices, there’s a sense of complete hopelessness about them. All of the delusions are outside of the situation, observing, kind of fearful, neurotic, miserable, poor me, why you – they’re not practical. They’re all fear based. Necessarily.

But the positive qualities are active, confident, brave, constructive. As Martin Luther King said, there’s nothing wrong with being angry, nothing wrong with finding fault, but then you ask what you can do about it. Same as His Holiness said when it comes to yourself. Each of them is active. Constructive – what can I do to change it rather than just cursing it. Huge difference. You can hear it.

So with the one of regret – and basically the four steps is engaging in a psychological process, you’re talking to yourself – so this regret is an attitude that you really need to cultivate - we only have guilt right now. So you have to first acknowledge that you did this and that and this. Right now we have guilt, or “What do you mean I did it, it’s their fault” – or we deny it – “I did not do that”. These are the three ways of responding – guilt, blame, denial – all useless.

So this is a new attitude to cultivate, it’s a brave attitude, an attitude of self-respect. And of course it’s based totally on the view of karma. There are consequences for me of what I do, say

and think. It has nothing to do with whether somebody thinks I did it, saw I did it or not – that’s got nothing to do with it. It’s got nothing to do with Buddha, it’s with me. It’s taking responsibility – it’s really simple.

You do this practice at the end of the day – as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, we’re insane if we don’t do it every day. So you sit down and think, okay, I did this and that and this, I bad mouthed that person, I got mad, I lost my temper, I said this, I got jealous – action of body and speech, you acknowledge them. And then maybe there wasn’t that much today – or you don’t remember. If there’s something, how you talk to yourself is like this:

“Oh, this morning, yet again I fought with my mother. I shouted at her, I bad mouthed her to someone else, criticized her with the next door neighbour, gossiped about the boss, killed the ants” – I mean, maybe we’re not Hitler but there’s always things we do with our body and speech that harm others. So you acknowledge this, but then you say that you regret this from the depths of your heart because I don’t want the future suffering to come from these seeds that I planted in my mind. I’m fed up with suffering. That last part is the voice of regret – it’s for your own benefit.

So like I said, it’s not an attitude that we tend to have. We need to cultivate it – and again it needs thinking about it. So we don’t need right now, as long as no one heard us or no one saw us – who cares? But that’s got nothing to do with it. Buddha says that karma is a natural law. Whatever we say, do and think leaves a seed in the mind that ripens in the future as experiences for oneself similar to the seed. So you can be specific, maybe yesterday, last year or whatever – but then you can be very general. “Whatever I have done with my body and speech in this life, even if I don’t remember, whatever I have done to harm others, I regret from the depths of my heart because I don’t want that suffering. I’m fed up with suffering”.

But really it's the voice of self-confidence. It's like when you're so fed up now with being fat and lazy and overweight. And more than anything, you're fed up with falling down again, eating too much again, falling in the same trap again. You can see the suffering you're causing yourself, so finally, "I regret this – I'm fed up with this – so I'm taking hold of this". It's strong, it's taking control of this, it's full of self-respect.

Of course, in this life, if you're Buddhist already, you've already taken refuge, you've already taken bodhisattva vows, Tantric vows, you can be specific about your particular broken vows and you can be very sincere in the way you generalize. "I regret from the depths of my heart any of my broken vows – no way do I want the future suffering".

So then of course, given the Buddha's assertion that your consciousness goes back to beginningless time, that you've had countless lives, which means you've done harm like Hitler countless times, like Stalin countless times, you've been lions and whales and eaten billions of sentient beings countless times, so – "I regret from the depths of my heart anything I've ever done since beginningless time to harm any sentient being ever with my body and speech".

The more you understand that certain kinds of food will cause you suffering in the future as you get older, the more you will regret because you know you don't want that future suffering. Let's just say that it's sugar that's destroying you – well you don't have to remember every piece of chocolate that you've eaten, you just have to say I regret every kilo of sugar that I've eaten because they will cause me to suffer in the future.

So another analogy: it's like having eaten poison. You know what poison means – it's something that will cause you suffering in the future. Of course you'll acknowledge it. It won't be, "Well, it's not my fault – he did it". It won't be, "What do you mean I took poison, I did not". It won't be guilt, "Oh, I ate poison, I'm such a bad person". Very stupid. You will acknowledge you've

done it – totally regret it because you don't want to face the future suffering. And then you'll ask for the doctor who can give me the antidote.

Just briefly, because of our negative karma in the past, we have suffered in the lower realms. Eventually we finish that main karma then, amazingly, our virtue ripens and we now get a human life again. But because we haven't purified all aspects of that killing by regretting it and by resolving never to do it again – the fourth opponent power – we end up in this precious human body with the residual result of that past karma: the tendency to continue to kill.

And so of course the tragedy is, it's considered normal to kill rats and fish and cockroaches – everybody does it, it's not considered bad – so as soon as you meet a rat, oops you kill it. It makes you feel good – so the thing you're attached to do from having done it in the past is the thing you have a tendency to do again.

Look at fishing. If you were born with the tendency to kill poodles, you would have a problem. You'd have to do it at night, sneaking around. But fishing, that's considered normal in our culture, so we never question our tendency to want to do it.

But ask the fish if they like it! And think about it – fish die quietly. They don't squeal like pigs! Who'd like to go fishing if fish squealed like pigs!

So here we are born with the tendency to kill again because we didn't regret it no vow to never do it again. So you run again to the river.

A friend of mine who's the son is a fisherman, she said from the time he was a tiny boy, he ran to the river like a magnet. He even called himself, "Salmon". He fished all his life, a professional fisherman. A really nice guy, bit with a really powerful tendency to kill. She said she went fishing with him one time – she never killed anything. And she was devastated. All she

could see was suffering. He had the same eyes, intelligent heart, kind man but because of this tendency to kill, he couldn't see the suffering.

So what happened? He died young whilst scuba diving. So he totally wasted his human life. Completely down the toilet – and straight back to the lower realms, because in the past he hadn't regretted killing and hadn't made the decision never to kill again.

So, according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, regret is the most important step. It's certainly the first step; the other steps flow from that.

THE SECOND OPPONENT POWER: RELIANCE

1. REFUGE So, here, the second one is reliance. The first part is this reliance is refuge in the Buddha. And the second one is having compassion for others.

So refuge, what's that? We all go about as Buddhists, "Yeah, yeah, I took refuge in the Buddha". But I don't think we understand exactly what it means, so the analogy of the poison is a good one.

Say you haven't taken poison but you hear about some amazing doctor who has got every antidote for all the poisons in the world, somewhere in Tanzania. But you haven't taken poison, but you're kind of interested in this doctor, isn't that fascinating? But you don't really care. Why? Because you don't need it. Now, look at how you feel when you've taken poison, when you know you're suffering. You don't care, first class, you'll go all the way. And you'll listen to every word he says and you'll take his advice perfectly. That's refuge.

I remember years ago when Lama Yeshe said that if we all had refuge as strong as the Muslims, we'd all be enlightened by now. So the problem here is because we haven't got the first level of suffering, the Suffering of Suffering, then we don't really think we're suffering, so why would you bother taking refuge in the Buddha. Instead of just waiting for the serious thing to happen,

we start to look deeply into the suffering of change and all pervasive suffering, and start to have a deep sense of our imminent suffering, and on this basis therefore turn to the Buddha, who has the methods that we can practice to remove the seeds before they ripen. That's a very intelligent approach – sort of like preventative medicine.

So we turn to the Buddha. Buddha's not our creator, therefore the relationship we have with the Buddha is a distinctively different one than the one we have with God. In many ways it's the same.

I was brought up a Catholic and educated by the nuns. I loved going to mass. Seven days a week I went to mass on my bicycle. Yearned to be a nun, like Saint Teresa of Lazio – she was my great hero. Even when my mother sent me off to boarding school since I was actually very naughty. My last two years at school she sent me off to the convent – the same nuns. Actually I was integrated by the French order of nuns, the Sisters of Sacré Coeur. Of course, when I was in school it was all very traditional – you had to wear gloves and curtsy. Actually my school uniform had a little blouse of this yellow colour, and a cardigan of this colour (pointing to the dark maroon robe) so I've been wearing robes since I was five.

When I was fourteen, I left school early (I was a boarder). When I was fourteen, I had incredible faith in God. But curiously I never thought of him as my creator – I think I was already a Buddhist then but I didn't know the name. It was like guru devotion. So this is something we'll talk about later and certainly comes into this book. Devotion plays a huge role in Buddhism, especially in Tantric Buddhism.

And I know that when I was a Catholic, the yearning was the same as the relationship that I have now with the Buddha and with my teachers and so on.

Here we would visualize above your head the Buddha in the particular form called the Vajrasattva. This is a very tasty practice

that all the Lamas recommend. In the same way that you would be when you found a doctor that could cure your illness, you'd feel the same feeling of closeness and delight when you found the Buddha. And you'd recite a prayer expressing that refuge. And if you have a Lama or a Guru, you would see them as one with the Buddha.

2. COMPASSION So the second part of reliance is where we cultivate compassion. It's curious that it's called reliance. Compassion is very specifically empathy with the suffering of others, so if there are no others that are suffering how can you have compassion? Hence, we "rely" upon sentient beings in order to have compassion.

And even more, we're attempting to cultivate compassion for those that have harmed us. So as Geshe Sopa said one time, Bodhisattvas *need* their enemies. We rely upon people as an object of our compassion in order to cultivate this huge compassion. In order to cultivate compassion, you need to be around suffering sentient beings.

We've already cultivated compassion for ourselves, if you like, and that's regret; then it's not difficult to have compassion for others. Then you think about others who have harmed you – and with the view of karma, cultivating that is not difficult. We're all in the same boat – harming or being harmed, life after life after life.

THE THIRD OPPONENT POWER: THE REMEDY

Then we go to the third step when we take the medicine, the remedy. So in Tibetan Buddhism, there's a whole medicine cabinet full of remedies.

First of all, even simply thinking the opposite of things you've regretted, that in itself is purification. Having regretted killing, obviously it's part of the remedy to actively save the lives of sentient beings. If you've regretted lying, you actively try to tell the truth. And this is kind of fundamental and necessary. These

practices give like a rocket boost of weakening, of destroying, negative karma. They are weakening the seeds, preventing them from ripening. It's only when you finally realize emptiness that you can uproot them totally.

But there is a particular remedy, a practice, that all the lamas praise as the best medicine of all. Doing that practice incorporates imagining, visualizing Buddha Vajrasattva, whom we have already taken refuge in, and imagining nectar flowing from him above our heads as we recite his mantra.

THE FOURTH OPPONENT POWER: RESOLVE

The fourth step, Pabongka Rinpoche says, is the most important: resolve.

Having this strongly is dependent upon regret, the first step. Otherwise you won't even go there because regret is the beginning of the process of taking responsibility. It's the attitude of a person with self-respect. If you had just have guilt, there's no way you'll think it's even possible to change. But having this healthy attitude of regret, of acknowledging that you have neurosis in actions of body, speech and mind that have harmed others and harmed you, then you'll only want to make this determination to change.

We all know that the time we finally decide to go on a diet is when we make a *decision* to change –it's obvious: I will not eat any more chocolate cake.

Here we're talking about tendencies to lie, kill, get angry, steal, and including our own internal tendencies.

But Lama Zopa says, don't lie to yourself, "I'll never get angry again" if anger is your worst habit. With confidence, you give yourself a time line.

So this way of talking to yourself, you've really got to cultivate this. But we are the boss, the Buddha says. We have to do the changing. Okay, you do it in reliance on the guru or the Buddha and that's very tasty. This gives you courage.

So if you've taken vows, of course, every evening you would reiterate these vows. But don't just think you're just repeating them – every thought counts. So every time you make the vow you'll never kill again, it strengthens your vow to never kill again. Each day becomes easier. You become better and better at that. And in the end it even prevents you from having to be in situations where you'll have to be forced to kill.

But maybe you're doing the practice before you go to bed, maybe you could say, "I will not be angry for another twelve hours". Or even eight hours. You'll be asleep. You'll keep your vow – well done! You've got to be realistic with yourself. And especially with these points, you're engaging with yourself, developing self-esteem, courage, praising yourself. Nothing you're used to it.

And then, as Lama Yeshe says, you go to bed with a happy mind.

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4. UNDERSTANDING ATTACHMENT, THE MAIN VOICE OF EGO-GRASPING

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

ATTACHMENT IS SUFFERING

Not following attachment is practicing Dharma; following attachment is not practicing Dharma. It is as simple as that. The whole point of Opening the Door of Dharma, these instructions from the holy mouths of the Kadampa geshe, which they practiced and experienced, is to cut off the eight worldly dharmas, to be free of attachment clinging to this life. Whether you are practicing Dharma or not, the thought of the eight worldly dharmas is the source of all obstacles and problems. Everything undesirable comes from this thought of the worldly dharmas.

When you are told that you have to give up attachment, you feel as if you are being told to sacrifice your happiness. You give up attachment, then you don't have happiness and you're left with nothing. Just yourself. Your attachment has been confiscated; you have been robbed of your happiness; and you are left there empty, like a deflated balloon. You feel as if you no longer have a heart in your body, as if you have lost your life.

This is because you have not realized the shortcomings of attachment. You have not recognized that the nature of attachment is suffering. Attachment itself is a suffering, unhealthy mind. Because of attachment, the mind hallucinates, and you are unable to see that there is another happiness, real happiness.

For example, when there is attachment for an object and enjoyment of it, you label this experience "happiness", and it appears to you as happiness, but in reality it is only suffering. As

you keep doing the action, such as eating food, your happiness doesn't increase but only decreases. As your stomach becomes full, your happiness then becomes the suffering of suffering. Before the suffering nature of the action is noticeable, it appears to be happiness; but when it is noticeable, it becomes the suffering of suffering. When the suffering was not noticeable, the feeling was labelled "pleasure" and appeared as pleasure, but as you continue the action, the feeling gradually becomes suffering.

The peace you experience by abandoning attachment leads you to nirvana, the sorrowless state. This peace, which is the absence of attachment, allows you to develop completely, to become enlightened. You can experience this peace forever. From the very first time you free yourself from thought of the worldly dharmas, from attachment, you begin to develop this peace in your mental continuum, and eventually you experience it forever.

If you feel that by sacrificing attachment you are sacrificing your happiness and are left with nothing, remember that all your problems are based on attachment and thought of the worldly dharmas. Not knowing that the nature of attachment is suffering, you cannot see that there is a better happiness. You cannot see that by sacrificing thought of the worldly dharmas, by freeing your mind of attachment, there is real peace, real happiness. This happiness doesn't depend on any external sense objects; it is developed within your own mind. With your mind you can develop this peace.

For example, let's say that you have a skin disease that makes you itch. You scratch yourself so much to relieve the itch that you make sores. Rather than labeling pleasure on the relief that scratching the itch gives you, wouldn't it be better not to have any disease at all? Wouldn't it be better to give up the disease? Having attachment is like having this skin disease.

If there were no attachment, there would be no cause for all the problems that arise from attachment. There would be no evolution. If we didn't have this body, this samsara, caused by

delusion and karma and contaminated by the seed of disturbing thoughts, we wouldn't have to experience hot and cold, hunger and thirst, and all the other problems. We wouldn't have to worry about our survival, or spend so much time and money looking after our body. We are kept busy just keeping this body looking good. From our hair down to our toes, we put so much work into decorating this body. So much of our precious human life is spent on that. When you get sick, however, even taking medicine cannot always cure you. So, wouldn't it be better not to have this body, this samsara, at all? Then you wouldn't have to experience all these problems.

Without attachment, there would be much peace in the mind - a peace that could be developed and completed. This work has an end. Seeking samsaric pleasure in dependence upon external objects of attachment is work that has no end. No matter how much you work towards that goal, it has no end. Like waves in the ocean coming one after the other, that work never ceases.

First of all, temporal happiness, which is dependent on external sense objects, is in the nature of suffering; and second, no matter what you do, there is no way to finish the work for temporal happiness.

LESS ATTACHMENT, LESS PAIN

As Nagarjuna explains in the verse that Dromtonpa often recited:

Acquiring material things or not acquiring them; happiness or unhappiness; interesting or uninteresting sounds; praise or criticism: these eight worldly dharmas are not objects of my mind. They are all the same to me.

It is easy to understand how it can be a problem not to acquire things, to be unhappy, to hear uninteresting sounds, to have a bad reputation, to be criticized. These are commonly recognized as problems. But you might not recognize acquiring things,

having comfort and happiness, hearing interesting sounds, having a good reputation and being praised as problems. However, they are all the same; they are all problems.

But the object itself is not the problem. Having wealth is not the problem. So, what is the problem? The problem is the mind desiring and clinging to wealth - that is the problem. Having a friend is not the problem; the mind clinging to the friend makes having a friend a problem.

Attachment makes having these four - material things, comfort, interesting sounds, praise - a problem. If there's no attachment, no worldly concern, having or not having these objects does not become a problem.

You might be sleeping comfortably one night when suddenly your sleep is disturbed by a mosquito biting you. If you have strong worldly concern, strong attachment for comfort, you will be very annoyed at being bitten by the mosquito. Just being bitten, by just one mosquito. It is nothing dangerous, nothing that can cause any serious disease. The mosquito takes just a tiny, tiny drop of blood from your body. But seeing that mosquito's body filled with your own blood, you are shocked. You become angry at the mosquito and are upset all night. The next day, you complain about the mosquito all day long, "I couldn't sleep for hours last night!" Losing sleep for one night, or even a few hours, is like losing a precious jewel. You are as upset as somebody who has lost a million dollars. For some people, even such a small problem becomes huge.

There are also people who attachment so much to be praised and respected by others. Now, if you ignore such a person and walk past them with your nose in the air, or say just one or two words disrespectfully, something that they don't expect to hear, it causes great pain in their mind. Or if you give them something in a disrespectful manner, whether purposely or not, again there is great pain. For such a person with so much expectation, so much

clinging, the pain from even a small physical action that they dislike is great. It is like having an arrow shot into their heart.

Suddenly anger arises strongly. Suddenly their body becomes very tense. Their face, relaxed and peaceful before, now becomes kind of terrifying - swollen and tight, with their ears and nose turning red and the veins standing out on their forehead. Suddenly the whole character of the person becomes very rough and unpleasant.

The greater a person's attachment to receive praise and respect, the greater the pain in their heart when they don't get it. It is similar with the other objects of attachment. The stronger the attachment for material things, comfort, interesting sounds and praise, the greater the pain when one experiences the opposite.

If you expect that a friend will always be pleasant, smiling, respectful, kind, and always do what you wish, but one day they unexpectedly do some small unpleasant thing, that tiny thing causes an incredible pain in your heart.

All this is related to worldly concern, to how strongly you attachment something. The less attachment you have for the four desirable objects, the fewer problems you will have when you meet the four undesirable objects. Less attachment means less pain. If you cut off clinging to this life, there is no hurt when you experience criticism or do not receive something, because there is no clinging to praise or receiving things.

In the same way, when you do not cling to the expectation that your friend will always be nice to you, always smile at you, always help you when asked, there is no hurt when your friend changes and does the opposite to what you attachment. There is no pain in your heart. Your mind is calm and peaceful. By cutting off the attachment that clings to the four desirable objects, you don't have a problem when the four undesirable situations happen. They cannot hurt you, cannot disturb your mind.

THOUGHT OF THE WORLDLY DHARMAS CLINGS TO THE FOUR DESIRABLE OBJECTS OF THIS LIFE

Without this thought, there is so much calmness and peace in your mind that meeting the four undesirable objects doesn't bother you. And meeting the four desirable objects also doesn't bother you. If someone praises you, it doesn't matter; if someone criticizes you, it cannot disturb your mind. There is stability in your life, and peace of mind. There are no ups and downs. This is equalizing the eight worldly dharmas.

How do you keep your mind peaceful when problems happen? How do you protect your mind so that experiencing the four undesirable things does not disturb you? By realizing that clinging to these four desirable objects is the problem. You have to realize the shortcomings of these four desirable objects and abandon clinging to them. This is the basic psychology. If you use this method, undesirable situations will not disturb you.

Geshe Chenngawa would equalize the eight worldly dharmas by reciting this verse:

Being happy when life is comfortable and unhappy when it is uncomfortable: all activities for the happiness of this life should be abandoned as poison. Virtue and non-virtue are functions only of the mind. Cut off non-virtuous motivations and those motivations that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

The latter refers to actions of body and speech with indeterminate motivations; these are called “unpredictable” actions.

The best way to train our mind is to expect the four undesirable objects rather than the four desirable ones. Expect to be criticized and disrespected. This practice of renunciation, which cuts off attachment, is the best psychology. Having trained our mind to expect undesirable things, when something

undesirable actually happens, because we are expecting it, it doesn't come as a shock to us; it doesn't hurt.

Before knowing about Dharma, before practicing meditation, you regarded discomfort, uninteresting sounds, criticism and not acquiring things as undesirable problems. Now, if you examine well the nature of the mind that clings to material things, comfort, interesting sounds, praise, you won't find that it is happy; you will see that it too is suffering. It is not the happiness you thought it was before knowing about Dharma. It is not peaceful - it is painful.

The mind that clings gets stuck to the object of attachment. When you receive praise - "You are so intelligent", "You speak so well", "You understand Dharma so well" - your mind gets stuck to the praise and is no longer free. Like a body fastened with chains, the mind is fastened with attachment. The mind is tied, controlled, chained by attachment. The mind is stuck like glue to the object. Or like a moth flying into melted candle wax: its whole body, wings and limbs become completely wrapped in the candle wax. Its body and limbs are so fragile that it is extremely difficult to separate them from the wax. Or like a fly that gets stuck in a spider's web: its limbs get completely wrapped, and it is very difficult to separate them from the web. Or like ants in honey. Attachment is the mind stuck to an object.

ATTACHMENT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL PROBLEMS

As Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in *The Great Commentary on the Graduated Path to Enlightenment*: "We follow attachment in the hope of getting satisfaction, but following attachment leads only to dissatisfaction".

In reality, the result of following attachment is only dissatisfaction. You try again and again and again, but there is only dissatisfaction.

Following attachment and not finding satisfaction is the major problem of samsara. Having cancer or AIDS, for example, is not

the main problem. Compared to the problem of following attachment and not finding satisfaction, cancer and AIDS are nothing; they don't continue from life to life. If you don't do something about the problem of attachment in this life, while you have a perfect human rebirth, it will continue from life to life.

Following attachment ties you to samsara continuously, so that again and again you experience the sufferings of the six realms. Again and again - endlessly. If you continuously follow attachment, there is no real satisfaction, no real peace. Following attachment leads you only to dissatisfaction and the continuous experience of the sufferings of samsara in one of the six realms.

It is thought of the worldly dharmas that brings again and again all the diseases that scare us so much. Again and again, from life to life, it brings all the serious problems that a person can experience; it creates the karma for us to experience these problems again and again. Thought of the worldly dharmas, attachment clinging to this life, is the most serious disease. Compared to the worldly dharmas, other problems are nothing.

If you do not have thought of the worldly dharmas, which ties you to samsara, even if somebody kills you, all you do is change to another body. Your consciousness takes another perfect human body or goes to a pure realm. Your being killed is just a condition to change to another body. But if you have thought of the worldly dharmas and do not practice Dharma, even though no one kills you and you live to be a hundred, you constantly use your perfect human rebirth to create the causes of the lower realms; you use your fortunate rebirth to create the causes of unfortunate rebirths with no opportunity to practice Dharma. The longer you live, the more negative karma you create, which causes you to abide in the lower realms and experience suffering for many eons. Therefore, this thought of the worldly dharmas is much more harmful than some enemy who merely kills you.

Lama Tsong Khapa's quotation about following attachment continues: "Attachment brings so many other problems. Through following attachment, the mind becomes rough and unpeaceful".

Hundreds of problems come from dissatisfaction. When there is very strong attachment, it is very easy to become angry, for example. The stronger the clinging, the stronger the anger that arises. If you don't cling very much, you don't get so angry when someone upsets you. You might still be disturbed, but less. Anger, jealousy and so forth arise in relation to clinging. Because of clinging, these other negative thoughts arise. When any of these negative thoughts arise, you create negative karma, the cause of the lower realms.

When your mind is overwhelmed by attachment, completely clouded by attachment, you cannot meditate. Even if you have some idea of emptiness, for example, it is very difficult for you to have any feeling for it. At times when your mind is quiet and peaceful, you may have some feeling for it; but when your mind is clouded, a thick fog of attachment covering everything, you are unable to meditate on emptiness. And you are unable to think of the shortcomings of attachment.

When you have strong attachment for an object, you become very unhappy if you can't be near it. You cannot relax; there is no physical relaxation because there is no mental relaxation. Even though you may not have any particularly hard work to do, since your mind isn't relaxed because of attachment, there is no physical comfort or relaxation.

There are many such examples of the shortcomings of attachment. Think of alcoholics and drug addicts. Their lives become so unhappy, so uncontrolled, that they cannot do anything. In particular, they damage their awareness and memory.

Disease comes from the dissatisfied mind of attachment, the evil thought of the worldly dharmas, because dissatisfaction creates the conditions for sickness. You are then sick for many

years, with huge unwanted expenses of many thousands of dollars. When you can't get money in a proper way, you have to steal. Your mind becomes disturbed; you have a nervous breakdown and go crazy. You then have to spend so much time and money on psychiatric consultations, and you end up in an institution.

And the origin of all this? One moment of uncontrolled attachment. That one moment when you did not protect yourself from thought of the worldly dharmas, when you did not practice Dharma, brings so many problems. The problems go on and on for years and years, costing you a lot of money and making your life unnecessarily complicated and difficult. All these worries and expenses are caused by thought of the eight worldly dharmas. If, from the very beginning, you had kept yourself free of the worldly dharmas, all those years of unwanted problems and expenses would not have happened. You need never have experienced them.

When your attachment isn't fulfilled, when you can't get what you want, this is the time of nervous breakdowns and thoughts of committing suicide. Recently one Dharma student in Switzerland had problems like this and committed suicide. He hanged himself. I think he had heard some Dharma teachings but hadn't done much practice or retreat. He had a very good job earning a lot of money, but he had relationship problems.

You may have had the experience many times of thinking about suicide, about ending your human life, because of these kinds of problems. Basically, this is the shortcoming of the worldly thought of attachment.

Kadampa Geshe Gonpawa, who had clairvoyance and many other realizations, said:

If one receives the four desirable results of comfort, material things, interesting sounds and praise from an action done with thought of the eight worldly dharmas, that is the only

result in this life, and there is no benefit in future lives. And if the four undesirable results come from the action, there is no benefit even in this life.

Often, actions done with thought of the eight worldly dharmas that bring the four desirable results eventually lead to the four undesirable results anyway. For example, in business, you may have success after success; because of that success, you then act more and more with thought of worldly dharma. After some time your karma for success finishes, and the karma of failure is experienced. In one day you can become a beggar. One day, you are a millionaire; the next, you do not even know how you will pay your rent and take care of your family. Your whole life collapses.

This is due to doing actions with thought of the worldly dharmas. Even though you have achieved material comfort, you are not satisfied and continue to act with thought of the worldly dharmas. Because of your past success, one day your karma for success is exhausted, and everything collapses. Someone who was wealthy yesterday, with no financial worries, today suddenly has to worry even about such a small thing as how to take care of his family. He doesn't know what to do and is unable to eat or sleep.

Even if you successfully steal one, two, three times, for example, your success cannot continue indefinitely. You need to have some control over your attachment; you need to find some satisfaction. Otherwise, by continuing to steal, you will definitely get caught one day. No matter what the mistake is, by continuing to repeat it, one day it will definitely become a big problem. The shortcoming of attachment is that it eventually leads to so much that is undesirable.

Freeing yourself from attachment becomes a great protection. Cutting off clinging to an object or person means that all the other negative minds do not arise, and you don't create all those negative karmas as a result. It provides unbelievable protection.

Normally, by clinging to a particular object, you create much negative karma in relation to many other sentient beings. By cutting off clinging, you stop the causes of the lower realms.

Great peace comes when you free yourself from the thought of attachment. Concentrate on this real peace that you can experience immediately by freeing yourself from attachment. When you focus on this, there is no problem. When you attempt to attain this greater happiness, this real peace, temporal happiness becomes uninteresting and not difficult to renounce; it's like picking up used toilet paper. Be aware of this, then there will be no danger of depression or of going crazy.

So, we can see, no matter how many problems we have, there is no choice: we have to practice Dharma. And practicing Dharma means controlling the mind, controlling attachment. Forget about living an ascetic life of pure Dharma practice; at the very least, for peace of mind and the happiness of this life, and to stop the increase of problems, we need to control attachment. *From Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive. LamaYeshe.com*

5. HOW IGNORANCE GRASPS AT THE I

BY LAMA THUBTEN YESHE

THE MOUNTAIN OF SELF

Our conception of ego instinctively feels that I'm somewhere around here; Thubten Yeshe is somewhere here. Where is Thubten Yeshe? My ego's instinctive interpretation is that I'm here, somewhere in my body. Check for yourself. See what comes up in your mind when you think of your name. The huge mountain of your self will arise. Then check exactly where that mountain of "me" can be found. Where are you? Somewhere around your body. Are you in your chest, in your head?

You feel this instinctively. You don't have to study philosophy to learn it; you don't have to go to school; you parents didn't teach you. You've known this since before you were born.

Buddhism describes two kinds of ego identity: *kun-tag* and *lhen-kye*.

LEARNED GRASPING AT SELF

Kun-tag means the sense of self that's philosophically acquired. It's something that you learn through outside influence from teachers, friends, books and so forth. This is the intellectually derived ego. Can you imagine? You can even acquire an ego through reading. This one is easier to remove, of course, because it's more superficial. It's a gross conception. The simultaneously born sense of self is much, much harder to get rid of.

INNATE GRASPING AT SELF

The one I'm talking about is *lhen-kye*, the simultaneously-born one; the one that exists simply because you exist. It was born with you; it needs no outside influence for its existence. Like the smell

that comes with a pine tree, they're one. The pine tree doesn't grow first and then the smell comes later. They come together. It's the same with the innate sense of ego;

This instinctive conception of ego is really convinced that around my body is where you'll find Thubten Yeshe. Someone looks at me and asks, "Are you Thubten Yeshe?" "Yes", I reply, "I'm Thubten Yeshe". Where is Thubten Yeshe? Around here. Instinctively, I feel I'm right here. But I'm not the only one who feels like this. Check up for yourself. It's very interesting.

MY NAME IS NOT ME

Until I was six years old, I was not Thubten Yeshe. That name was given to me when I became a monk at Sera Monastery. Before that time, nobody knew me as Thubten Yeshe. They thought I was Döndrub Dorje. The names Thubten Yeshe and Döndrub Dorje are different; different superstitions give different kinds of name. I feel my name is me, but actually, it isn't. Neither the names Thubten Yeshe nor Döndrub Dorje are me. But the moment I was given the name Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Yeshe came into existence. Before I was given the name, he didn't exist; nobody looked at me and thought, "There's Thubten Yeshe". I didn't even think it myself. Thubten Yeshe did not exist.

But when one superstitious conception named this bubble, my body – "Your name is Thubten Yeshe" – my superstition took it: "Yes, Thubten Yeshe is me". It's an interdependent relationship. One superstition gives the name Thubten Yeshe to this bubble of relativity and my ego starts to feel that Thubten Yeshe really does exist somewhere in the area of my body.

THUBTEN YESHE IS MERELY A NAME

The reality, however, is that Thubten Yeshe is merely the dry words applied to the bubble-like phenomenon of these five aggregates. These things come together and that's it: Thubten Yeshe, the name on the bubble. It's a very superficial view. The

ego's instinctive feeling that Thubten Yeshe exists somewhere around here is very superficial.

You can see that the relative reality of Thubten Yeshe is simply the name that's been given to this bubble of energy. That's all Thubten Yeshe is. That's why the great philosopher and yogi Nagarjuna and the great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa both said that all phenomena exist merely in name. As a result, some early Western Buddhist scholars decided that Nagarjuna was a nihilist. That's a conclusion that could be reached only by someone who doesn't practice and spends all his time dealing in concepts and words.

If I were to show up somewhere and suddenly announce, "You're all merely names", people would think I was crazy. But if you investigate in detail the manner in which we're all merely names, it becomes extremely clear. Nihilists reject the very existence of interdependent phenomena but that's not what Nagarjuna did. He simply explained that relative phenomena exist but that we should view them in a reasonable way. They come, they go; they grow; they die. They receive various names and in that way gain a degree of reality for the relative mind. But that mind does not see the deeper nature of phenomena; it does not perceive the totality of universal existence.

RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE EXIST SIMULTANEOUSLY

Phenomena have two natures: the conventional, or relative, and the absolute, or ultimate. Both qualities exist simultaneously in each and every phenomenon. What I've been talking about is the way that bubbles of relativity exist conventionally. A relative phenomenon comes into existence when, at any given time, the association of superstition and the conception of ego flavors an object in a particular way by giving it a name. That combination – the object, the superstition giving it a name and the name itself – is all that's needed for a relative phenomenon to exist. When

those things come together, there's your Thubten Yeshe. He's coming; he's going; he's talking. It's all a bubble of relativity.

THUBTEN YESHE IS A BUBBLE

If right now you can see that Thubten Yeshe's a bubble, that's excellent. It helps a lot. And if you can relate your experience of seeing me as a bubble to other concrete objects you perceive, it will help even more. If you can see the heavy objects that shake your heart and make you crazy as relative bubbles, their vibration will not overwhelm you. Your heart will stop shaking and you'll cool down and relax.

If I were to show you a scarecrow and ask if it was Thubten Yeshe, you'd probably say it wasn't. Why not? "Because it's made of wood". You'd have a ready answer. You can apply exactly the same logic to the argument that this bubble of a body is not Thubten Yeshe either.

I believe very strongly that this is me because of the countless times from the time I was born up to now that my ego has imprinted the idea "this is me" on my consciousness. "Me. This is me. This bubble is me, me, me". But this bubble itself is not Thubten Yeshe.

THUBTEN YESHE IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND

We know it's composed of the four elements. However, the earth element is not Thubten Yeshe; the water is not Thubten Yeshe; the fire is not Thubten Yeshe; the air is not Thubten Yeshe. The parts of the body are not Thubten Yeshe either. The skin is not Thubten Yeshe; the blood is not Thubten Yeshe; they bone is not Thubten Yeshe; the brain is not Thubten Yeshe.

The ego is not Thubten Yeshe. Superstition is not Thubten Yeshe. The combination of all this is not Thubten Yeshe either – if it were, Thubten Yeshe would have existed before the name had been given. But before this combination was named Thubten Yeshe, nobody recognized it as Thubten Yeshe and I didn't

recognize it as Thubten Yeshe myself. Therefore, the combination of all these parts is not Thubten Yeshe.

If we call the scarecrow Thubten Yeshe and then analyze it to see exactly where Thubten Yeshe can be found, we can't find Thubten Yeshe in any of the parts or on all the parts together. This is easy to understand. It's exactly the same thing with the bubble of my aggregates. Neither any single constituent part nor the whole combination is Thubten Yeshe. We also know that the name alone is not Thubten Yeshe. So what and where is Thubten Yeshe? Thubten Yeshe is simply the combination of superstition flavoring an object with the words, "Thubten Yeshe". That's all that Thubten Yeshe is.

BEYOND THE NAME, THERE IS NO THUBTEN YESHE

Beyond the name, there is no real Thubten Yeshe existing somewhere. But the simultaneously-born ego doesn't understand that Thubten Yeshe exists merely as an interdependent combination of parts. It believes that without question, around here, somewhere, there exists a real, independent, concrete Thubten Yeshe. This is the nature of the simultaneously-born ego. Therefore, if we do not remove conceptions like, "Somewhere in this bubble, I'm Thubten Yeshe", we cannot release the ego.

The conception of ego is an extreme mind. It holds very concretely the idea that somewhere within this bubble of the four-element combination body there exists a self-existent I. That is the misconception that we must release. If the ego mind assessed the situation reasonably and was comfortable and satisfied perceiving that superstition giving the name Thubten Yeshe to this interdependent, four-element bubble was enough for Thubten Yeshe to exist, that would be a different story. But it's not satisfied with that. It cannot leave that alone. It wants to be special. It wants Thubten Yeshe to be concrete. It's not satisfied with Thubten Yeshe being a mere name on a collection of parts.

Therefore, it conceives an imaginary, unrealistic, exaggerated, concrete self-entity.

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6. YOU CANNOT FIND THE I ANYWHERE

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Let's concentrate for a few moments on what I'm saying. [Silence.] We believe, "I am here, in this building." We believe, "I am in America, Soquel, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha! I'm in this gompā, I'm in Vajrasattva retreat, I'm on this cushion, I'm in pain! I'm tired! I'm sleepy! I'm exhausted from a long day! What is he talking about? What is he mumbling about?" Anyway, thinking like that.

We think there's a real one, a real I, a real me, here doing Vajrasattva retreat, or listening to teachings. Here, sitting on this chair, or on this cushion – a real me listening to teachings. Now, I is your label; me, I.

You point to your body and label it I: "I am going out." You don't pick up a book and point to it and say, "I am going out!" No. You point to your body and apply the label, "I am going out."

And as your mind does the activity of thinking, you label, "I am thinking."

As your mind meditates, "I am meditating." By first thinking what kind of activity your mind is doing – for example, it's wandering – you say, "I am wandering. I am not meditating." "Are you meditating now?"

"No." You check the mind, then you say, "I am wandering," or, if it is meditating, being transformed into virtue by analytical or fixed meditation, you say, "I am meditating"; you call, or label, it, "I am meditating."

In exactly the same way as in this example, when you say "I," instead of pointing here [at your chest], point at this table; label I on this table.

So now, you have labelled I on the table, but where is that I on the table?

You cannot find I on the table. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find it anywhere, on any corner of the table, inside the table, above the table – you cannot find I anywhere. Not only that, but this corner of the table is not I, this other corner is not I – no part of the table is I. Even all the parts of the table together are not I.

So now, like this, it's exactly the same, exactly the same, even though our mind constantly labels I on this association of body and mind [Rinpoche pointing to his chest], constantly, twenty-four hours a day, labels I on this association of body and mind, exactly as in the example where your mind labels I on the table – even if you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table – the table is not I, nor is I on the table, inside the table, or anywhere else; you cannot find I on any part of the table, and even the whole thing is not I – in the same way, I cannot be found anywhere on the association of body and mind. If you look for your I, you cannot find it, from the ends of your hair to the tip your toes – your little toes, your big toes – nowhere can it be found. You cannot find your I anywhere. It is neither inside your nose nor on the tip of your nose! I'm joking!

Anyway, I is nowhere to be found, not even inside your body.

Normally you believe I to be inside, but even if that's what you normally believe, apprehend – that there's a real I inside the body, there's a real me inside the body – if you look for it, you cannot find it. When you start to analyze, it cannot be found. Where is it exactly? Look for it. Where is it exactly, inside the body? Where is it exactly, inside the chest – the part of the body where we normally believe the I to reside? It's somewhere there, within the body. We don't think that the I is outside – we think that it's inside, inside the chest. But if you try to identify exactly where the I is located, it cannot be found. There is no particular

location. You can't find it. If you look for the I, you cannot find it or its particular location.

Even though you normally believe that the I is there, somewhere inside your body, inside your chest, if you really check inside where it is, its exact location, you cannot find it.

SUBTLE DEPENDENT ARISING

When you think that the nature of the I is dependent arising, subtle dependent arising, the real I that appeared to you at the beginning and that you apprehend, disappears. It immediately becomes empty. It becomes empty, as it is empty in reality. If that real I that appeared to you were true – that you believed at the beginning to really be there – if that were true – according to the way in which it appears, the way in which you believe – if that were true, then even after analysis it should still be there. Even after your analysis of its dependent arising, it should remain. You should be able to find it. But it is not there.

Even when you meditate on the chakras, a real I seems to exist, but there is no real I existing in this body the way it appears to exist, the way you apprehend, or believe, it to exist. That I is not there, neither on the body nor inside the body. The body is not I; nor is the mind. Even the association of body and mind is not I; these aggregates are not I.

Without going through the Madhyamaka or lam-rim analyses of emptiness – for example, if the aggregates are I, then what happens, what illogical consequences arise? If the body is I, what illogical consequences arise? If the mind is I, what illogical consequences arise? – without going through all those detailed analyses, what I have just mentioned gives you an idea of how the aggregates are not I. From that, you can understand, or get the idea of, the rest.

SUBJECT & OBJECT CANNOT BE ONE

Even this association of body and mind is not I. As the texts state, the aggregates – this association of body and mind – are what is received.

They are what is received, and I is the receiver. I received these aggregates this time; I is the receiver. I is the subject who receives these aggregates, who has received, or taken, them. The I is the receiver. Can you say “taker,” that I is the taker? Like take-away food! I is to be taken away, like take-away food! I is to be taken away. Anyway, I’m joking...well, there is a way in which this can be true.

In Tibetan, we say *nye-wa lang-cha lem-pa-ko*. *Nye-wa lang-cha*: what is to be taken, the aggregates. The aggregates are what is to be taken, and I is the taker, who takes them. I is the subject and the aggregates are the object, what is to be taken. I is the taker of the aggregates. *Nye-wa langcha*, and *lem-pa-ko*; *lang-cha* is what is taken and *lem-pa-ko* is the taker.

So, there are two. The I created the cause of these aggregates; the continuity of this I created the cause of these aggregates, this samsara. Then this I has received, or taken, these aggregates. So the aggregates are what is to be taken and I is the taker. Subject and object. Therefore, they are not one. Therefore, the aggregates are not I, cannot be I, the subject.

Because aggregates are what is to be taken – the object. I is the taker of that object. So they cannot be one.

Similarly, an ax and the tree it cuts cannot be one. One is the object, the other is the subject, so they cannot be one. The cutter – the ax – and what is to be cut – the wood – cannot be one. The wood that is to be cut is not the cutter, the ax.

POSSESSOR & POSSESSION CANNOT BE ONE

In that way, there’s one reason. The other reason is similar. [We say] “My aggregates, my aggregates, my aggregates.” Even from the common, language point of view, “my aggregates” shows that

the aggregates are the possession, and my, or I, is the possessor. “My aggregates, my mind, my body.” Even normal language shows that these two are completely different; two completely different phenomena. They are not one. They are totally different phenomena. “My aggregates, my body, my mind” shows that they are possessions, and from that it follows that my, I, is the possessor.

Again, through that reason, you can see that there’s no way in which the possession, that which is possessed, can be the possessor, I.

There is no way. The two are totally different phenomena. They don’t exist separately, but they exist differently.

THE LABEL & THE BASE CANNOT BE ONE

Perhaps another thing to mention is this. The aggregates, the association of the body and mind, is the base to be labelled, and I is the label to be applied – what the base is to be labelled with. Again in Tibetan, I is *dagchö*, the label to be applied, and the aggregates are *dag-shir*, what is labelled, the base to be labelled. The aggregates are the base to be labelled, and I is the label, what is labelled on the base. Thus again here, one is the base, the other is the label. Two totally different phenomena; two totally different phenomena. They don’t exist separately, but they exist differently.

If they did exist separately, it would help a lot if you were a criminal!

It would help a lot. Because then you could say, “It wasn’t me that did it; it was the body. I didn’t do it”! Or you could say, “This mind did it, not me”! You could have many arguments! In court! You could argue in court, “I didn’t do it – the body did it; the mind did it.” If what you did was criminal or something for which you’d get punished, you could say, “The body did it; the mind did it. I didn’t do it.” But if it was a situation where you had something to gain, then you could say, “I did it”!

Say your body did something that normally brings millions of dollars, but nobody saw it. If your I had no relation to your aggregates, you could say, “I did it”! Since doing the action that brings millions of dollars didn’t depend on the body or the mind doing it, you could take the credit, “I did it. I should get the money”! You could argue like that. If there were something good to gain, something that you like or want to acquire, you could say, “I did it.” But if what you’d done were criminal or subject to punishment, you could say, “It wasn’t me”!

Anyway, I’m saying that if the I existed separately from the aggregates, it could be very helpful. You could do that. Maybe you could still argue, “I didn’t do it because I cannot find the I anywhere. I cannot see the I, so how could I have done it?” I’m joking!

What I’m trying to say is that since the aggregates are the base to be labelled and I is what is labelled on them – the aggregates are the base and I is the label – they are two totally different phenomena. Therefore, they are not one; the aggregates are not I.

THE MIND IS NOT THE I

Similarly, the mind is not I. It’s the same – you can use all those reasons that I mentioned regarding the aggregates, with the mind, to understand that the mind is not I. Your mind is not you. My mind, your mind – that shows it is not you. Your mind is not you; my mind is not me.

If something that the I possessed had to be I, were the I, then everything you possessed would be you. Your car would be you. Your kaka would be you!

It’s exactly the same with the table, as I mentioned before. You can find the I nowhere on these aggregates. Neither are the aggregates the I.

Exactly the same. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table. The table is not I. Exactly as you cannot find your I on the table even though your mind labels the

table I, exactly like that, even though your mind labels I on the aggregates, you cannot find I anywhere on the aggregates. Neither that, nor are the aggregates I.

When you get a feeling that the aggregates are not I, when you cannot find I on the aggregates, this understanding makes very clear what is the base and what is the label; you are able to differentiate. Now you are able to differentiate between the base and the label. After this analysis, you are able to differentiate what is the base and what is the label I.

Before, it was unclear to your mind; these two things were unclear. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would say those two are mixed up, as if the table were mixed into the base, as if the table were inside the base.

His Holiness Ling Rinpoche used to say that the definition of the object to be refuted is the appearance of the base and the label as undifferentiable.

For your mind, in your view, the base and the label – for example, the base to be labelled “table” and the label “table” itself – are undifferentiable. His Holiness Ling Rinpoche explained during a commentary on the Seven Point Thought Transformation at Drepung Monastery many years ago that this is the object to be refuted.

You are unable to differentiate between the label and the base. Your mind is very confused. Your mind is in a state of confusion. What appears to your view is that these two – the base, the aggregates, and the label, I, are undifferentiable. Now, through this analysis, you can see clearly that they – the label, I, and the base, the aggregates – are two totally different phenomena.

WHEN THE REALIZATION OF EMPTINESS OF THE I IS REAL, IT IS SO POWERFUL

Now, even if you have one hundred percent understanding, or recognition, that the base, the aggregates, is not I, that the I exists nowhere, I would not call that having realized emptiness. In

other words, you understand through the four-point analysis, the analysis of the four vital points, that if the I is inherently existent, it should exist either as oneness with the aggregates or as completely separate from them; it has to be pervaded by being either oneness with the aggregates or existing separately from the aggregates. But simply understanding that the inherently existent I is neither oneness with the aggregates nor does it exist separately from them – having a clear idea that the aggregates are not one with the I but also don't exist separately from the I – this awareness alone, the ability to distinguish between label and base, is not the realization of emptiness. Even if you had this awareness – the ability to distinguish label from base – even if the difference between the base and the label had become clear for your mind, still I would not say that you had realized emptiness.

When you realize emptiness – not just that there is no I, not just the feeling that there is no I – you should feel something very intensive. It should be very much more than that. Your understanding should be something very intensive. Not just the feeling that there is no I. The feeling should be something very deep; the feeling “there is no I” should be very intensive, very deep. You should feel as you would if you'd had a vision that you had received a million dollars, that somebody had put a million dollars into your hands, and you had totally, one hundred percent believed that you actually had all that money – and then suddenly realized it was just a hallucination! It's gone! Like that, suddenly you realize that it's not there, it has totally gone.

What you have believed, were one hundred percent convinced of, and so strongly clung to, grasped at, is suddenly, totally non-existent.

There's nothing to grab onto, nothing to hold onto. Suddenly, it's totally non-existent. Nothing of what you have been holding onto, cherishing as if it really exists, is truly there. Nothing of what, so far, you have never had any doubt about, have been

grasping at continuously, holding onto like a cat grabbing a mouse – all its claws clutching tightly together – nothing of that I exists. Suddenly, that about which you have never had any doubt since beginningless rebirths – even since this morning or since you were born into this life – suddenly, it doesn't go anywhere. Suddenly, there's nothing there. Maybe it's gone to the beach! Or to the mountains! To a retreat centre! Anyway, it doesn't go anywhere.

Just there! Suddenly! You realize there is nothing there. Suddenly, it is not there. You realize that it's totally non-existent. Totally non-existent.

There's nothing to hold onto. It's lost. Totally lost. Just right there – where it was – totally lost. Not that it's gone somewhere, but right there, it has become totally lost. There's nothing to hold onto. You feel something very intensive – not space, but empty, like space. During that time, there's no dual view, there's no “this is I and that is emptiness”; no “here is the subject, perceiver, realizer and there is the object, emptiness.” It's not dual; non-dual. At that time, the view that should appear should be non-dual, not “this I is meditating on emptiness, seeing emptiness. Oh, that is emptiness.”

Instead, there should be a very intensive understanding, seeing very intensively that . . .the I is empty. It's not just thinking that there's no I; it's not just that. It's not like, after searching for the table, the labelled table, the general table – not the inherently existent table but the general table, the labelled table – looking to see if any part of the table is the table – it's not that – or if perhaps the whole collection of parts together is the table – it's not that either – and only after all that, then thinking that the table does not exist. It's not that kind of experience. Nor is it like analyzing the body to find if the I is inside the body or on the aggregates, or understanding that the aggregates together are also not the I, then, after all that analysis, at the end, coming to the conclusion that there's no I.

Because you cannot find it, thinking that there is no I. It's not just that.

WHEN YOU SEE EMPTINESS, THERE IS EITHER UNBELIEVABLE JOY . . .

The right way of perceiving that the I is empty is an extremely deep, intensive experience, but there are basically two kinds of experience you can have. You can feel incredible, that you have discovered the most precious thing, such as a wish-granting jewel. Or like a person who has been looking for or waiting to meet a dear friend for many, many years – praying, wishing, to meet that person for many years – and then, after all these many years, suddenly meeting that friend. Or like you've been waiting to get a billion dollars for a long time and then suddenly you get the money. In other words, when you see emptiness, you feel unbelievable joy; incredible joy that makes you cry.

. . . OR UNBELIEVABLE FEAR

The second kind of experience is one of unbelievable fear, incredible fear. Not just any kind of fear. Not just the fear of being attacked by somebody; not that kind of fear. It's a very deep fear; something deep inside your heart, in the very depths of your heart. A very deep fear. The other fear is not fear of losing the I – something is going to happen to this I, but it's not losing the I. The ordinary is fear that this real I is going to receive some harm, but here, something that you've believed in – not only from birth but from beginningless rebirths up until now – something that you've believed in one hundred percent, only now, only now you realize that it's not there. Only now you realize that it's totally nonexistent.

This can cause an incredibly deep fear to arise.

As I often say, even when you recite *The Heart Sutra*, when you say the words, “No ear, no nose, no tongue...no ice cream! No coffee, no chocolate, no cigarettes, no drinks...!” – if fear comes

into your heart when you say “no this, no that,” if fear arises, that’s a good sign. Fear arising means your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, The Essence of Wisdom, is hitting, or touching, the root of samsara, hurting it. Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra* has touched the root of samsara, ignorance; has hit it.

Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, your way of thinking when you recite *The Essence of Wisdom*, is fitting – like an arrow or a bomb. As an arrow hits its target, as a bomb or a torpedo hits its target, the enemy at which you aimed, like that, your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, those teachings on emptiness, your way of thinking, your meditation, has hit its target, the object of ignorance, the inherently existent I – the I that is apprehended by simultaneously-born ignorance. You have hit the target you’re supposed to hit. The target that you are supposed to hit with the arrow or bomb of your recitation of the words of *The Heart Sutra* and thinking on their meaning is the object to be refuted, the inherently existent I.

Fear in your heart means that you have hit the target.

The texts explain that it is highly intelligent practitioners who have the experience of incredible, blissful joy, tears running down their cheeks, and feel as if they’d found an unbelievably precious jewel, and less intelligent practitioners who feel fear when they realize emptiness. At that time, you should not try to escape from this fear – trying to do so is your greatest obstacle to realizing emptiness. Instead, you must realize that this is the one time, the one opportunity, to realize emptiness – the only wisdom that can directly cut the delusions, the root of samsara, the gross and subtle defilements, bringing liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. Knowing this, you must go through the fear; you must complete your experience. Go through the fear like crossing a river.

Otherwise, if you block your own progress the one time that you have the opportunity of realizing emptiness, if you run away from that, like running away from teachings, from meditation

courses, especially my meditation courses – of course, those are good to run away from! – if you run from the fear that arises when you realize emptiness, that is no good at all.

**BUT DON'T BE AFRAID THE I WILL DISAPPEAR;
THERE IS ALWAYS CONTINUITY OF THE LABEL I**

However, you never have to worry about the I ceasing, because the I never ceases. The I that is the label never ceases. The I never stops, never ceases. Why is there always continuity of the I, the label? Why is there always continuity of the self? Because there is always continuity of consciousness. Even after enlightenment, the consciousness continues forever.

Even though the body might change – one body stops, another body is taken – the continuity of consciousness is always there, even after enlightenment. Therefore, the continuity of the I never ceases. It always exists because the base, the continuity of consciousness, always exists.

Therefore, thinking, “I’m going to cease, I’m going to become non-existent” is totally wrong.

When that feeling arises, the appearance of losing or having totally lost your I, you shouldn’t be worried that that appearance means you’re falling into nihilism. Because of that appearance, you should not be worried that you are falling into nihilism – just as you should not be worried that the I is becoming non-existent. There are two things – one is the fear of falling into nihilism; the other is the worry, “I am becoming nonexistent.”

You should not be scared of those things. If you do get scared, you’ll block yourself from realizing emptiness; this one opportunity to realize emptiness will have arisen and you’ll have blocked it yourself.

A very clear commentary on the Mahamudra by Ketsang Jamyang (I’m not hundred percent sure that’s his name), which is regarded as a very effective teaching, explains why this appearance of the self becoming non-existent happens. It

happens because it has to happen. Furthermore, it is a sign that there is no inherent existence on the I, the merely labelled I. There is no inherent existence on that I, and the experience of its becoming non-existent shows, proves, that. When you have this experience, you see the Middle Way, the Madhyamika, view. You see the Middle Way, devoid of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

REALIZING EMPTINESS IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS LIBERATION

I would say that realizing that the object of ignorance – the concept of the inherently existent I – is empty, realizing the emptiness that is the negation of the object to be refuted, is the first step towards liberation. I'm not saying that by that alone you have entered – of the five paths to liberation – the path of merit. I'm not saying that. But it's like you've taken a step towards liberation, because that wisdom is the main thing that directly ceases the defilements.

CONCLUSION: THE I EXISTS BUT NOT HOW WE THINK IT DOES

Just to conclude now – before we all go to sleep! – as I mentioned before, how when you label I on the table, it's not there – in exactly the same way, when the mind labels I on these aggregates, it's not there either. The aggregates are not the I; the I is not there. I exists, but it's not there. The I that is labelled by your mind exists, but it's not there. Even that is not there. Even that. Besides the real I that you believe to reside in the heart, inside your body, not being there, even the I merely labelled by your mind, which does exist, is not there either. I'm not saying it's not here [in this room], I'm saying it's not there [on your aggregates].

So now, the I that is merely labelled by the mind exists. That is here, that exists, but even that cannot be found on these

aggregates, on the base of the aggregates. It doesn't exist on these aggregates. The merely labelled I exists because the base, the aggregates, exists. In the same way, the base, the aggregates, which are merely imputed, exists, but it doesn't exist on the gathering of the five aggregates; it doesn't exist there. The merely labelled aggregates exist, but they don't exist on the collection of the five aggregates. They don't exist there; they cannot be found there. So that's clear. The merely labelled aggregates cannot be found on the collection of the five. They don't exist there.

In exactly the same way, for each aggregate – for example, the aggregate of form, the general aggregate of form – it's exactly same. The same logic applies. The merely labelled aggregate exists but it doesn't exist on that base. Empty. It doesn't exist there; it's not there, not existent on this base. The aggregate of form does not exist on the collection of the limbs, either in all their parts or on the whole collection together. So there's no question about the inherently existent, real aggregate: it doesn't exist anywhere.

The real one appearing from there – the aggregate, the general aggregate of form – exists nowhere. Similarly, if you go to the parts of the limbs, to the arms, head, legs, stomach, and so forth, all those merely labelled ones exist, but they don't exist on their own bases. Even the merely labelled head cannot be found on the collection of its parts, the brain and everything else. If you look for head, it cannot be found there.

Like that, it's the same for the arms, the legs, the main body – everything down to the atoms – that which is merely labelled exists, but it doesn't exist on its own base. Even the merely labelled atom exists, but it doesn't exist, cannot be found, on the collection of the particles of the atom. And it's the same for even the particles of the atom – they can't be found on their own base either.

Thus, everything from the I down to the particles of the atoms, or, from the general aggregate of form down to the particles of

atoms, which appears as something real, is not there. It's totally empty; every single thing is totally empty. What appears to your view, your hallucinating mind, seems to be something real, from there – but it's not there. Starting from the real I down to the real particles of the atoms, what appears is not there; it's totally empty – not space, but like space; totally empty, non-existent.

That was form. How about the aggregate of feeling, that which is labelled on the thought, the mental factor that experiences pleasure, indifference and suffering? It's the same with the aggregate of feeling – the merely labelled aggregate of feeling exists, but cannot be found on its base. It's also the same with the aggregate of cognition, which discriminates phenomena as bad or good, as this and that, as friend and enemy, fat and skinny, long and short, and so forth. The merely labelled aggregate of cognition exists – because its base exists – but it doesn't exist on that base. So that's the same. Then, if you analyze the pleasant feeling, the suffering feeling, the indifference, you cannot find those feelings on their base. Similarly with the aggregate of cognition – you can do the same analysis, but neither can cognition be found on its base, even though merely labelled cognition exists.

It's also the same thing with the aggregate of compounded phenomena.

It's also labelled, merely imputed, because its base exists. Subtracting feeling and cognition from the fifty-one mental factors, the rest are called the aggregate of compounded phenomena, labelled that, but that aggregate cannot be found on that base.

Finally, it's the same with the aggregate of consciousness. Merely labelled consciousness exists, but it cannot be found on its base, like a carpet on the floor. The merely labelled consciousness doesn't exist like that. The mind, which knows phenomena, which does the function of continuing from one life to the next, perceiving merely the essence of the object, that knowing

phenomenon, she-pa, because that mind exists, your mind labels it nam-she, consciousness. But using the same analysis I mentioned before, neither that consciousness nor the split seconds of consciousness can be found on their respective bases.

Therefore, starting from the I down to the split seconds of consciousness, each aggregate – form, feeling, cognition, compounded phenomena and consciousness, down to the split seconds of consciousness – everything that appears to our mind, to our view, as real, as something real existing from there, is totally non-existent. Normally, after making all this analysis, you should meditate on this emptiness; let your mind dwell in it for a while. Looking at everything as empty, let your mind stay in that state of emptiness for as long as possible. That's extremely good, very effective.

DWELL IN THIS EMPTINESS OF NON-EXISTENCE FROM ITS OWN SIDE

So that's reality; that's how things are. This is reality, so let's place our minds in this state for a while. Concentrate for a little bit on this conclusion that the whole thing is totally empty. Everything – from the I down to, and including, the particles of the atoms and the split seconds of consciousness – is totally empty from its own side.

[Long meditation.]

The final thing is that it's totally non-existent – from its own side. It's totally non-existent, but non-existent from its own side. So the second part of that expression makes the way of thinking or the experience correct – seeing it as not just empty, non-existent, but empty, non-existent, from its own side. Like this, the nature of everything else in existence – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, hell, enlightenment, samsara, nirvana, happiness, suffering, life's gains and losses, virtue, non-virtue, everything – is totally empty, non-existent. But, non-existent from its own side.

WHILE EVERYTHING IS EMPTY, THEY DO EXIST – MERELY LABELLED BY MIND

So, while things are empty – everything is totally empty from its own side – they exist. They exist in mere name, by being merely labelled by the mind – which also exists in mere name. Things exist as merely labelled by the mind, which itself also exists in mere name. Everything is unified with emptiness and dependent arising, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha realized and Lama Tsongkhapa praised highly. Lama Tsongkhapa himself also actualized this emptiness – which is unified with dependent arising, subtle dependent arising – this right view, this wisdom, which is the only one that can cut the one particular root of samsara: the ignorance, the hallucinating mind that – while there's no I on these aggregates, including the inherently existent I – through negative imprints left on the mental continuum, projects on to these aggregates the appearance of an inherently existent I and then believes it to be true; the ignorance that believes this inherently existent I is true, that it really exists.

This particular root of samsara – the ignorance that apprehends the I, which is merely labelled by the mind, as existing from its own side, as not merely labelled by the mind – can be cut only by this specific wisdom, only by this right view, this wisdom, this right view. Only by generating that can you be totally liberated from samsara, from the entire ocean of sufferings of samsara, which are divided into three – suffering of pain, suffering of change and pervasive, compounded suffering. Within samsara, there are the specific sufferings of each realm and the general sufferings of samsara, such as the six, the four and the three.

It is only with this wisdom, this particular right view, the Prasangika view, that you can be totally liberated from the oceans of samsaric suffering – all the specific sufferings of each samsaric realm, and the three, four and six general sufferings of samsara. By ceasing the cause – delusion and karma – you can achieve the

sorrowless state of total liberation from samsara, and only with this wisdom, the Prasangika view, can you also eradicate the subtle defilements, achieve full enlightenment and be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings, leading them to enlightenment as well.

I'd better stop here, otherwise we won't finish until tomorrow morning!

Teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche given during a Vajrasattva retreat at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, in 1999.

7. BODHICHITTA IS THE BEST MEDICINE

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Good morning. Geshe-la [Geshe Lhundrup Sopa] advised that I should do some chatting, so today Mickey Mouse is going to do some chattin.

Everything we do in our daily life is for happiness, whether our own happiness or the happiness of others. Even though there are so many prayers to recite and so many different meditation practices, the very heart of the teaching of our kind compassionate Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the loving, compassionate thought of bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta, the altruistic thought to achieve enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings, is the best medicine, the best meditation, the best Dharma practice. Bodhichitta is the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's advice. Bodhichitta means letting go of the I and cherishing others. We have to let go of the I, from where arise all our emotional problems and all the obstacles to our own success and happiness and to our bringing success and happiness to the numberless other living beings.

From where do all the problems and difficulties in life come? From the I; from the ego cherishing the I, or in other words from the I. And from where do all the good things come? From bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is the source of all happiness, of all desirable things, from the temporary happiness of even our moment-to-moment peace of mind in our daily life up to the ultimate happiness of liberation—total liberation from the entire suffering cycle of rebirth and death and all the problems that are experienced in between and from its cause, karma, or action, and the delusions that motivate the actions—and the ultimate peerless happiness of full enlightenment, pure happiness that

never degenerates, that never turns into suffering.

Bodhichitta, the altruistic mind that cherishes others and seeks to bring them happiness, is generated in dependence upon the existence of suffering sentient beings; therefore, we receive all our happiness, all the good things, through the kindness of others. Living your life with the good heart, cherishing others, is the best way to take care of your health. It's the best way to heal AIDS, cancer, or any other disease.

TAKING UPON YOURSELF THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

For example, some years ago in Singapore when a student went to the hospital for a checkup, he was told by his doctor that he had AIDS. The student then sent a letter to his guru, Rato Rinpoche, a very high lama who lived in Dharamsala. Even though Rinpoche himself was showing the aspect of sickness at that time, Rinpoche kindly dictated a meditation on bodhichitta that involved letting go of the I and cherishing others.

In this meditation, by generating compassion, you take upon yourself all the sufferings of the numberless other beings with AIDS and of those who have the karma to experience AIDS in the future and by generating loving kindness, you make charity of your body, your happiness, and your merits, the cause of all happiness, to others, who are numberless. Rinpoche kindly dictated the meditation to Ruth Sonam, the translator for Geshe Sonam Rinchen, who has been teaching for many years at the Tibetan Government Library in Dharamsala. You take the sufferings from AIDS of others upon yourself, upon your ego, and use them to destroy your ego, from where AIDS and other sicknesses come. You then send light to others and give everything—your body, happiness, and merit, the cause of happiness—to other sentient beings.

After receiving the meditation instruction, the student did the practice for four days. He then went to the hospital for another

checkup and the doctor told him, “You have no AIDS”. I thought that he must have practiced for many hours each day. When I asked him, “How many hours did you practice?” and he said, “Five minutes”, I was shocked. But the five minutes that he meditated on those four days was extremely powerful. I would think that in that five minutes of meditation on bodhichitta he probably purified many more negative karmas and defilements than many months of deity retreat, reciting mantras and visualizing deities, even Vajrasattva, but without strong compassion for others, without the altruistic mind cherishing others. I think that his five minutes of meditation on bodhichitta was like some people’s months of retreat. The effect on his mental continuum, and even the benefit to his health, was much more than that from years of deity retreat done without a pure motivation.

While doing the meditation, he felt unbearable compassion for others. When he thought of the other people with AIDS, tears poured out. He felt it was unbearable that others were suffering, especially the people with AIDS. During those five minutes of meditation, he felt so much compassion for others. So, that is what he did each day.

BODHICHITTA HEALS

He was healed by his own compassion, by his own healthy mind, not by medicine. Making his own mind healthy by generating this purest of attitudes affected his body; it improved his health. How does meditation heal sickness? Generally speaking, by understanding this, we can understand how meditation can heal sickness without depending on external factors such as chemical medicines and so forth. Compassion is very powerful. Generating compassion is a very powerful method of purification and of collecting good luck, or merit. Because this student generated compassion very strongly, he purified so much negative karma, the real cause of sickness. This negative karma was within him,

on his mental continuum, not outside, and generating compassion purified that negative karma. With one way of thinking you can make your body and mind sick; you can make your mind sick and that can make your body sick. In a similar way, however, your positive attitude can make your mind healthy and that can make your body healthy. This is what normally happens in our daily lives. If you are aware, you can see this. It can be proved.

I also heard that four people in Spain had recovered from AIDS by doing meditation practice, but I don't know the details. This was mentioned to me by the lead singer from the famous group called Meccano, who recorded a song about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's life. (I call the group "*Nangcho*", which means inner offering, because their name sounds like "*nangcho*".)

Generally, our health depends on our attitude to life. I think that anything happening in the body is an expression of the mind. The body is an expression of the mind; how the body appears is an expression of the quality of the mind. This is what I think. So, how much you take care of your mind determines how much you are able to take care of your health. This is the best way to take care of yourself. This is the best protection for your life, the best way to keep healthy, because it is the correct evolution. Even though external factors such as pollution do affect the body and the mind, there is a reason that they do so; it doesn't happen without cause and conditions. What happens is a result, or an effect, so the cause has to exist prior to that. Since that result is a causative phenomenon, its cause has to exist beforehand. So, there is a reason for it. Things do not happen without a reason, which is the same as saying that things do not happen without cause and conditions.

SEEING SUFFERING AS GOOD

There was one student in Australia who had AIDS. Every time he came to Chenrezig Institute, a meditation centre in Queensland,

Australia, he did a lot of retreat and practice, with Medicine Buddha as the main one and others. Doing all this practice and meditation would give him a lot of strength. These deities are very powerful. The purpose of their manifestation is only out of compassion embracing all sentient beings; no matter how much negative karma sentient beings create, a Buddha's compassion never gives up sentient beings for even one second. Of course, their mantras are also very powerful and very blessed, so they have a lot of effect. Anyway, after all this practice, he would get better; he would become so radiant that he looked as if he had no sickness at all. He could then help in various activities around the centre.

When he got better, the thought would always come to go back to the city to help other people with AIDS. However, whenever he went to the city, he was unable to continue his practice and his health would then deteriorate. He was busy, but I think that his health suffered not so much because he was busy, but because he was unable to continue his practice. I think that was the main reason.

He would then come back to the centre and again do the practices. His health would again improve. Because he got better, he would then again go back to the city. He went through this cycle a few times.

When his condition was very bad, he came to see me when I was in Brisbane. He was so weak that he had to be supported by two friends. He sat in a chair and listened as I talked to him about how it is good to have AIDS, how it is positive to have AIDS. I'm not talking about positive-negative in relation to AIDS, but about how positive it can be to have a sickness. I talked to him about all the benefits of having AIDS. I told him that he was very lucky, very fortunate, because he could use the AIDS to develop bodhichitta, to develop compassion for all sentient beings. Having AIDS can be a quick and powerful way to develop compassion, because having the problem yourself makes it easy

for you to feel compassion for others, for those with similar problems, as well as for those with other general sufferings.

It is much easier for human beings living in this particular human world, the southern continent, to develop compassion than human beings living in the other continents: the eastern, western, and northern continents. Of course, there is no question that it is much easier for us to develop compassion than the worldly gods, but it is easier for us than even human beings living in those other worlds. It is easier for human beings living in this southern continent to develop compassion because we can see many sufferings in our own lives and in the lives of other human beings in this world. Because we can see and experience these sufferings, it is easy to understand others' suffering and develop compassion. This means that we can develop bodhichitta more easily and more quickly, and thus can achieve enlightenment. Human beings in this world can more quickly achieve the great liberation, non-abiding in the sorrowless state, or full enlightenment, which is the cessation of all the faults of the mind and completion of all the realizations. But that is still not the final goal. Achieving enlightenment means that we can liberate other sentient beings from all their sufferings and the cause of their sufferings and bring them more quickly to full enlightenment. This is the main goal of life, the main objective, and we can accomplish this more quickly.

I told this student that having his sickness gave him an incredible opportunity to develop his mind in the spiritual path, in the path to enlightenment. His sickness opened the door to enlightenment and all other happiness. Using it to generate loving kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta for other sentient beings brings very powerful purification. As I mentioned before, many hundreds of thousands of eons of negative karma get purified. I don't remember every single word that I said to him, but the conclusion was that his illness could bring him to enlightenment more quickly.

NOT ONLY TAKING UPON OURSELVES OTHERS' SUFFERING BUT ALSO GIVING THEM ALL OUR HAPPINESS

We should use our life problems—whether AIDS or another problem—to develop the realization of bodhichitta by doing tong-len practice, taking other sentient beings' suffering and its cause within ourselves to destroy the ego, the source of all our problems, and then, with loving kindness, giving everything to other sentient beings. I told him that each time he did the meditation of taking upon himself the suffering of numberless other beings he collected skies of merit, skies of good karma, or good luck. And each time he gives his body to all sentient beings, he collects good karma, the cause of all happiness, including enlightenment; he collects the cause of all the temporary happiness of this life and of all future lives, up to enlightenment. He creates skies of merit by giving his body to all sentient beings. Then, by giving all his merit, the cause of his happiness, to all sentient beings, he again collects skies of merit. And by giving all his happiness, the result of his merit, to others, he again collects merit like the sky. So, it is just unbelievable!

When you want to do this meditation of taking others' suffering and giving others your own merit, happiness, and so forth, I normally advise that in the times between your meditation sessions, while you are working or busy doing something else, whenever the thought arises, "Oh, I have this problem", immediately think, "I'm experiencing this problem on behalf of the numberless other living beings". Whether you have AIDS, cancer, a relationship problem, or a job problem, think that you are experiencing the problem on behalf of the numberless other beings who have that problem and who have the karma to experience that problem in the future, and then on behalf of the rest of the sentient beings. Either one thinks, I'm experiencing this for all sentient beings. When the thought comes, "Oh, I have this problem", before fear, worry, and other

negative emotional thoughts arise, immediately think, “I’m experiencing this problem on behalf of all sentient beings”. Think this, then try to keep your mind in that state. Each time you think this you collect merit as limitless as the sky; you collect skies of merit, of good karma, because those for whom you are experiencing the problem are numberless.

PRACTICING “GIVING AND TAKING” – TONGLEN – KEEPS YOUR MIND IN PEACE

Keeping your mind continuously in this state is keeping your mind continuously in the state of happiness. While the problem is there, you will be able to keep your mind continuously in a state of peace and happiness, and because of that, no other negative thoughts will arise. With this thought, you won’t create negative karma. This thought is an incredible protection. Those other disturbing, obscuring thoughts will not arise, so you won’t engage in negative karma, which not only harms you but also harms others. Keeping your mind in a state of happiness helps so much. Also, when you are able to keep your mind continuously in a state of happiness in this way, you feel very free and joyful, and you then have so much space to communicate with and to help others. There are no personality clashes because your mind is in this very open, very joyful, state. You can then communicate better with others and can better help them.

There is also continual inspiration to practice; it gives you the energy to do various practices in your daily life. When your mind is too upset or too depressed, you can’t even do your daily practices. Also, when your mind is so depressed, so discouraged, you don’t want to communicate with or to help others. There is no space to help others.

So, to get back to the point I am trying to make. I don’t remember what I told him word for word, but the essence of the whole talk was to get him to look at his having AIDS as positive, as beneficial. I wanted him to see the incredible benefit he could

get from having his sickness by using it to develop bodhichitta. At the beginning, he was slumped back in the chair, but after I had talked to him in this way, he was able to lift his body and get up. He waved his arms in the air, saying: “Oh, look! Look, now I can stand by myself”. You can see now how it has very much to do with the attitude, with the mind. This applies generally to everything, but I think that particularly in the case of AIDS, if you are able to make your mind strong and healthy, you can live longer. Even though the AIDS doesn’t go away, the person can live longer and also have a stronger, healthier body by making their mind healthy. The immediate change was an improvement in his health, but of course he had to keep his mind continuously in that state. It was not enough just to have his mind in that state at that time; he had to continue to keep his mind in that state. This would help him to stay healthy longer.

THE GOOD HEART IS THE BEST PROTECTION, AND IT BRINGS SUCCESS

As I was saying before, loving kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta, the good heart, provide the best protection, even concerning protection of the life. Bodhichitta is also the best friend. External friends can change, but your bodhichitta is always the same. It doesn’t change; it doesn’t cheat you. It doesn’t harm you, but always benefits you and other sentient beings. It’s the best, most reliable friend.

Your good heart, your bodhichitta, is also the best means to gain success. Bodhichitta is the best method to have success in any of the works of this life, success in the happiness of future lives, success in the everlasting happiness of liberation from the entire suffering and its causes, and the greatest success of achieving full enlightenment. Even for success, bodhichitta is the best. Again, the logic is the same. Success is a causative phenomenon. Success is a dependent arising; it depends on cause and conditions. Therefore, success in finding happiness—I don’t

know about success in finding problems!—has to come from a particular cause, virtue, good karma, or positive action; positive action, or karma, has to come from positive intention, or *sempa* in Tibetan, which is a mental factor. It has to come from positive intention. With bodhichitta, this thought of benefiting sentient beings, one collects the most extensive merit, or good karma. This is the logical reasoning.

BY MERELY THINKING ABOUT BODHICHITTA YOU COLLECT MERIT

As you will remember, it is said in the teachings and in *Bodhicaryavatara*, even without engaging in an actual action to benefit others, just by thinking to benefit others, you collect merit like the sky. Since merely thinking to benefit others collects skies of merit, bodhichitta is the best means to have success in finding happiness. The same applies to finding wealth.

By having bodhichitta, you become a friend to all sentient beings. Having this good heart, this thought to benefit other sentient beings, breaks down the wall between you and others. If you feel distant from other sentient beings, as if there is a wall between you and others, bodhichitta will break it down, so that you feel close to all sentient beings. There is no distance between you and others. By having this realization, you hold all sentient beings in your heart. Bodhichitta is the source of all your happiness and success and of all the happiness and success of all other sentient beings. Your loving kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta are also the source of happiness and success for all the numberless other living beings.

UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

The last point I want to mention is universal responsibility. If you have the good heart, the thought to benefit others, numberless other sentient beings do not receive harm from you, which means they receive peace and happiness from you. On top of that, they

receive help, benefit, from you. Besides the peace and happiness that is the absence of harm, they receive so much peace and happiness from you. Therefore, all this peace and happiness they receive from you is in your hands. Whether or not you want cause others this peace and happiness is up to you; it depends on what you do with your mind, on whether or not you generate this good heart, this bodhichitta, the thought to benefit. Therefore, every one of us here holds the responsibility for the happiness of numberless other sentient beings. If we live our daily life with this attitude, everything—all those many hours of working, studying, eating, sleeping, walking—will naturally become work for others, work to cause happiness to others. In this way, all those actions will become virtue and the best Dharma because they are unstained by self-cherishing thought. They will become the best cause of happiness for you and for all sentient beings. In this way the twenty-four hours of each day will become beneficial, useful. No matter what lifestyle you have—whether you are healthy, with no cancer or AIDS, or whether you have one of those sicknesses, whether you are at home, in an office, or even in prison—with this thought your life will always be beneficial for sentient beings. Whatever you do, it will always be beneficial for sentient beings. Your life becomes useful all the time, because it is always for sentient beings. In this way the purpose of your living is achieved.

Thank you. Thank you so much.

A teaching given at Madison, WI, USA on July 4, 1999.

8. DEDICATE IN EMPTINESS

BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me,
buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings – which
are totally non-existent from their own side –
May the I – which is totally nonexistent from its own side –
Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment – which is
totally non-existent from its own side –
And lead all sentient beings – who are totally non-existent from
their own side –
To that enlightenment – which is totally non-existent from its
own side –
By myself alone – which is totally non-existent from its own side.