

རི་ཆོས

KARMA CHAKME'S MOUNTAIN DHARMA VOLUME TWO



AS TAUGHT BY
KHENPO KARTHAR RINPOCHE

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The restricted chapters, not included in these volumes, are available at Karma Ling Retreat Center with the permission of one's teacher.

For the complete list of contents of Ri Chö, see "*Precious Garland: A List of Contents to Prevent Disorder*"

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KARMA CHAKME'S MOUNTAIN DHARMA

VOLUME TWO

As taught by

KHENPO KARTHAR RINPOCHE

Translated by

LAMA YESHE GYAMTSO



KTD Publications

*This book is dedicated to
His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley
Dorje*

ཨོཾ། འཛིན་སྟོན་ཀུན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྟེན་པ་རང་
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OM SWA STI KARMA KA BI DZA YA

From the unchanging, permanent Dharmakaya appears the
magical body of Karmapa.

May your three secrets of body, speech, and mind firmly
remain in the vajra realm.

May your boundless activities be blazingly glorious and
spontaneously accomplished.

Aspiration by the Twelfth Gyaltschap Mingyur Gocha. Mangalam

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Preface

The students of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche wish to express their gratitude to Rinpoche for bringing *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma* to us. As always, Rinpoche presents his teaching with infinite generosity, wisdom, and **compassion**, and we appreciate his confidence in us to receive this teaching.

His Holiness the Sixteenth **Karmapa** (Rangjung Rikpe **Dorje**, 1923–1981) indicated that it was his wish that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche present *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma* to Western students. In accordance with this wish, Khenpo Rinpoche began teaching this text in the Year of the Earth Rabbit, February 1999, at Karma Triyana **Dharmachakra**, the North American seat of His Holiness, located in Woodstock, New York. The teachings took place on weekends over the subsequent four years, concluding in the Year of the Water Sheep, April 2003.

The original text by Karma Chakme Rinpoche was written in 1659. The text that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche taught from was printed and published at Tashi Jong, Himachal Pradesh, India, and consists of 595 pages in fifty-four chapters. Karma Chakme requested that the text always be copied and presented in its

completeness, thus ensuring that nothing be lost. Because *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma* is a complete work of the complete path, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche follows Chakme Rinpoche's instructions in maintaining the integrity of the original text. We also respectfully follow their wishes and instructions; however, due to the length of the text and commentary, we will publish Khenpo Rinpoche's commentary in four volumes, with a separate volume for the Tibetan text.

Rinpoche followed the same order as the original Tibetan text with two exceptions. He began with the **namthar** (spiritual biography) of Karma Chakme, which in the Tibetan original is placed at the end of the text. Rinpoche also omitted the restricted chapters, which, at some point, will be published separately for use by qualified students. The result of these efforts is that the entire contents of *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma* is available in English for the first time.

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to our translators, Lama Yeshe Gyamtso, Chojor Radha, and Namgyal Khorko, to Jeanette DeFries for transcribing the oral teachings as well as for her invaluable support and guidance, to Louise Light and Sandy Hu for their generosity in helping us get started, to Naomi Schmidt for her technical assistance, to Wendy Harding for the line drawing of Karma Chakme Rinpoche, to Chojor

Radha for his calligraphy, and to Tenzin Chonyi for his kindness and encouragement.

The editorial and production staff — Maureen McNicholas, Peter van Deurzen, Daia Gerson, Barbara Majewska, and Mary Young — also wish to thank all the many others who helped in so many ways to bring to fruition the wishes of His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa and the wishes of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. This would not have been possible without the extraordinary talents and efforts of all. Our most special thank you is for Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche for his blessings and guidance.

Together we have made our best effort to present Rinpoche's teachings as accurately as possible. However, if any parts are incorrect or unclear, we take full responsibility. We hope that, despite our shortcomings, all beings may benefit from these teachings.

Maureen McNicholas and Peter van Deurzen

Advice from Khenpo Rinpoche

The following paragraphs are taken from the Question and Answer sessions that were a part of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's teaching on Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma. During these sessions, Rinpoche personally engaged with his students, answering their questions and offering his advice. Here Rinpoche comments on how the teachings were given to Tsonдру Gyamtso, the uniqueness and value of this text, and how to use the information and practices contained in the book to instruct and support their practice.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche was in lifelong retreat when Tsonдру Gyamtso requested teachings on mountain Dharma. Traditionally, when someone was doing a lifelong retreat, provisions were made for limited communication with the outside. When a practitioner had completed all of the graduated practices of the various yidams and had achieved signs of realization, it was appropriate for them to teach even though they were remaining in retreat. They would speak through a small aperture in the wall, and as in the case of Karma Chakme Rinpoche and Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, the teachings would be received and written down by a student sitting outside, often in the cold. In some cases a blessing would be given, with the retreatant actually

sticking his hand out and blessing the person. The reason it was appropriate for Karma Chakme Rinpoche to teach while he was still in retreat is that he was in lifelong retreat and he had completed all of the necessary practices.

...

This book is almost unique in its clarity of presentation. The various topics that are dealt with are also to be found in other texts; however, most of these are so long and detailed that it is possible to get lost and not come to any real understanding of the subject. The presentation here is concise and very clear. As Karma Chakme Rinpoche wrote in his introduction, “If you place this volume on your pillow, then you have gotten hold of the one teacher who will never get mad at you.” If people have this text available, then they will truly have an understanding of how to practice and how to approach the many different practices we do. They do not need to use the whole book. They can select the parts that correspond to their particular practice and get a much better idea of the purpose of it.

...

This text is designed as a means of general guidance. It presents the whole path common to any system of practice in which

you might be engaged. For example, when the text explains the preliminary practices, they are presented in their usual sequence. When it reaches the yidam practices, they are presented in a general way that can be applied to any major yidam practice, although you would need the empowerment for that particular yidam.

...

When you make tea, you have to know what you are doing. You have to know how to use the stove. If you do not know what you are doing, you are going to burn your house down. When it comes to practicing Dharma, you think that you do not need to know what you are doing. You do not need to know anything. You do not need to study. This is incorrect. You may wonder why I am teaching all of this. Surely, the contents of any one of these chapters would be enough. It is not enough. Everything presented in this text is necessary and is here for a reason. You need to know these things in order to do your practice and to be able to deal with the problems that arise. Therefore these practices and these chapters are not redundant. They are not irrelevant. They are not outmoded. They are here for a reason.

...

It is important that you practice only those practices for which you have received the complete empowerment, **reading transmission**, and **instruction**. If you practice something that you have not received instruction for or the instructions have not been given to you completely enough so that you are certain about exactly what to do, then even though you may be diligent in the practice, because you are in doubt as to exactly what you are supposed to be doing, there will be a lot of impediments and a lot of possibility for error or deviation. Therefore abandon practicing things that you have not been properly instructed in. If you practice something for which you have not received the empowerment and the reading transmission, then it is like churning water to get butter. If you want to get butter, you have to churn milk. If you churn water, no matter how much you churn, it is never going to turn to butter because it lacks the potential. In the same way, practicing something for which you have not received the empowerment and reading transmission will lead to no result.

It is possible that simply through the fact that such a practice is Dharma and through the power inherent in the **mantras** that you could receive some indication of blessing, but in the long run it is a cause for rebirth in the lower realms. The reason for this is that if you have not received the empowerment and the reading transmission, something will go wrong and the blessing

will become a cause for arrogance or jealousy. It is something to be avoided at all costs. It is essential when you do a practice to have the complete empowerment, reading transmission, and precise instructions for that practice.

...

It is no good being in a big hurry to finish **ngondro** because when you are in so much of a hurry to finish it, you have automatically dismissed ngondro as a practice and you just try to get through it. You think that it is not the real thing, that it is just something to be done with. It will be ineffective if you are in that kind of hurry. It is important to remember the saying that the preliminaries are more profound than the main practice. The meaning of this is that the actual work that causes the main practice to produce results is mostly done during the accumulation of the preliminaries. The function of the so-called preliminaries is to prepare you so well that when you engage in the main practice it is easy to produce results. The main practice itself should not be the place where the results are achieved. They should just arise there through the work that was done during the preliminaries. If that does not occur, and if most of the work is not done through the preliminary practices, the main practice will not work. It will not produce results. By doing each part of the preliminaries properly, whether you do one hundred prostrations

or one-hundred thousand, at least knowing that you did them as best you can, will give you confidence in your own practice. When you complete each part or complete the preliminaries, you will know that you have actually done something properly. If you rush through them in a big hurry, not only will they not be effective, but you will not have any satisfaction or any confidence in what you have been doing.

This is why the preliminaries take up so much of the first part of this text. This text, of course, is intended for people who have already done these practices. The reason that they are presented in such detail is because they are so important. Much of the work of the path is done by the preliminaries. As soon as the presentation of the preliminaries is finished in this text, it all of a sudden presents the practice of Mahamudra and how to bring that all the way to the stage of greater nonmeditation. The only reason why it is possible for someone to achieve that through the practice of Mahamudra is because of the preliminaries. The preliminaries have made that person ripe and ready for this realization. I have encountered this question many times. People have come to me and said that they do not have a lot of time to waste and that they have to get through the preliminaries as quickly as possible so that they can get on with it. Getting on with it means doing the practices that follow after the preliminaries. The problem with that attitude is that it ignores that fact that

the preliminaries are the very essence of Dharma practice. It is taking an attitude as though the preliminaries are not Dharma practice, that they are something that, for some reason, you have to get through before you begin real Dharma practice, which is not the case.

In Tibet it was not uncommon for great masters to do the preliminaries many, many times over, sometimes as many as forty times, twenty times, fifteen and sixteen times. These were not exceptions. They would just do them again and again and again. The reason they did them was that they continued to be effective. It continued to bring them more benefit through purifying obscurations and accumulating merit. Consequently the other practices became very, very effective. If you really purify obscurations and accumulate merit, then when you get to the practice of **guru yoga**, you are like very dry wood that is just about ready to burst into flames. On the other hand, if there is no purification and accumulation, you could practice something profound like guru yoga and not much would happen, not because there was anything wrong with the technique but simply because you are like soaking wet wood. You are just not ready to catch fire yet. So it is important to practice the preliminaries with a relaxed mind, a mind that is really interested in the practice and wants it to work and bring its benefits with a pure motivation and, especially, with a motivation of **bodhichitta**.

Without bodhichitta as a motivation for practice, no practice will be genuine or real, whether it is the preliminary practice or the main practice, whether it is the **generation stage** visualization of deities or **completion stage** meditation practices. Whatever it is, if the motivation is not bodhichitta, it is like a dummy in a store as opposed to a living being. No matter how much you dress up a dummy, it is still a dummy. It is not a person. In the same way, no matter how technically correct your practice might be, without bodhichitta it is completely dead. With the motivation of bodhichitta, your practice really comes alive.

...

The practices that have been described in this text are a specific type of visualization practice called an application. To do an application connected with the practice of a specific deity, you should have received the empowerment of that deity. Strictly speaking, in order to perform an application practice, you must not only have received the empowerment, you must have performed a specific number of recitations of the deity's mantra. This is called being "fit for activity." The usual requirement is 100,000 multiplied by the number of syllables in the mantra. Thus if it is a ten-syllable mantra, it would be 1,000,000, and so on. That is considered the minimum requirement to be "fit for activity." The reason for this is that your faculties have to be

empowered and familiarized with the visualization to the point where the application of that visualization and the benefit of others will actually be affected.

...

I would like to say something about this whole question of signs or indications in practice. Sometimes it happens that practitioners will experience some positive signs in their practice, some indication that the practice is taking effect. They assume that that means they are done, that they have attained the result, and they therefore stop practicing. This is incorrect. Signs in practice do not indicate that you have reached your destination. They indicate that you are heading in the right direction and that therefore you should continue to practice as you have been. It is as if you were driving for the first time to New York City, and you were not really sure if you were taking the right highway or not. All of a sudden you come across a sign that says, "New York City this way, so-and-so many miles to go." You would not stop at that point but would just realize, "Well, at least I am on the right road and if I continue, I will eventually get there."

...

The fundamental thing that you need to keep in mind is that the reason why you are practicing is that, like all sentient beings, you have buddha nature. What you are trying to do by practicing is remove the obscurations and enable yourself to attain an awakening for the benefit of others. There are only two ways to do that. One is through devotion to your teachers and to the teachings; the other is through compassion for sentient beings. The only two things that actually bring awakening are devotion and compassion. If you practice, whatever the practice is, with a state of devotion and compassion, it is effective and it is powerful, regardless of whether or not you feel that you are mindful, and regardless of whether or not you feel that you understand the mechanics of the practice. Compassion will be extremely effective.

On the other hand, even if you understand everything about the practice and even if you maintain a very high degree of mindfulness and alertness to the practice, if your motivation is selfish, if your motivation is, “I want to free myself and I do not care about anyone else,” or “through doing this practice I want to heal such and such sickness for myself,” then you have wasted the practice. There will be some temporary benefit, but because your motivation is selfish, it will not produce its true and intended benefit. An analogy for having practiced something with a selfish motivation is that it is like someone who

had a trunk full of American money and said, “This money is very precious because it can keep me warm in the winter,” and every time it got cold he would burn some. Well, it did provide warmth but that is a pretty foolish way to use money. If practice is done selfishly, it is just like that.

Introduction

Mountain Dharma, Oral Instructions for Mountain Retreat, by Karma Chakme Rinpoche is, on an outer level, a comprehensive manual for all aspects of practice by the great mahasiddha Karma Chakme Rinpoche. In essence it is a text on how to reveal our own buddha nature. Buddha nature is who we truly are. It is our own genuine nature, and it is absolutely essential that we understand this as the basis of motivation to practice.

Simply knowing that we possess buddha nature, however, is not sufficient to bring about awakening. If we know this but do not practice, it will not change anything. After all, this has always been our nature. We have always possessed buddha nature, or sugathagarba, but we have not yet attained buddhahood. Just its being there is not enough. This is like the way it is with water in Tibet. It is now evident that there is a lot of water underground in Tibet. We once thought there was a problem getting water, but now we know that if we dig in the ground, we could readily gain access to it. Nevertheless the water just being there does not do us any good unless we actually drill the wells. In the same way, the only point of studying buddha nature is to be inspired to practice Dharma, because it is the practice — not

the knowledge — that reveals our buddha nature and enables us to attain buddhahood.

What we call buddhahood is nothing more or less than the full revelation of our own innate qualities that have always been present. “Buddha” is not something external to us. As long as we have not discovered our own buddha nature, we can only regard “Buddha” as external because we have no experience of “Buddha” as something within ourselves. This text, *Mountain Dharma, Oral Instructions for Mountain Retreat* by Chakme Rinpoche, is concerned with every stage and every detail of the process of discovering our own buddha nature. It describes how to remove every type of adventitious obscuration and other impediments that in any way conceal or prevent the recognition of it.

Nevertheless it is possible to misunderstand the point of this text. Because the text is called *Mountain Dharma, Oral Instructions for Mountain Retreat*, some people may think that it is only useful for those who are in strict, isolated retreat, but that is not what this title refers to at all. *Mountain Dharma* refers to the fact that this is an allsufficient, single text of instruction. Once you have received the necessary transmissions and initiations from a qualified teacher, if you were then to take this text into isolated retreat and had no other resources — no other literature and no living instructor — you would still have access to all of the

guidance and all of the instruction you would need. The reason why this is called *Mountain Dharma* is that it is a text that will give you whatever instruction you need whenever you need it. It contains within it all the tools you will need at different stages of your practice in order to realize your own buddha nature. Therefore this title does not mean that this text is only for those in retreat; rather, it means that it is sufficient for those in retreat.

Furthermore the text is not designed for advanced practitioners only. It begins with the most fundamental aspects of Buddhist dharma — the **vow of refuge** and so forth — and continues all the way through the path, explaining everything you need to know and everything you need to practice in order to attain buddhahood. It contains all of the teachings of both sutras and tantras, an explanation of all of the stages of discipline and practice corresponding to individual liberation (Hinayana), the **bodhisattva vow** (Mahayana), and **secret mantra** (Vajrayana). Because of its completeness, this text is therefore regarded as superior to almost all other texts of this type.

The historical period in which this text was written was a remarkable and difficult one for our lineage. It was the time of the Tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje, who because of political circumstances was unable to directly benefit beings in any significant way. He said that Karma Chakme Rinpoche was the emanation of his

activity in upholding the teachings of our lineage and spreading them widely. In addition, based upon the vision of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Karma Chakme Rinpoche is considered to be an emanation of the mind of **Amitabha**. During this era, the time of the Tenth Gyalwang Karmapa and the Fifth Dalai Lama, the writings of Karma Chakme Rinpoche spread like wildfire throughout Tibet, especially in Kham, forever changing the character of our practice.

From Rinpoche's teaching in which he introduced some background to the text.

Short Biography of Karma Chakme Rinpoche

Karma Chakme was born, in accordance with the prophecies of **Guru Rinpoche**, in the Do-Kham area of Tibet in the year 1613. His father was the mahasiddha Pema Wangdrak and his mother, Che Kyong Kye, was a wisdom dakini. At the moment he was born, his father gave him the name Wangdrak Sung and bestowed upon him his first empowerment. As a child he was very accomplished in all aspects of study and Dharma practice, and by the time he was nine years old, he had received many empowerments and had become well known for his supreme intelligence and knowledge.

When he was eleven, Wangdrak Sung met Prawashara, from whom he received many empowerments, transmissions, and pointing-out instructions. When he was thirteen, he began a solitary **Chenrezik** retreat. After completing this retreat, he began to bestow empowerments and give reading transmissions and instructions to everyone who requested him to do so. At the age of twenty he received full ordination vows from the Tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje, at **Tsurphu Monastery**, and received the name Karma Chakme. From that time, he diligently served

the **sangha** at Thupten Nyinling, a monastery of the Surmang tradition.

For the next few years Karma Chakme studied with and received many empowerments, transmissions, and pointing-out instructions from His Holiness Karmapa, including Mahamudra, **Chakrasamvara**, Medicine Buddha, and **Dorje Phakmo**. He became quite well known and his fame greatly increased with his public examination at the Karma **Kagyü** Monlam in 1635. Between the ages of eleven and thirty-seven, Karma Chakme entered into solitary retreat for at least a few months every year in order to accumulate root and accomplishment mantras. There was not a single mantra he had not accomplished. During this time, he also received many auspicious visions, dreams, and signs of accomplishment of various deities.

At some point Karma Chakme returned to his native region and built a retreat house at Palri. He resolved to accomplish **Gyalwa Gyamtso**, and received the four empowerments in a dream from the Tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje. Soon after this, in 1650, at the age of thirty-seven, he began a strict thirteen-year retreat, persevering in the practices of Gyalwa Gyamtso and Mahamudra. During this period, he wrote many texts and commentaries including *Ri Chö, Instructions for Mountain Retreat* written in 1659. In the same year Karma Chakme recognized and enthroned the

great **terton** Mingyur Dorje, who gave oral transmission lineage teachings for which Karma Chakme was the scribe.

In 1663, at the age of fifty, Karma Chakme ended his thirteen-year retreat. He continued to greatly benefit beings, performing ceremonies and giving empowerments often attended by over four thousand students. Karma Chakme perfected all possible stages of practice and every miraculous deed for the sake of benefiting others.

In 1678, the Year of the Earth Horse, at age sixty-six, Mahasiddha Karma Chakme Rinpoche announced to thousands that the time had come for him to change realms, and he passed away. Many signs occurred at the time of his death, including rainbows, clouds in the shapes of the eight auspicious symbols, and countless images of Gyalwa Gyamtso and Dorje Phakmo embossed on his bones.

Adapted from the “Biography of Karma Chakme” by Jampal Gyepai Loden, Garland of Immortal Wish-fulfilling Trees, Snow Lion Publications, 1988.

Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche was born in Rapshu in the province of Kham in eastern Tibet. He was born at sunrise on Mahakala Day, the twenty-ninth day of the second month in the Year of the Wood Mouse, 1924. On this day, very early in the morning, immediately after Rinpoche's mother went to fetch water from the stream and carried the full vessel of water back by herself, Rinpoche was born without giving any pain to his mother. According to Tibetan tradition, all of these special circumstances indicate a very auspicious birth.

Rinpoche's father was a devoted **Manjushri** practitioner who constantly recited the Manjushri **sutra**. He would go to sleep reciting the sutra and when he'd wake up he would simply continue with his recitation. His practice was so strong that he was known to benefit even animals when they died. When Rinpoche was quite young, his father taught him to read and write and to study and memorize Dharma texts.

Rinpoche decided at a young age to follow the path of his older brothers, who were both monks. At the age of twelve he entered

Thrangu Monastery in Tso-Ngen, eastern Tibet. For the next six years Rinpoche studied and practiced at this monastery.

When he was eighteen years old, he went to Tsurphu Monastery to visit the seat of His Holiness, the Sixteenth Karmapa. His Holiness, who was also eighteen, was not yet old enough to give full ordination vows, so the following year Rinpoche received his Gelong vows from the Eleventh Tai Situ Rinpoche at Palpung Monastery.

After the Gelong ordination, Rinpoche returned to Thrangu Monastery and participated in the annual Yarnay (three-month summer retreat). Soon after this, he joined the year-long Vairochana group retreat, which was special to Thrangu Monastery. By the end of that retreat, Rinpoche was very enthusiastic to participate in the traditional **three-year retreat**, which he began shortly thereafter.

After completing the three-year retreat, Rinpoche expressed the heartfelt wish to stay in retreat for the rest of his life. He went to his uncle's cabin to begin his lifelong retreat, but after one year the Eighth Traleg Rinpoche strongly advised him to come out in order to receive transmissions from Kongtrul Rinpoche and to join Thrangu Rinpoche and other lamas in the newly formed shedra (monastic college) at Thrangu Monastery, which was under

the directorship of Khenpo Lodro Rapsel. Traleg Rinpoche felt that Khenpo Rinpoche had attained insight and realization in his years of retreat and that this further education would be of great benefit to many students in the future.

The Second Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, the Eighth Traleg Rinpoche, and His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa are Khenpo Rinpoche's main teachers.

In 1954, when Rinpoche was thirty years old and had completed his advanced training, he received the title of Khenpo. For the next four years he was an attendant and tutor to Thrangu Rinpoche. They traveled together teaching, studying, and benefiting others.

By the late 1950s the threat of the Communist Chinese was creating an increasingly dangerous situation for the Tibetan people. In 1958 Rinpoche left Thrangu Monastery along with Thrangu Rinpoche, Zuru Tulku Rinpoche, and the three-year-old Ninth Traleg Rinpoche.

With a few horses and some provisions, the party began their long trek. After two weeks they realized they were surrounded by Communist soldiers. They managed to escape, but for seven days they had to survive without food. During this time the elderly Zuru Tulku Rinpoche fell from his horse, so Lama Sonam

(Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's younger brother) carried him the rest of the way. Eventually they met a group of nomads who gave them some provisions.

After two and a half months, they arrived at Tsurphu Monastery. His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, with his profound vision, was aware of the dangers and told them they must leave immediately for Sikkim. He provided them with the necessary provisions, and in March 1959 the lamas left Tsurphu.



Thrangu Rinpoche, Traleg Rinpoche, and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche,
Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, New York, 2002.

The group quickly reached the border between Tibet and Bhutan. At this time the Bhutanese were unwilling to grant passage, and as a result, the party spent one month at the blockaded border until His Holiness the Dalai Lama could secure permission for the refugees to enter India. The rinpoches then traveled to Buxador, located at the border of India and Bhutan, where a refugee camp was set up by the Indian government.

More than fifteen hundred monks were gathered at Buxador. Their vision was to maintain and preserve the Dharma. During this time, due to the heat and unhygienic conditions, disease spread rapidly through the camp, and by the eighth year of residing there, Rinpoche was terribly sick. In 1967 Rinpoche went to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, the seat of His Holiness the Karmapa in India, where he taught the monks and performed various rites for the local Buddhist communities. As the state of his health worsened, Rinpoche was sent by His Holiness to teach at Tilokpur, a nunnery in Himachal Pradesh founded by His Holiness and Sister Palmo. After this, Rinpoche traveled to Tashi Jong Monastery, also located in Himachal Pradesh, where he received the Dam Ngak Dzo empowerment, transmission, and teachings from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

Rinpoche's health improved while he was there, but once he returned to Rumtek, his condition worsened once again. His

Holiness then sent Rinpoche to Tashi Choling Monastery in Bhutan. Unfortunately, his health again grew worse, leading to a long and serious hospital stay.

Upon His Holiness's return from the United States in 1975, Rinpoche returned to Rumtek. In this same year Khenpo Rinpoche received the title of Choje-Lama, "Superior Dharma Master," from His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa.

For so many years Rinpoche had been ill with tuberculosis and now he was close to dying. He asked His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa if he could go back into retreat for the rest of his life. Instead His Holiness requested that Rinpoche go to the United States as his representative to establish Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, His Holiness's seat in North America.

Initially unable to obtain a visa due to his illness, Rinpoche soon acquired a special type of visa enabling him to enter the United States specifically for the purpose of receiving medical treatment. Nonetheless, sick as he was, Rinpoche boarded an airplane in February 1976 to begin a different life as teacher of the Dharma in a culture and environment far removed from his home in eastern Tibet.

When Rinpoche arrived in New York City, he was greeted by Tenzin Chonyi and Lama Yeshe Losal, who had been sent ahead by His Holiness while Rinpoche awaited approval of his visa. Immediately upon his arrival, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche was taken to a hospital in New York where he spent one month receiving treatment. It would take another year for him to regain his weight and become strong and healthy again. Years later when His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa visited the United States, Rinpoche thanked him for saving his life. His Holiness responded by telling Rinpoche that if he had stayed in India he would surely have died. After his initial recovery, Rinpoche, along with Tenzin Chonyi, Lama Losal, Lama Ganga, and Yeshe Namdak, moved into a house in Putnam County that had been offered by Dr. Shen, a devoted student of His Holiness. From there Rinpoche traveled to New York City every week to offer teachings at what was to become one of the first KTC (Karma Thegsum Choling) centers in the United States.

Soon more centers were established and when His Holiness visited in 1977, the search began for a permanent site for His Holiness's seat in America. His Holiness had told Khenpo Rinpoche that he should open the new center on the auspicious day of Saga Dawa in 1978. Early in this year they located a good property and purchased the Mead House located on a mountaintop in Woodstock, New York. The day Karma Triyana Dharmachakra

opened was the very day (the fifteenth day of the fifth Tibetan month in 1978, May 25, 1978) that His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa had commanded Rinpoche to do so. Ever since this time Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche has been teaching extensively with a warmth and directness that communicates the compassionate wisdom of the Kagyu lineage.

The Venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche is the Abbot of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in Woodstock, New York, the North American seat of His Holiness the Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Rinpoche is also the retreat master at Karma Ling in upstate New York where he is now leading his fourth traditional three-year retreat.

For more information about late Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (1924-2019) please see: [Amrita of Eloquence. A Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche](#)

ཇི་ཚེས་

KARMA CHAKME'S
MOUNTAIN DHARMA
VOLUME TWO



NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SARVA SIDDHI
HUNG

*Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins with homage and supplication to all dakinis, asking them to bestow **siddhi** and spiritual attainment, and pays homage to his own kind **guru**, **Chokyi Wangchuk**, “the one who is the knower of everything, who is the master of the **mandala**, who is always gazing upon every sentient being with tremendous compassion.”*

A Song of the Path for Travelers Who Are Going a Long Distance: The Practice of Meditation and the Manner in Which Realization Arises

Karma Chakme Rinpoche now gives instruction on the practice of meditation and the manner in which realization arises. This is indicated by the initial homage, NAMO MAHAMUDRAYE, “Homage to Mahamudra.” The song begins, as usual, with the words, “Listen carefully, Lama Tsondru Gyamtso,” whom he also calls by his Sanskrit name, Virya Sagara.

The text begins, “Having received practical instruction in either a combination of Mahamudra and Dzokchen or either one of these . . .” Karma Chakme Rinpoche is saying that in order to practice this type of meditation, you need to receive instruction in either Mahamudra or Dzokchen or in a mixture of both. Having received that instruction, you need to offer your realization to your guru. Here realization does not literally mean realization; it means experience. Having received instruction in the technique of meditation and having practiced it a little bit, you need to

go back to your teacher and discuss what your experience is, because you may not have understood it.

The point here is that the practice of meditation is completely unlike any other kind of study you might do. It is not something you learn out of a book. It is not something you simply try to comprehend intellectually. You have to get it right. Having received the instructions and having actually practiced them, to be sure that you get it right, you go back to the teacher and present what has happened. The teacher will tell you whether you are doing the right thing or not. The text continues, “If the guru says, ‘That is it,’ then do not stop.” You should continue to practice. Do not abandon your meditation. The first point is that having received the instructions, you need to practice the instructions until it becomes evident to your teacher that you have fully understood them. Then you can continue further.

“Go to a solitary, isolated place and meditate.” The instruction here is to practice in retreat, and much of what follows at this point in the text is about how to practice meditation in retreat. The reason you are instructed to go into retreat is that if you try to practice this type of meditation in the midst of many activities, it is going to be very difficult to generate any experience or realization. The text continues, “It is best if you are completely alone. Even if you have companions, do

not see them and practice alone.” You should be completely independent without any contact with anyone whatsoever. If that is impossible — for example, if you need someone to cook for you or bring you firewood — then under no circumstances should you see him or her during your meditation sessions. You should practice alone.

It is extremely important to cut through complexity. Initially this refers to the coarse level of mental complexity, which is thinking about many different things. First addressed here are all the sorts of things you might come up with as excuses for not practicing meditation properly once you have gone into retreat.

The first things that may come up are mundane complexities, such as thinking about the need to subdue competitors or enemies and protect friends, about the need to take care of different things and make sure you have enough food and wealth, and about how your investments are doing. If your mind wanders to these things, then reflect upon the fact that it is through thinking about these things that you have continued to wander in *samsara*. When these thoughts come up, you have to recollect that you are not in retreat to think about them. Throughout this life, throughout all our lives, and throughout beginningless *samsara*, because we have allowed ourselves to continue to think about such things, we have never obtained liberation.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche continues, “Even in this life, up to now, you have exerted yourself in such concerns, but you have never accomplished a state of mundane happiness and security. Exclude such concerns from your mind while you are practicing, and commit to this by saying, ‘From now until I give rise to experience and, at best, excellent realization, even if I die of hunger, I will not under any circumstances think about food, clothing, or wealth.’” The way to prevent your mind from wandering to mundane concerns during meditation sessions is to establish what in the **Kadampa** tradition is called the “impassable **vajra** of commitment,” which is like a door or a gate that cannot be opened, even by force. It is the commitment that, “Under no circumstances whatsoever will I think about these things while I am meditating, no matter how hungry I get, no matter what.” The first part is about mundane complexity, where thoughts arise of things you might want to take care of.

The next sort of thing you might come up with is thinking about learning, not just Dharma learning but learning in general, such as scientific and cultural learning. If your mind wanders to objects of knowledge, recollect the fact that all of these things are merely ways of attaining greatness in this life. Yet no one has ever attained enlightenment through studying the sciences or studying cultural traditions. Therefore it says, “The result of such learning is limited to food, wealth, and influence, and that

is why we pursue it. Here in retreat, however, we are trying to ensure the welfare not only of ourselves but also of others in future lives. We are here because we want to attain the result of perfect awakening.” In other words, by recollecting your inspiration, your fundamental reason for being in retreat and practicing meditation, you can cut through the tendency to think about learning. The reason these distractions and complexities arise is that when you start to practice the type of meditation being discussed here and you have nothing else to think about, your mind will start to try to fill that gap. One of the distractions will be, “It will be better if I study something.” This section shows how to deal with that.

Chakme Rinpoche continues, “If it were possible to attain buddhahood through becoming learned in scientific and cultural matters, then would not all the great **panditas** of India have attained buddhahood?” Pandita here does not refer to a mahasiddha pandita; it means people who are learned in grammar, poetics, and cultural things. Remind yourself that on retreat you are trying to attain genuine experience and realization. The text says, “If clever explanations based on intellectual understanding could generate experience and realization, then why did all the great scholars of central Tibet, having attained the rank of being great and prominent scholars, need to rely upon realized teachers to point out stillness and occurrence to them?”

The next thing that will come up in your mind is, “Well, meditation is all very well, but I had better generate a definitive intellectual understanding of the Dharma first.” At this point, in the context of retreat, however, this is just an excuse not to meditate properly. If eloquently expounding the Dharma from intellectual understanding alone were a way to attain enlightenment, then why would scholars of the past, after becoming famous and influential teachers, have gone to yogis to receive meditation instruction? The fact that they needed meditation instruction, even the most fundamental identification of stillness and occurrence in the mind, means that they had not realized anything through their scholarship. Therefore let go of any thought of wishing to become learned when you are in retreat.

The next thought that will arise is, “Well, okay, I do not want to become learned, but I had better look at the text to make sure that I am doing the right thing.” Whenever you find yourself wanting to study, wanting to look at texts, remember that if reading volumes of Dharma texts could generate experience and realization, all of the household priests would have attained siddhi already. Household priests are people who are hired or sponsored by households to recite the sutras in their house for them. Such people are excellent chanters and readers, and they usually have a good understanding of what they are reading. Since they recite all of the sutras taught by the Buddha, they

read a lot. Nobody reads more than they do. If reading Dharma alone could bring enlightenment, we would have heard about it because these people would have attained enlightenment. There is no record of anyone having done that.

The next thing that will arise in the mind is the thought that you want to write something. “Maybe I should recopy all of my liturgies.” When that thought comes up, you should think, “If writing out Dharma could bring enlightenment, then all copyists and all scribes, who do that all the time, would have attained buddhahood.” It is not that any of these things are not valuable. Scholarship is valuable, reading Dharma is valuable, writing out Dharma is valuable, but it is not what you are supposed to be doing when you are in retreat. You are supposed to be practicing meditation. Scholarship in and of itself will not lead to enlightenment.

Next, you might think, “I should chant more. I should chant more liturgies.” If liturgical practice alone generated experience and realization, then all the monks in monasteries who do not go into retreat would have attained liberation. But they have not. This refers to monks who are so thoroughly trained in ritual that they can perform it perfectly. They have memorized the rituals for many different tantric sadhanas, they can play the instruments, and they can chant magnificently. That is not

enough, and alone will not lead to awakening. It will lead to the accumulation of merit and it is a very important part of the monastic system, but it is not how you attain enlightenment. You must meditate.

Chakme Rinpoche concludes by saying, “Therefore understand that you have nothing to do other than maintain the recognition of your own mind that has been pointed out to you by your guru. From this point of view, everything else is a waste of time.”

This involves, to begin with, proper physical posture. Meditation is something you do with your mind, but in order to do it with your mind, you must also be doing it with your body. Maintain the physical **posture of the seven Dharmas of Vairochana**. Within the context of that physical posture, rest your mind without fabrication or alteration, utterly relaxed. *Without fabrication or alteration* means that you do not think about the past or prolong the past; you do not think about the future or beckon the future; and you do not conceptualize the present moment of experience. To *rest relaxed* means to rest in a direct experience of the present moment of cognition without conceptualization.

When you do that, you see no thing. This means, when looking at your mind in that way, you discover that the mind has no substantial entity. In that sense, you could say that the mind is

emptiness. At the same time, it is not nothingness. It is utterly open and empty of substantiality. You cannot say that it is nothingness because it is a cognition that cognizes itself. It is lucid to itself. It illuminates itself. Therefore we call it **lucidity, clear light,** or luminosity. When you can rest one-pointedly, without distraction, in the recognition that has just been described, that is the attainment of the first of the **four stages of Mahamudra.** This is a considerable attainment. Someone who actually attains one-pointedness will be able to rest in meditation for seven days without becoming hungry or needing to move for any reason.

When your mind starts to remain stable in meditation practice, it becomes like the flame of a lamp that is unmoved by the wind. It is as though it was protected from the wind. Such a flame, as the night goes on, actually becomes brighter and brighter. In the same way, as your mind gets more used to being at rest in meditation, the desire to meditate, and the enjoyment of and enthusiasm for meditation, increase naturally. As that happens, you will start to develop some attachment to the state of meditation. You will identify what you are doing as an ideal state of meditation and you will think, “This is real meditation.” As a result of attachment to the experience of tranquillity, there will be a corresponding degree of resentment of anything that disturbs it. Even though you are in isolation and there may be no people around, there are still going to be sounds of one kind

or another, and any kind of loud noise such as a sudden noise of birds, the sound of falling water, or the barking of dogs, will shake you up because it will disturb your state of tranquillity. Your mind will arise from the tranquillity and will immediately seize on the disturbance, which will become a source of distraction.

At this point you will probably think, “This is not isolated enough. I need to find a place more isolated than this, where I do not have to hear barking dogs or noisy birds. It would be good to go to a place where there are no beings whatsoever.” The problem is that if you cannot secure and control your own mind, you will never find a place that is completely free of the causes and conditions of disturbance.

In the text it refers to the story of the King of Nagas. There was a monk during the time of the Buddha Kashyapa who was practicing tranquillity meditation in isolation. Where he regularly went to the bathroom there was a tree, which had thorns growing on it. Unless he was very careful when he went around that tree to get to where he went to the bathroom, the thorns on the tree would rip off a few threads of his clothing. After awhile this started to really bother him, and he decided that in spite of the fact that according to the vinaya monks are not supposed to cut down trees, he just was going to do it anyway. He thought, “It is not a sentient being. I can do it.” Monks are not supposed to cut

down trees, nevertheless, he cut the tree down and he died soon after. Because he had kept a very good morality, he was reborn as a very powerful naga king. But because he had cut down that tree and committed a relatively minor infraction of his vows, this naga king, wealthy as he was, had one of these trees growing up out of his head, and every time the wind blew in the realm of the nagas it would cause great pain in his throat. The moral of this story is, “Do not look for a perfect environment, because you are not going to find it.”

There is simply no place where you are going to be absolutely free of disturbing conditions. The following approach is a better solution. When you are disturbed by the sound of barking dogs or falling water, causing thoughts to arise and your mind to move, look at the thought of being disturbed, the thought you give rise to as a result of the disturbance. First, look to see where that thought came from, and when you look to see where the thought came from, you will see it did not come from anywhere. Then, look to see where the thought is while the thought is still present in your mind, how it abides, if it has a location, and so on. You will see that the thought is not anywhere; it has no substantial entity and no substantial location. Finally, look to see where it goes. When the thought is no longer present in your mind, where does the thought go? Does it go somewhere? When you look, you will see that it does not go anywhere. When your

mind is harmed by this disturbance, what is the nature of that disturbance? Look directly at it. What is its essence? When you carefully examine these things, you will see that it is without basis. Recognizing its nature as empty, the disturbance will dissolve into emptiness. In that way, meditate earnestly, using all thoughts of disturbance as the object of meditation, as the object of scrutiny. In that way, every time you are disturbed it will actually be an opportunity for enhancement of your meditation.

If in that way you can learn to overcome minor disturbances and work with your mind, then gradually the experience of stillness, the mind being at rest, will increase. It will become like a still lake, and there will arise along with that an apprehension of stillness and therefore a fixation on stillness. You will recognize that your mind is at rest. You will like it, and therefore you will be attached to it. Do not get involved with that attachment. Do not grab onto or hold onto the stillness. Instead, look at the nature of that which is still. Look at the nature of that which is at rest. By looking directly at the nature of that still mind, you will see that the nature of stillness is emptiness. You will see that directly. You will have insight into that.

The mind being at rest, the mind being still is tranquillity. The recognition of the emptiness of stillness, the emptiness of mind, and the states of mind, is insight. The integration of these two

within the experience of stillness is the unification of tranquility and insight. When you maintain this, you will experience an increasing sense of well-being or bliss that is both physical and mental. Because it is a greater experience of well-being than you have ever experienced before you will think, “There is no one happier than I,” and you will feel very satisfied. Whereas before you could not wait to leave, you could not wait to find something to do, now you will only want to stay put and you will only want to meditate.

You will not have the slightest interest in a lot of getting up and sitting down and doing things. As a result, your craving for food and clothing will decrease automatically. Thinking, “I am cold,” “I am hot,” “I am hungry,” or “I am thirsty” will occur less and less. Through the power of that well-being that is starting to saturate your body and your mind, you will be able to remain free of distraction continuously throughout most of the day in the waking state. At night in your dreams you will occasionally find yourself in this state of meditation.

In this context, the most important practices to do to augment the meditation are the continued practice of guru yoga and the recitation of the supplication “Calling the Gurus from Afar,” It does not mean that you only call your guru when he is geographically far away from you. “Calling the Gurus from Afar,” means

you have an attitude of yearning and supplication like that of a child calling his mother. This type of melodious, vocalized supplication is very beneficial in this context, and you do not need to worry too much if you have a good or bad voice. Just do it. It is also important at this time, between sessions, not to read or to study texts because it will cause you to conceptualize your experience at this particular juncture.

After meditating on the outer, inner, and secret forms of guru yoga, you go on to practice the meditations of tranquillity and insight. The present chapter is concerned with the experiences and realizations that arise while doing these practices.

Through the practice of tranquillity meditation, you eventually develop a state of tranquillity so peaceful that your mind is like an ocean undisturbed by the wind, an ocean without waves. This experience is extremely pleasant and causes your mind and body to be saturated with intense well-being. When you continue to practice in the midst of that experience, after a certain point it starts to dissipate and you transcend that experience into a direct or naked experience of the union of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. The well-being that previously characterized your experience of meditation starts to be superseded by the experience of cognitive lucidity that is free of conceptualization.

You experience your mind as being like a cloudless sky. It is lucid in that there is cognitive lucidity or brilliance. It is naked in the sense that, like the sky free of clouds, your mind is free of thoughts, and it is very, very brilliant. There is a feeling of intense clarity to the mind. When you experience this, comparing it to your previous experiences of meditation, you develop confidence in it and you think that there could not possibly be anything better than this. This must be the ultimate realization. This must be the discovery of the mind of the Buddha.

The problem at this point is that, although you are experiencing the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness, there is a conceptual apprehension of this, and that is what causes it to be an experience. There is an idea in your mind: a characterization of cognitive lucidity and emptiness in a conceptual way. Although you may think that you are free of thought, you are thinking that you are free of thought.

The concept *lucidity* and the concept *emptiness* are both thoughts that you are imposing on your experience. Although this is a problem and is something to be transcended, the only thing that you need do in order to transcend the conceptual fixation on that experience is to look at the nature of the experience; look at the nature of the thoughts; look at the nature of the concepts.

When you look at the nature of the experience directly, it dissolves into emptiness.

Previously you had an experience of well-being that dissolved into an experience of clarity. Now the experience of clarity, or lucidity, dissolves into an experience of emptiness. In that dissolution of the conceptually apprehended cognitive lucidity into emptiness, there is no longer any thought: lucid or not lucid. There is not even a thought of empty or not empty. The absence of conceptual apprehension causes the cognitive lucidity to somewhat dissipate. You experience a kind of emptiness that is complete and total, like nothingness. At that point you will get the idea that everything is just empty. You will think that even physical things such as earth, stones, mountains, trees, and buildings are all empty like the sky. Even your body is empty. It does not exist. This will be what you are experiencing; however, as in the case of the previous experience of cognitive lucidity, there is still a conceptual apprehension of the experience. There is still the thought, “Things are empty,” that has to be transcended as well. Therefore when that thought arises you need to look at the nature of that thought, of that apprehension of emptiness. By looking directly at it, you will see that the concept of emptiness, like the concept of non-emptiness, is just a concept. You will see that what you are actually experiencing far transcends that kind of thought or that kind of concept. As long as there is a

fixation on emptiness, it is no better than a fixation on existence. The problem is fixation. It is not the content of fixation; it is the presence of it.

These three experiences — well-being or bliss, lucidity or clarity, and emptiness — are three meditation experiences that very commonly occur. They can arise in any sequence and be of any duration. The order given here, first well-being, then lucidity, then emptiness is not always the case. They can last for years, months, or days, depending upon your individual makeup, degree of purification of obscurations, and so on. At a certain point, in the midst of any one of these three types of what we would normally regard as positive meditation experiences, something will disturb you. Some kind of condition that brings about suffering or intense anxiety — such as people speaking about you or saying something to you, and so on — will happen that will break the bubble of your meditation experience. That is the problem with experience. It does not last. The experience will vanish in an instant, like a rainbow.

In its place, you will experience a degree of mental wildness and agitation that is at least as bad as what you experienced before you practiced meditation. In fact, your aggressiveness, irritability, resentment, conceptualization, agitation, passion, greed, obsession with food, clothing, and so on will all seem to

be worse than before. You will be more reactive than before. You will be short-tempered and harsh of speech.

With the previous experiences, there is a tendency to assume that they are really good and sometimes, particularly with the experiences of clarity and emptiness, we may mistakenly assume that we have attained enlightenment. For the same reason, we tend to assume that this is something really bad and that it means that our practice has been worthless. It is an *upsurge*, an experience that arises and is an actual indication that your practice is purifying your obscurations. The generic name for this type of experience is “rough experience.” When this happens, you simply have to recognize it for what it is, which will give you perspective on it. Recognize that it does not mean that your practice is ineffective. It simply means that this is what is happening. Then relax both your body and your mind as much as you can. Within the context of proper meditation posture and meditative awareness, relax as much as possible.

Look at the nature of this experience, just as you did with the other three. This experience, as unpleasant as it is and as apparently discouraging as it may be, is a great opportunity. If you can look at the nature of this, you stand a chance to make great progress because it is in that context, when you are actually able to look at the nature of your mind in the midst of this disturbance or

agitation, that you can first begin to really understand what it means to say that the mind is the root of all phenomena or the root of all things. You will recognize that there is nothing that you experience that is beyond or other than your mind. Looking at the nature of the experience, you will start to move toward a realization of the mind's emptiness. Nevertheless at this point, because there is not yet realization, there is still a sense of duality, so that when you are looking at the mind you may have a sense or experience of the mind's nature, but there will seem to be someone looking at the mind's nature that is separate from that nature.

When in the context of this experience you look at the mind and you experience its nature in this way, then confidence will arise once again — confidence in your recognition of your experience — and that is also a fixation.

These four types of experience — well-being, clarity, emptiness, and roughness — can arise in any order and can last for any amount of time. They are like the sun coming out between clouds in the spring.

Another thing that will happen as you continue to practice is that sometimes you will find that your mind is completely torpid, completely dull and depressed with no clarity, so that

even though you actively look at the mind itself, you are unable to see its nature. You are unable to see the mind's lucidity or the mind's emptiness; you will become anxious because you do not know what you are doing, and you will become depressed. When this happens, it is important to put more exertion into your physical posture. Take the strictest meditation posture that you can, with the legs crossed in **vajra posture**. Make sure that your back is very, very straight. Put extra energy into the gaze, looking slightly upward with your eyes open wide. Look somewhat fiercely. You are not focusing outward; you are focusing on the mind. You look out, but focus in, and in that way, when your mind becomes focused on itself, you can transcend that dullness.

When you do this while in the midst of dullness, you try harder to focus and look energetically at the mind; what you experience is a kind of vague presence in the mind of what appears to be not entirely formed thoughts, like the presence of sediment in muddy water. When you look at them, you do not actually see any particular thought that you can identify, but there is a feeling or an experience of something present within the mind, in the way that sediment is present in water. This kind of subtle thought is called the "sediment of mind." When you experience this, the way to break through is to look very, very intensely with your gaze — either in front of you or to your left or your right — while simultaneously looking very intensely, and for a

very brief period of time, at your mind. Doing that repeatedly for brief periods will promote the sharpness of your awareness and effectively separate the sharpness of your awareness from the sediment of your mind, like water being separated from sediment. This instruction, considered the best method, comes from Padampa Sangye's tradition of Pacification.

When you are going through these experiences of well-being, lucidity, and nonconceptuality, you will naturally, in the midst of these experiences feel some **renunciation**. You will feel that you have completely given up the concern with mundane things. During these positive experiences, your **kleshas** will seem very much weakened. It will seem that you have really beaten the addiction to the eight worldly dharmas. In fact, you have not. That is just part of the experience. The well-being or positive quality of the experience anesthetizes you against the deprivations of the kleshas, but they are not gone yet because these things are not firm. These experiences are not lasting and, as we have seen, at one point they will dissipate and something else will happen.

At this stage, the way that you need to practice meditation is called the "**samadhi** of the snow lion." The analogy here is that when a snow lion is jumping or trotting away, it jumps across but then it looks back. In the same way, there needs to be a nonconceptuality that is like the snow lion's movement, but then

there is also an attempt of looking at the mind itself, which is like the snow lion's looking back. At this stage there is a sense that meditation is centralized inward. There is still a sense of consciously looking in at the mind.

These experiences of well-being, lucidity, and nonconceptuality, as well as combinations of them, characterize the first of the four stages of Mahamudra practice: *one-pointedness*. The reason it is called one-pointedness is because, as it says in the text, your mind is able to abide one-pointedly in the meditation. Based upon your degree of habituation and the corresponding degree of stability in the practice, this stage can be divided into three: *lesser one-pointedness*, *intermediate one-pointedness*, and *greater one-pointedness*. Although you are attempting to practice a unity of tranquillity and insight here, in fact, what you are practicing is still tranquillity with very little insight.

At this stage you are like a mountain lion. Traditionally it is taught that there are different kinds of lions, and the best is the perfect one, the snow lion, which is also the strongest. Even though a mountain lion is not a snow lion, it is still a lion. In the same way, at this point you do not have realization of what you are practicing — Mahamudra, Dzokchen, or whatever it is — you have not yet actually realized it. Just as a mountain lion may not be a snow lion, it is still tougher than any other animal; in the

same way, simply through reaching this point, you are beyond the reach of sophistry, here represented by the analogy of less tough predators. Just as lions are adorned by manes and other special features that are unique to lions and make them lion-like, at this stage of practice, through the experience of one-pointedness, which is not yet realization, you will be adorned by the mane of great devotion for your guru. This section concludes, “This song of the roar of the mountain lion that is not yet a snow lion explains the practice of new meditators.”

The variety of experiences that will arise

NAMO MAHAMUDRAYE, “Homage to Mahamudra.” If you continue the practice in isolation with intensity, the variety of experiences that will arise is unlimited. The meditation is said to be like a field in summer in which anything can arise — different kinds of flowers, poisonous plants, medicinal plants, and all sorts of grasses and weeds — just as in the mind of a practitioner.

At some point you will come to an experience of emptiness that is so intense that you will think that these external appearances have no existence. These mountains, these buildings, all of these things, having no essence, are all just emptiness. You will

be certain that you can actually walk right through them, but when you test it, you find that you cannot. You find that you cannot even make a dent in them with your hand. When you are meditating you will think that you can actually fly. Sitting there in your meditation posture, if you wanted to, you could actually just lift off because you feel that your body is completely insubstantial, however, when you try to do it, you cannot even jump half a foot.

Another experience that can arise is a feeling of your mind being limitless and infinitely spacious so that you feel that your mind fills the entire universe as it is mixed with space, so that wherever there is space, it is pervaded with your awareness and wherever there is awareness, it is pervaded by the **dharmakaya**. You will think that what you are experiencing is the actual experience of the boundlessness of the dharmakaya, but there is still fixation here because you are thinking, “My mind has mixed with space; my mind fills the universe.” There is still thought. If you look at that thought, then the fixation on the mind filling or not filling the universe, the mind mixing or not mixing with space, will all dissolve, will all be pacified, and it will change into another experience, which is an experience of that which cannot be explained, that which cannot be conceptually designated.

Each of these types of experiences, which are so overwhelming and so apparently positive, can be a source of deviation from the path. If you become attached to and crave the experience of wellbeing in meditation, this is a cause of being reborn as a god of the desire realm. If you become attached to and crave the experience of lucidity or clarity in meditation, this is a cause of being reborn as a god of the form realm. When you have these kinds of experiences in meditation, if you take them to be gold, thinking that your mind has mixed with space and if that space is infinite, then so is your mind; or thinking that your mind neither exists nor does not, that your mind is neither something nor nothing, and that is what it is; or thinking that there is not so much as an atom that is outside your mind, that there is nothing whatsoever that is not mind, and that the mind itself has no substantiality whatsoever; thinking each of these things and fixating on them and becoming confident in that experience and in that view is the cause of being reborn in one of the four formless realms. The cause here is the fixation or the designation of any experience as ultimate. Up to this point, no matter how good your meditation experience may be, and no matter how much what you have discovered may sound like the realization of the nature of things, it is not realization. It is just experience and it is not going to last.

Deviation from the path

The next section begins with, “E MA HO! The wisdom of Mahamudra, the unity of bliss and emptiness, and the deviation from the path into the state of the six types of desire realms of the gods are very similar but there is a hair’s worth of difference.”

This means that, in the context of meditation, there is the slightest difference between these two. In the context of their results, the difference is tremendous. In the case of the deviation of meditation into bliss or well-being, there is fixation on bliss, on the thought “bliss” or “pleasant,” and the source of deviation is the fixation or apprehension of that. One destroys that fixation by looking at the nature of the bliss or the well-being, and when one does so, then one can experience the unity of bliss and emptiness, which is Mahamudra. In the same way, the wisdom of Mahamudra, which is the unity of lucidity and emptiness, and the deviation into the seventeen types of gods of the form realm are almost identical. There is just a hair’s difference, which means that when you are meditating the difference between the two is very slight, but in the result, the difference is tremendous. The difference is that in the case of deviation into cognitive lucidity, there is the thought that this vivid and naked lucidity-emptiness

is the best thing there is. One thinks, “This is it,” and there is confidence in that.

Depending upon the degree of arrogance that is developed based on that, you will be reborn in the corresponding realms of the form realm gods. If your deviation is more subtle, if there is less arrogance and less fixation, then you will be reborn toward the top of the seventeen realms, and if it is coarser, then you will be reborn in the lowest, which is the realm of Brahma. In any case, the deviation is caused by fixation on cognitive lucidity as a goal and it causes you to seek to achieve one of the four states of meditative stability as a goal, which therefore causes you to achieve it as a state of rebirth. Deviation here means actually bringing about a rebirth in one of these god realms. If this simply happens to you from time to time, that is not sufficient to bring about this deviation. If from time to time, there arises an experience of well-being or an experience of cognitive lucidity that you fixate on, that in itself is not sufficient to bring about rebirth in one of those realms. The best way to deal with this, of course, is that whenever there is fixation on anything you look at the nature of it. The problem arises when you cultivate this pleasant state of meditation as a goal, and think that it is the goal. If you die in a state of this type of meditation, which you believe is supreme, then you will be reborn in the coarse realm of the gods.

Part of the experience of cognitive lucidity can be different kinds of extrasensory perception, which can be occasional instances of true extrasensory perception or can be the illusion of it. In any case, whenever something like this arises, it is very important not to become proud of it, not to think that you have actually attained something, and not to think that it actually means anything whatsoever. When any experience of cognitive lucidity including extrasensory perception arises, simply look at the nature or essence of the lucidity itself and you will experience its nature as emptiness, which is the actual wisdom of lucidity and emptiness or Mahamudra.

One type of experience is when you are in the space between being awake and being asleep, especially if there is some light in the room that is shining on your vision, it will promote a clarity of your mind in a way that will not wake you up, but will make your mind more lucid yet somewhat nonconceptual. Through that and through the habit of your practicing the meditation of resting in the nature of mind, you will think that you can actually see through walls, that you can see what people are doing in other places, and so on. This does not happen all the time. This only happens every so often. If you think that this is true super-cognition and you become arrogant and involved with it, that is a severe obstacle and will put a stop to your progress. This is the *luminosity of experience* or *the clear light of experience*,

which occurs when the inherent clarity or lucidity of your mind is promoted, brought out, or intensified through practice and through circumstances.

Another thing that can happen, which is also part of this, is that when you are actually sleeping, not in between waking and sleeping, but actually sleeping, you will become aware in the midst of sleep and recognize the state. This does not mean dreams. This means the state of deep sleep. In that state your sense consciousnesses are shut down because you are sleeping, and even though the room you are sleeping in may be extremely dark, you will think that you can actually see everything in the room as distinctly as though it were there. You can see outside the room and see what people are doing and you can tell their thoughts, just as though they were telling you their thoughts. All of this is part of the clear light of experience. If you put too much stock in this and think, “Well, I have extrasensory perception, I have super-cognition, I have recognized the clear light of sleep,” then this becomes the obstacle of *mara*. This will put a stop to your progress.

It is always important to remember the traditional statement that anything can arise as experience for a practitioner, and in and of itself, is equal and does not matter. None of it is worth investing in or worth becoming proud of. If you avoid pride in

experience and you just let things be as they are, so that you do not care if they last, you do not care if they stop, you do not care if they reoccur, you do not care if they never reoccur, then no experience whatsoever will be an obstacle to you. The obstacle is when we fixate on them and make them the goal or aim of our practice.

At some point you might come to the understanding in your meditation practice that all things, without exception, are included in your mind, like salt dissolving into water, and the recognition that your mind itself, from the very beginning, has been completely pure and is the dharmakaya. This understanding is correct. It is true that all things are included within your mind and it is true that your mind is the dharmakaya. Fixation on that, which develops when you understand it, is not Mahamudra. It is the view of the **Mind-Only school**. Now there has been from time to time from various quarters a lot of talk about comparing the view of the Mind-Only school and the view of the Mahamudra tradition. The difference between these two is clearly stated here. The Mind-Only school view is incorrect only because it is a fixation on this; that is the difference.

In the same way, you might come to the experience in your meditation that your mind, like space, is without limit, and that is fine. There is nothing wrong with that. What is wrong is the

fixation on that idea since the fixation on that idea will bind you and cause you to be reborn in the formless realm called the *realm of boundless consciousness*. You might come to the experience that wherever there is space it is filled with your mind and that just as space is boundless and inconceivably vast, in the same way so is mind. There is nothing wrong with that except that if you fixate on that, you are bound by that subtle fixation and will be reborn in the *realm of boundless space*, also one of the formless realms.

You might come to the understanding that all things have, from the very beginning, had no inherent existence and are emptiness, and that they, in and of themselves, are no basis for the conceptualization or imputation of characteristics in which we engage. That is true, but fixation on that will cause you to be reborn in the formless realm called the *realm of nothing whatsoever*.

You might have the experience that all things in the outer world and within the mind, the universe and the beings who inhabit it, together with your mind itself, all of these things without exception ultimately or truly do not exist and are emptiness, but that relatively they appear to and they can appear as they appear because they have no ultimate or absolute existence. That is why appearance is possible. Recognizing that in your meditation, you will think things are neither something nor

nothing. That is fine, except fixation on that will cause you to be reborn in the formless realm called *neither perception nor the absence of perception*.

In that way, these four types of experience of emptiness, which lead to rebirth in the four formless realms, are actually held by some traditions to be realization and aimed at as goals. If you hold them to be the final goal, to be enlightenment, and you die in the state of one of these understandings, then you will be reborn in whichever one of the four formless realms is appropriate. Having been born there, for 80,000 kalpas you will not be born anywhere else. You will not take a physical body. You will not have any experiences such as pleasure or pain. You will simply stay like that until the momentum vanishes.

When, on the other hand, you simply look at your mind without fixation or prejudice and you experience its nature without thinking of it as emptiness or as not emptiness and you experience it without any kind of conceptualization or without any reduction of experience into some kind of linguistic concept, then that is the experience of emptiness, which is very different from the concept of emptiness. That is the actual experience of Mahamudra.

All of these different kinds of experiences can occur in different orders and can last for different amounts of time. They can be also of different intensities. They are here described in their greatest intensity, but they can also arise less intense than that. In any case, the state of meditation in which you are undistracted and there is naked lucidity to the mind, like the flame of a lamp undisturbed by the wind, where the mind rests one-pointedly, is what is called the state of onepointedness.

In conclusion, we have described the experiences that accompany the first level of Mahamudra practice, one-pointedness. We saw that one-pointedness could be divided into three levels. Essentially the three levels of one-pointedness are distinguished by the prevalence in one's experience of this one-pointed state of meditation, corresponding to its occurring sometimes, most of the time, and all of the time except when you are asleep. We have the three levels of lesser, intermediate, and greater one-pointedness. Up to that point, regardless of how splendid your meditative state may appear to be, it is still experience and not realization, which means that you have not yet truly seen the nature of things. This nature is still obscured by the contents of your meditation experience; you are still moved by the meditation experience itself.

As for how an individual will progress through these stages and through the stages that remain to be described, it varies quite a bit among individuals. In general, there are three types of progression that correspond to three types of individuals and each of these can be further subdivided into three. The first type of individual, a *gradual progresser*, is someone for whom it takes a long time to reach each stage of experience or stage of realization. While it seems difficult for that person to achieve these stages, once achieved, it is stable. This person will tend not to regress. The second type of person, a *jumper* or *skipper*, is someone who achieves experiences and realization easily and quickly, but it is not stable. Once achieved, it can disappear. There is a great deal of fluctuation, heights of experience, depths of the absence of experience, and so on. The third type of person, *someone who progresses all at once*, is someone who, from the very beginning or outset of his or her practice generates high realization, and with very little meditation practice brings it to completion. Obviously, this third type of person is extremely rare.

There are subdivisions within these three. For example, there is a type of person who has a hard time moving from one stage to the next. In general we call such a person a gradual progresser, but when this person is also afflicted by instability, so that once a level is reached it can still change and there are a great deal of highs and lows, we call this person a *gradually progressing jumper*.

or *skipper*. Karma Chakme says here that he is like that, but we can actually understand his progression to be more like the next one. An *instantaneously gradually progressing* person progresses somewhat slowly, but although this person has to proceed along the path in stages, every experience and realization that one is supposed to reach at each stage of practice is achieved. For example, when going through the stages of the preliminary practices, this person has the realization or experience in full measure that the specific practice or stage of practice is supposed to bring about. That kind of person proceeds gradually but nevertheless is stable and does come to a definitive experience of each stage as soon as he or she practices it. Within each of the three, such as the skippers and the instantaneous progressers, there are variations that correspond to all three. You can extrapolate these easily based upon what has been explained up to this point.

How realization develops

Up to this point, in discussing the level of one-pointedness, we have basically been concerned with meditation experience. Through continuing to practice intensively, through the blessing of your devoted supplication to your guru, through the result of your attaining the supreme siddhi through the practice of a

yidam — which means the experience and realization that arises in your mind through yidam practice, making offerings to the yidam and so on — through the power of your accumulation of a great deal of merit, and, in part, through the awakening of karmic residue from previous lives — such as your previous accumulation of merit, your previous habituation with the path and so on — at some point in your practice the bark or skin of your previous meditation experience is shed.

What happens is that everything up to that point in your meditation practice is seen as superficial and it is just cast away, like a discarded skin or like the bark of a tree. At that time, your fixation on an object of meditation and on a meditator as being distinct from one another is cast away into space. At that point, there is no longer any kind of direction in your meditation in the sense of “I am meditating on this” or “I am meditating on that.” Your fixated apprehension on the discovery or experience within meditation, such as “it is this” or “it is that” is all transcended or destroyed.

Previously it was said that in the state of one-pointedness you are fundamentally focusing inward on the mind. At this point, there is no longer any sense of pulling your mind inward or summoning your mind inward and looking inward. There is also no longer any sense of looking outward. Looking outward

here refers to the experience of cognitive lucidity in which you can physically and mentally look at the world and it seems luminous. For example, even at night things would seem very bright. You seem to be able to know what is in others' minds and so on. Not only the inward focus of the nonconceptuality but also the outward focus of the cognitive lucidity no longer arises. The previous sense that there was a person looking at the mind and a mind being looked at and that these two were separate is destroyed or broken down, and at this point there is no longer any sense of that separation, as though the two have mixed or as though they were always the same thing. There is no longer any conceptual identification of the meditative state or the nature of mind. There is no longer any identification of "it is this" or "it is that" and there is no conceptualization of experience. There is no thinking of this or that; it becomes a state of extreme simplicity, almost as though your mind has returned to a state of being completely ordinary. You are just sitting there with your mouth shut.

Because this is completely different from the previous experiences and because it is, in a sense, less extraordinary, especially for someone who does not have access to immediate guidance or who has not studied a great deal, in **postmeditation** there may be a number of questions that arise. There may be a lot of doubt. You will think, "This is completely different from everything

that I have experienced before and maybe something has gone wrong.” If you have heard of nihilistic views, like the Hashang view and so on, you might think that you are possibly becoming nihilistic. If you heard of this view of emptiness as nothingness, you will think that perhaps you are straying into that view. You might think that you have just lost your meditation, just lost everything, lost your practice. You might also think that you have achieved final, ultimate realization, that state of nonmeditation that is the highest state of Mahamudra. You will think that because there does not seem to be an object of meditation, and since you are not meditating on this or on that, perhaps you have achieved nonmeditation. In postmeditation, you will become quite concerned, even agitated, about what is happening and you will think about it a great deal. You will want to discuss your experience with someone who is more experienced than you are.

If you are not learned in the practice of meditation, then you will probably think that you have lost your practice, that you have lost track of meditation because you will remember how wonderful your previous experiences of well being, lucidity, and nonconceptuality were. You will think that you wish that something like that could happen again. You will practice meditation with the hope that it will happen, but because you have transcended that level of experience, it will not occur. Since you do not understand what is happening, this may make you

depressed and make you doubt the process. On the other hand, if you are overconfident you may think that you have achieved the realization of nonmeditation, the highest level. The danger here is that you may think that since you have achieved the highest level of meditation, it is now appropriate for you to emphasize benefiting others and you will discard the practice of meditation. Since you have not actually achieved the highest realization, you will become distracted and eventually will lose your practice to distraction. At this point, because so many questions arise, it is important to rely upon the guru who is learned in the teachings of the Buddha, which means to rely upon the authentic scriptural descriptions of the path of meditation in order to dispel the misconception either that you have lost the track or that you have achieved final realization. An example of this type of thing is this text itself. The purpose of this chapter of this text is to prepare you for these various experiences so that you do not misunderstand them. Any kind of description, either in the original teachings of the Buddha or in the teachings of the lineage that describe this experience, may be very helpful to you at this point — the teaching of the Kagyu forefathers, the teachings of the Buddha in the tantras, and so on. Eventually, by studying these things, you cut through doubt about what is happening and you realize that what has happened is that, for the first time, you are actually seeing the nature of your mind. What is seen and the experience of seeing

it is not characterized by anything extraordinary in the sense of extraordinary experiences as in the previous level, therefore it is called “naked ordinary cognition or ordinary wisdom.” This stage, where there is the recognition of the mind’s nature for the first time, is the stage of lesser simplicity, which is the first part of the *yoga of simplicity beyond elaboration*, the second of the four levels of Mahamudra practice.

It is like the crescent moon on the third day of the lunar month. The crescent moon is very slender; it is by no means the disc of the full moon but it is, beyond doubt, the moon. In the same way, at this point you are actually seeing the nature of your mind, but your recognition of the mind’s nature is not complete. It is authentic but incomplete. It is the realization of Mahamudra but that realization does need to be expanded, just as the crescent moon needs to develop into the full moon. Nevertheless from this point onward you are referred to as someone with realization. Someone with realization does not mean someone that acts a certain way, dresses a certain way, or looks a certain way. It means someone who has recognized authentically the nature of his or her mind.

From this point onward, there will be no change in the nature of what is recognized; however, there will still be fluctuation in the degree or manner of recognition. There is still some problem

with meditation arising and obscuring the recognition, so there will be some fluctuation in clarity of the recognition.

At this point you are primarily experiencing realization, but there is still some degree of experience. All of the stages of the path, which are enumerated in the sutras and which correspond to the stages of Mahamudra practice that are described here, can be said to be changes in the ratio between experience and realization. At the beginning, there is only experience and no realization; at the end there is only realization and no experience and, as you go through the path, there is more and more realization and less and less meditation experience. At this point, while there is mostly realization and much less experience, it is not the case that you are free from or have completely purified meditation experience and the tendency for it to arise. There will still be a lot of fluctuation based on the arising of experience. As well, at this point there is the clearest and most dramatic difference between the state of meditation or even-placement and the state of postmeditation. When you are practicing without distraction and with a one-pointed mind, your mind is completely even. Because there is no conceptualization, there is no distinction between that which is outside yourself and that which is inside. Everything is fundamentally equal and even. Aside from the slight effort to maintain undistracted awareness, there is no object of meditation and no direction in meditation. The

meditative state, as well, is extremely simple and even. When you see things and hear things, there is no conceptualization of what you see and hear. For example, when you are in the state of meditation, when you see a form with your eyes, you are like a small child in a temple who sees things just like anyone else but has no concept or thought about what he sees. In meditation, whatever you physically see arises as the unity of appearance and emptiness, which is Mahamudra. In the same way, whatever you hear when you are within meditation, because there is no conceptual reaction to it, there is no designation of it as pleasant or unpleasant, there is no delight in some sound, and dislike of others, everything you hear is just like an echo. Everything you see is just like a reflection in a mirror. It is clear but there is no conceptualization of it and everything you hear is like the sound of an echo. Within meditation whatever sounds you hear are the unity of sound and emptiness, which is Mahamudra.

The same thing applies with the other senses. Whatever you smell, whatever you taste, and whatever you feel are all the unity of those sensations and emptiness.

This is true while you are undistracted, that is to say, while you are practicing. When you become distracted at this stage, and distraction here constitutes the state of postmeditation, then you are completely ordinary, not in the good sense but in the

usual sense. Your five poisons can arise just as bewilderingly and just as strongly as anyone's can. Therefore at this juncture of the path you need to be careful to abandon, as much as you can, mundane concerns and activities. With regard to your practice of Dharma, you must emphasize meditation. At this juncture, do not overemphasize elaborate or complex practices, such as liturgical practices and so on. Reduce your daily supplementary practices to the minimum and really emphasize the practice of one-pointed meditation. That will bring the most progress. If you overemphasize elaborate, complex practices, there is a danger that this experience of simplicity will vanish. As in the previous case with the yoga of one-pointedness, basically the yoga of simplicity is distinguished based upon how often that state of simplicity or beyond elaboration arises. When it arises occasionally, it is called *lesser simplicity*; when it arises most of the time, it is called *intermediate simplicity*; and when it arises all the time, except when you are asleep, that is *greater simplicity*. In addition, there will be a correspondingly greater proportion of lucid dreaming among the dreams.

The transcendence of fear and anxiety is characteristic of this level. The reason for this is that you are no longer threatened by things that you previously experienced as external to yourself. You have no conceptualization about what forms you see, sounds you hear, or what you smell, taste, feel, and so on. Not

conceptualizing them, you are not afraid of them. You are like a snow lion that has reached the snowy peak of the mountain and is safe. You have no fear; you have no anxiety. The samadhi or meditative absorption that characterizes this level is *heroic samadhi* because it is fearless. Essentially what this really refers to is the realization of the selflessness of persons. The reason why you are fearless at this point is because at the level of simplicity you have realized half the emptiness. You have realized the emptiness or selflessness of yourself as a person or individual.

The reason why we can say that the realization of selflessness is equivalent to the realization of simplicity is that, when we use the term mind and the term *self* we are referring to the same thing. Because at this point you have recognized, through looking at the mind, that the mind itself has from the very beginning been unborn, unarising, free of a location, and is unceasing. You have recognized the selflessness or the nonexistence of the imputed personal self. In addition, the basis for our imputation of the self of persons is our mind. Because at this point you have the confidence or certainty that comes with the resolution of the nonexistence of the previously imputed self of persons, because you have realized that there is no dharmakaya other than your mind itself, with that realization of the selflessness of persons, you are fearless. That is half of the realization of emptiness. At this point you have established, in direct experience, the nature

of your mind internally or within yourself, but you still have not really resolved or established the nature of external appearances. You do not conceptualize them in the same way and you are not afraid of them in the same way, but you have not truly penetrated their nature.

After that you begin in your practice to reveal or establish the nature of appearances, and to do so it is necessary to actually direct your awareness to things that you see or experience as external to yourself, such as the earth, stones, mountains, people, buildings, and so on. In short, you direct your awareness to whatever you can see and look at the nature of it. Because you have recognized the nature of your awareness, you are looking at the nature of your experience with the object, which is the nature of your awareness. By looking at the nature of that experience, the two things, the experiencer and the experienced object, are seen as inseparable. At this point there arises the experience that you cannot really separate external forms from your mind that experiences them. When you become habituated with this, it is no longer necessary to intentionally cultivate it, in other words, to intentionally direct your awareness toward objects of experience.

Naturally, whatever you see will be experienced as not other than the mind that experiences it. Gradually you then expand this

beyond what you can physically see to include the rest of the universe, the four continents, these billion worlds, and all the worlds everywhere. Placing these in your mind and meditating upon them, you recognize the inseparability of these things from your mind. Then, in the same way, mixing your mind with space, you have an experience where you can no longer distinguish between the two in the sense that you cannot say, “From this point onward it is space and not mind and from this point inward it is my mind and not space.” You find that because there is no border between them, there is no way to separate them or distinguish between them. At that point there is the real experience of mind pervading all space or being mixed with all space. By looking at the nature of that, you experience a unity or their combination.

There is no boundary experience, from that point onward, between external space and the internal mind. You do not need to intentionally mix your mind with space and meditate on it in that way. Simply continuing the practice of meditation, you experience all things of samsara and **nirvana**, everything that appears and everything that seems to exist, as appearing as whatever it appears to be, quite clear but empty of any kind of essence. You experience this in such a way that you recognize that the vividness of its appearance or its form is in no way

obstructed or prevented by its emptiness. In fact, its emptiness is what allows its vivid appearance and its emptiness is

in no way obstructed by its vivid appearance. An example is a rainbow that, in its very nature, appears the way it does because it is insubstantial. Another example is the reflection of the moon in a body of water. It is, in its very nature, something that does not exist as what it appears to be and for that very reason, not in spite of it, appears the way it does. Yet another example is the image reflected in a mirror that, in its very nature, has no existence as what it appears to be and, for that reason, can appear in the way it does. Nevertheless at this point, in spite of the fact that there is a decisive recognition of the unity of appearances and mind, and therefore the emptiness of appearances, this recognition only occurs when you are practicing. When you become distracted, as before you are prey to ordinary bewilderment. The incidence of distraction and the length and period of distraction, of course, depends upon your diligence, your exertion. When you are very busy, when you are suffering or extremely frightened, then this experience of the unity of appearances and the mind may not arise. It will usually arise under other circumstances, that is to say, you do not need to intentionally cultivate it at that point, but you need to be undistracted for it to arise. If you become distracted, then for the duration of the distraction you will not necessarily experience this unity. What is principally needed is

the watchfulness of undistracted awareness. Aside from that there is no intentional directedness to your meditation. You no longer need to attempt to resolve the nature of appearances; you simply need to maintain an undistracted awareness.

You now begin to mix the practice of meditation with the post-meditation practices of supplementary Dharma practice: ritual practices, liturgical practices, various recitations, ceremonies that are performed on certain days, and so on. You gradually try to mix these two aspects of practice. You do not stop either one and you try not to lose either one. You are trying to get to the point here where you can simultaneously be meditating in the way described and performing another practice or ceremony. That way you have both aspects of practice occurring simultaneously. You also attempt to mix your mind and the mind of your guru. Mixing these two, you look at the nature of that unity of yourself and the mind of the guru. Looking at it in that way there will arise within you the realization of the unity of your mind and the mind of the guru, which arises from the recognition or realization of the fundamental equality of these two minds in their nature. For example, the water of India and the water of Tibet can be distinguished one from another in that they are present in different countries and different places, but insofar as they are water, they are of the same nature and no distinction can be made between them. In the same way,

the mind of the guru and your mind have the same nature, the same characteristics, and the same style of manifestation. They are both equally empty in nature. They are both equal in cognitive lucidity. And they are both equal in the unimpeded or unlimited display of appearances and in how they manifest. In these three important ways, your mind and the mind of your guru are indistinguishable. Through recognizing this directly in meditation, you have come to experience that there is no boundary or border between your mind and the mind of the guru. You can no longer say that up to here it is my mind and not the mind of the guru and past that point, over there, is the mind of the guru and not my mind. No such distinction can be made. While this is explained here in a conceptual way, what actually happens at this point in your practice is a direct and nonconceptual realization, not a theoretical understanding. When this kind of realization arises from the depths of your heart, it is called “mixing your mind with the mind of your guru.” Then you extend that and you actually mix your mind with the minds of all buddhas of the three times and ten directions and, mixing your mind with theirs, you look at the nature of that in the same way. Through doing so, there will arise the same experience as before of their inseparability or indistinguishability, one from another. Then, extending yourself beyond that, you mix your mind with the minds of all sentient beings, including the sentient beings in the hells, **pretas** and so on. By looking

at the nature of your mind, inseparable from the nature of the minds of all beings, you recognize in direct experience the unity or inseparability of these. This is the direct, naked realization of the single dharmakaya, the single nature of all things, which is the absolute truth. You recognize that aside from your mind itself, there is no samsara outside. That is what is called “stirring or emptying samsara from its depths.” This is emptying your samsara from its depths; it is not emptying the samsara of others because as long as others have not attained realization, their samsara is potentially endless. When you rest within the state of practice, you recognize the unity or inseparability of samsara and nirvana. This is not to say that no distinctions can be made between them, but you recognize directly that they have the same fundamental nature, which is emptiness, and that, in that emptiness, in that nature, there is no better or worse, no good or bad. This is the achievement of the view, called *the inseparability of samsara and nirvana*, which is highly extolled in the traditions of Mahamudra and Dzokchen.

At this point, because there is a realization of such a profound view, you need to beware of the danger of losing your behavior to the view. Losing your behavior to the view means ignoring the results of actions. Consequently it is especially important to be particularly careful with how you behave. There is still the situation of difference between meditation and postmeditation

or between being undistracted and being distracted. When you are undistracted you possess this very high level of realization, but when you become distracted, your **mental afflictions** can become even coarser than before. They would be completely ordinary and possibly very strong. This characterizes the first part, *lesser one taste*, of the third level or third yoga of Mahamudra practice, which is *one taste*.

At this point, in postmeditation there can be extreme reactivity and strange behavior. You can be extremely grouchy or angry; your kleshas may seem to be even stronger than before. You may be very avaricious or desirous. In short, you may think and others may think that your meditation is completely ineffective. The traditional way that this is explained in the Tibetan society is that it is said that old meditators go around collecting the discarded shoes of others. You seem to be concerned with little things that are valueless and it is almost as though you have gone a little mad. This type of behavior is characteristic of when someone at the level of one taste is prey to distraction. When they become distracted then they can behave roughly or strangely.

While on the one hand this is a sign that the person is going through the level of lesser one taste, nevertheless there is a danger. If the person allows himself or herself to engage in coarse or inappropriate conduct, there is the risk falling into lower states.

It is therefore something that requires great caution. It says in the text, “At this juncture you need to be particularly careful of your behavior with regards to the accumulation of *karma*.” If you are careful and if you properly establish the interdependent positive conditions for progress on the path, then they will be effortlessly and automatically established.

The next thing that happens in your progress is that most of this roughness characterized at this level by roughness of behavior or conduct and the mental afflictions that motivate that are pacified. You become far less reactive, such as in conversation with others you are less small-minded than you were previously. This also means that you are not particularly affected by what people tend to do for you, such as service, respect, praise and so on. They do not particularly please you. Whenever you rest in practice, then there is the spontaneous experience of the environment and beings within it as the unity of clarity and emptiness, like the reflection of the moon in a body of water. There is no need for any kind of intentional cultivation of that recognition, such as mixing your mind with the environment or the space and so on. There is no alteration of spontaneous meditation that is needed. Your apprehension of dreams and the state of the clear light lessens, which does not mean that your confusion increases. It means that there is less fixated apprehension of these things. At this point innumerable visions,

meditation experiences, and visionary dreams, and so on can arise. You will meet many deities, not only deities you have meditated on, but others that you have not meditated on. The reason why this is possible is that the deities you meditate on and the deities you do not meditate on are embodiments of the same wisdom, of the same nature, so the fact that you meditate on one deity does not mean that you are not going to have a vision of another deity.

You will also have visions in which you meet various siddhas of the past and the present who will teach you, probably symbolically or with gesture or symbol. In spite of all of these visions and so forth, you will not be particularly pleased by them. You will not think that they are that special. You will not take them to be that big a deal. Nevertheless you are still prey to distractions and when you become distracted, you will feel very bad about it and feel very regretful or remorseful. This is the *level of intermediate one taste*.

You will remember that at this level there is still distraction and when distraction arises, there is still a feeling of dissatisfaction or regret. This dissatisfaction or regret is the principal indication at this level that there is not yet the mixing of meditation and postmeditation. Here postmeditation is defined as this kind of subtle distraction and it is important to remember that the

distraction at this level is completely unlike what we normally consider a distraction. Distraction here means that the practitioner departs from or moves from their state of even placement. They experience in postmeditation the appearances of phenomena, but they do not generate any coarse fixation on these, either taking things to be permanent or taking things to be real. They see phenomena as illusory but, because there is a slight degree of fixation on the illusory appearance of phenomena, they are still distracted. Because it is slightly different from the meditative absorption at this level it is considered distraction, but do not think of it as distraction like our own.

At that point, through the condition of the blessing of the practitioner's guru and their intensive practice of their yidam, through one of these conditions, they break through to a further level of realization. This is a decisive realization of all aspects of Mahamudra — ground, path, and fruition — that is completely different from a dry understanding. A dry understanding is a theoretical or conceptual understanding of something and it is, indeed, dry because it is like being on top of a mountain dying of thirst and hearing about water somewhere else. That is really what dry understanding is like. The recognition or realization of Mahamudra at this point is completely unlike that. It is a direct realization, a direct experience of its meaning.

It is also different from the kind of decisive understanding you might give rise to through logical analysis. It is also different from the kind of understanding that you give rise to through a thorough research of the meaning of something in the scriptures of the sutras and tantras. It is completely unlike simply adopting the views or ideas of someone else, like repeating something you have been told or been taught. At this point, you finally transcend the problem of subtle distraction or subtle departure from even placement.

There still arise instants or moments of distraction, moments of forgetfulness and the state of sleep, but at this point you realize that there is no difference between distraction and nondistraction, which means that the recognition of the nature continues even when you are distracted. You realize that there is no difference between forgetfulness and mindfulness because at this point, even when you are forgetful, the recognition of the nature remains. There is no difference between sleep and being awake at this point because even when you are asleep, the recognition of the nature remains.

At this point, with an insight or **prajna** that completely and fully realizes the nature of things, you realize that nature to be the dharmakaya and to have been that from the beginning. You realize that nakedly, which means without concept or any kind

of obscuration. You realize the absolute truth, the nature of all things, in a way that is unceasing. This realization is beyond any kind of distraction or fluctuation. Although you realize that, although you no longer lose or depart from that realization, there is, nevertheless, still the intentional imposition of mindfulness. In other words, there is still some slight exertion, which is the maintenance of mindfulness. You recognize at this point that, although you have fully recognized the nature, it is still appropriate and profound to continually reinforce or clarify that recognition through the maintenance of mindfulness.

Although at this point you have realized that samsara has no true existence, has no nature, you still recognize that it is profound and useful to make aspirations for rebirth in pure realms. An indication of this is that even realized teachers, although they certainly have the ability to control their rebirth and to take birth in any pure realm they wish, will still cultivate the practice of aspiring for rebirth in a pure realm. Although at this point you have realized that there is no such thing absolutely as virtue or wrongdoing, you still are very, very careful in practicing virtue and abstention from wrongdoing. Although you realize that from the very beginning this very nature from which you no longer depart has never been stained or affected by wrongdoing, you still exert yourself in the purification of previous wrongdoing and the accumulation of merit.

A distinction can be made between two forms of this level of one taste; this is the *greater one taste*. If the realization that has just been described is sporadic, if it occurs sometimes and not at others, it is called the experience of one taste. It is not the full realization of one taste. If it is stable and unwavering, if it is there all the time, without fluctuation, then that is the actual attainment of the level of one taste. There is still farther to go and there is still progress to be made in the expansion of one's realization. All of the qualities of one's realization have not yet become evident in one's being. Nevertheless, that is the attainment of one taste.

We have previously discussed heroic samadhi, which is one of *three samadhis* of *bodhisattvas* spoken of in the sutras presented here. At this point you have attained the second, *illusory samadhi* or the samadhi that is like a magical illusion, because at this point, never wavering from the recognition of the nature, for the first time you directly and fully see external appearances as illusory without any fixation on them whatsoever as anything else. That is the attainment of this second samadhi, the illusory or illusion-like samadhi. The third is the vajra-like samadhi of nonmeditation.

Chakme Rinpoche interjects here that everything up to this point has been presented based upon his own experience of it

and he has explained it for the benefit of others, dictating this chapter as he did the previous ones to Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso. He makes the point here that this is not Dharma for scholars. This is not presented so that people can study or acquire information about the path. This is designed to be a practice manual, a basis for someone who is actually practicing Mahamudra to deal with the levels and stages. He says, “If I were to write a lot of things that I had not experienced, not only would it not be possible, but there would not be much point. It would just be a waste of paper. Nevertheless in order that this presentation be complete, I will go on briefly, basing my presentation on the writings or the teaching of the Kagyu.”

What he is saying here, literally, is that he has only realized greater one taste, and he has not gone further than that. This is probably not true, but he is saying so that he does not actually have to come out and say that he has attained enlightenment. He is pretending that everything he is writing from now on is based upon the teachings of others.

When there is meditation, you need to rely on mindfulness because the essence of meditation is the imposition of mindfulness. When you reach the point where there is no need for the intentional act of mindfulness and, even without mindfulness, there is no change whatsoever in the recognition of or immersion in the

nature, then that is *nonmeditation*, which is the highest level of Mahamudra practice. Chakme Rinpoche here states his source for this. He says that this is clearly presented or stated in the ancient text of excellent origin, which is the scroll on *The Unity of Wind and Mind* that was presented by Milarepa to Gampopa as his parting gift.

It is taught that, like the other three stages or yogas, there are three levels to nonmeditation — *lesser, intermediate and greater* — which correspond subtly to the degree of freedom from the intentional imposition of mindfulness. All of the remaining subtle obscurations are conquered by the samadhi of nonmeditation and this samadhi itself, because it transcends any kind of intentional imposition or direct attempt, is impervious to all obstacles. Nothing that could arise in your mind at that point could impede or obstruct this samadhi, because of its very nature. Therefore the Mahamudra samadhi of nonmeditation is the third and final samadhi presented in the sutras. The *vajra-like samadhi* is, by definition, the samadhi or meditative absorption that brings one to buddhahood; therefore the state of nonmeditation is the state of *samyaksambuddha*, or perfect and full awakening. The vajra is a metaphor for that which is indestructible, that which is unassailable, cannot be cut, cannot be broken, and cannot be stopped. Vajra-like samadhi means that meditative absorption that is perfect, unassailable, unstoppable, and indestructible.

With the attainment of that, with the attainment of *greater nonmeditation*, you enter into buddhahood. It says here, “Greater nonmeditation is the state or level of a perfect buddha.”

Chakme Rinpoche points out that he is not just making that up, that you can find that in all the meditation texts or guidebooks of the Mahamudra tradition.

The statement in all of the anuttara yoga tantras that buddhahood can be obtained in one lifetime refers to this attainment of buddhahood. When we normally think of a buddha, we think of someone like **Buddha Shakyamuni**, who has a crown protuberance, the marks of wheels on the soles of his feet and the palms of his hands, and who exhibits the twelve deeds of a supreme **nirmanakaya**. That is normally our definition of a buddha. In fact, buddha, by definition, is someone who has completely eradicated even the subtlest obscurations and who, therefore has attained full and omniscient wisdom. Since that is attained by this vajra-like samadhi, the samadhi of greater nonmeditation, when the practitioner reaches that point, although their body does not change and they do not necessarily develop a crown protuberance or wheels on their hands and feet, they nevertheless have attained the same state or level as any buddha. From their own point of view, they are a buddha, but they will not necessarily look like a buddha to other people. When someone

attains buddhahood through the path of Mahamudra, he does so in that life without necessarily appearing like the historical buddha. That is what is meant in the tantras by the achievement of buddhahood in one lifetime.

This practice has been presented using the characteristic terminology of Mahamudra, but it has also been mentioned throughout the text that it is the practice of Mahamudra or Dzokchen, the Great Perfection. It can be considered either. As for how it would be classified within the system of the Great Perfection, the term for this practice that is used in Dzokchen is *trekchö*, “breakthrough.” That is what this type of practice is called. The way it is explained here is characteristic of the highest level within the first of the three classes in Dzokchen, the *mind class* or *mind section*. In the two other parts of the Dzokchen scriptures — the *space class* and the *instruction class* — there are refutations of statements made in the mind class. This should be understood in the following way. The point being made in the space and instruction classes where there is criticism of the description of the path in the mind class is simply a refinement of terminology, a refinement of manner of explanation. It is not actually a dispute about the meaning of what is being presented. Therefore if you carefully examine the statements in these three classes, you will see that there is not a hair’s difference in the

nature of the actual samadhi being presented. It is a difference in the terminology of description with which it is presented.

In the same way, there is no fundamental difference at all between Mahamudra and Dzokchen, aside from obvious differences in terminology. That is why if you are talking about words, you can say they are different, but if you are talking about meaning, you have to say they are not. At this point, in order to make it clear that he is not just making this up, that this is not just his opinion, Chakme Rinpoche says, “For example, it was said by the mahasiddha Karma Pakshi that, with regard to Mahamudra and Dzokchen, there are differences with their words or terminology, but no difference in their meaning.”

This is fairly obviously true. When you talk about Dzokchen, you call it Dzokchen and when you talk about Mahamudra, you call it Mahamudra. Within each tradition, there are different words and different terms for the same levels and for the same practices. What is being pointed out, the nature of the task, and the nature of the samadhi that is being described is the same.

Chakme Rinpoche concludes, “This is the roar of the snow lion. It is how to practice Mahamudra and Dzokchen as a unity. Those without good fortune who are antipathetic to this tradition might be terrified by it. In other words, those who doubt the efficacy

of the practice of meditation as explained here, as being the essence of the path might doubt that it would work. But those with good fortune, who are lion cubs, would practice it with joy.”

Here the term *lion cub* is used to refer to those who are predisposed toward this path because of a previous accumulation of merit and, therefore have the necessary openness to this presentation to actually pursue it and actually grow up to become snow lions. He continues, “Since I have just explained what I have experienced as it has appeared to me, there is no question that I have in any way been deceitful. Whether or not you agree with what I have said, it is an honest explanation of my own experience. Because, as has been pointed out, anything can arise as an experience for a yogin, there is no reason for the learned and attained to be displeased by this.”

In fact, what he is saying is that this is absolutely true because he has experienced it himself but, to be polite, he is saying that even if it is not true, at least he is saying what he has experienced. Since he is not lying, there is no reason for scholars to be upset with him. Then he concludes saying, “This was written by Lama Tsondru Gyamtso, who took it down in dictation, having devotedly paid homage, prostrated, and offered a mandala. By the merit of this, may some meditators be benefited.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Isn't it the goal to be able to develop a sense of restful mind during meditation practice and also to try to extend that ability to be able to have a restful state of mind over a longer period of time? How does this conflict with developing attachment to the restful state of mind? Also, does the understanding of the empty nature of mind eventually remove the attachment? Is that how it works? The second question is how would the understanding of emptiness be different from wakeful mind or enlightened mind and realization?

RINPOCHE: With regard to your first question, we need the stillness of mind, the tranquillity, and that is why we practice tranquillity meditation. The problem is not the stillness. The problem is that we become attached to the pleasure of stillness. If that attachment remains, it causes your practice to be directed toward the achievement of that pleasure of stillness, which is a mundane end that will divert your practice from the true path. It will divert your practice because it will be oriented toward the goal of stillness. We need to get rid of that fixation or attachment. That does not mean that we need to disrupt the stillness. It simply means that we need to be able to remain in that stillness or tranquillity without attachment to it. In order

to do that, we look at the nature of the stillness and discover that its nature is emptiness. This means there is nothing in that nature to be apprehended and therefore there is nothing to be attached to, consequentially that which is still does not have the characteristic of something that one could attach to.

Resting in that experience, where there is no longer any distinction between the subject and the object, and experiencing the emptiness of the stillness enables you to continue the stillness and actually to prolong it even more, because the attachment that arises to the stillness will eventually interrupt it and will corrupt it. In that way, through resting in the nature of stillness and seeing that it is empty, the attachment is destroyed and then you can remain in the stillness without attachment. In a sense, yes, the recognition of the emptiness of the stillness does destroy the attachment to the stillness, but it does not destroy the stillness.

As for the relationship between this recognition of emptiness and the final wakefulness, the final result, this recognition of emptiness is in a sense the cause of awakening, or the cause of enlightenment. It is not awakening or enlightenment in itself. It is not the final result. For example, if I wish to travel a great distance, I will only reach my destination when I reach it, but when I turn in the right direction and take a few steps I am

beginning the path to that destination. That is what this initial recognition of emptiness within the mind is like.

STUDENT: Does tranquillity or stillness require looking directly at the mind?

RINPOCHE: In a sense, the stillness can result from any *shamatha* technique that is properly applied. Traditionally in the context of Mahamudra, the way that the stillness is first generated is through doing guru yoga practice and visualizing rays of light from the body, speech, and mind of the guru dissolve into your body, speech, and mind, and that the guru dissolves into you and becomes inseparable from you. Then you rest without fabrication. That is held to be the best way to generate a first genuine experience of meditation, because it is without possibility of sidetrack or deviation. Most meditation techniques are subject to sidetrack and to impediment; achieving meditative absorption through devotion is superior to others in that it is free of such danger.

This is in the context of someone who has done the preliminary practices and who is using the practice of guru yoga as a steppingstone to meditation practice. Someone who is not doing the preliminaries would need to go through the stages of *shamatha* that are commonly taught.

STUDENT: How is it that seeing emptiness will overcome holding onto experiences?

RINPOCHE: First of all, the reason why it is necessary to let go of the fixation on experience is because fixation on experience is one of the chief impediments to progress on the path. The reason why that fixation is removed by the recognition of the nature of any experience is that when the nature of the experience is seen to be emptiness, there is no longer any apparent substantial existence to the experience to be held onto.

STUDENT: The experience still exists, therefore doesn't one hold onto something even though it seems to be empty?

RINPOCHE: Not necessarily. It is possible to retain the experience but be without any fixation on it.

STUDENT: If a person comes to a state of tranquillity and stillness, does the recognition of emptiness come naturally?

RINPOCHE: Unfortunately, it is not automatic. Simply attaining the state of stillness or tranquillity does not in itself guarantee that you are going to recognize the nature of that stillness to be emptiness. What does happen automatically when you attain the stillness is there is a natural tendency to become attached

to it. If no remedy is applied to that attachment, that attachment will obstruct further progress. Therefore there has to be the intentional cultivation of our recognition of the nature of the tranquillity.

STUDENT: I have a problem with a certain practice that I find that I do not like, but I am committed to doing this for a certain period of time. I want to know how to deal with the dislike of a specific technique that is part of the series.

RINPOCHE: This is a good opportunity, because when you do the practice and you experience this dislike or the disturbance caused by the technique itself, look at that.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, how do we know when to take a break and when to stay with those difficult disturbances when meditating and a whole lot of agitation comes up.

RINPOCHE: If your mind becomes extremely agitated while meditating, it is best to get up and walk around a little bit, relax, and then return to the session. In general, this is something that will happen. This is one of the experiences in meditation that happens at some point or another to almost everyone. It is actually a sign of progress. It is not in it itself a bad thing. Also, if you keep on practicing, eventually it will disappear. It

will not last forever. At the same time if you cannot get past it in a specific session, you are better off relaxing a little bit and then going back to it.

STUDENT: Could you please explain how mind first becomes confused?

RINPOCHE: You will never find a beginning to this. No matter how much you scrutinize the development of bewilderment, no matter how far you trace it back, you will never find the first moment of ignorance. That is why it is commonly said that samsara is beginningless, because there was no first moment. If there had been a moment or a period of time that predated ignorance, if there were a time without bewilderment and subsequent to that we became bewildered, then we could say it happened because of this cause and these conditions. But because there was never a time before bewilderment, before ignorance, we cannot say why it happened.

STUDENT: If mind's nature is naturally clear, then why would not that exist initially before confusion?

RINPOCHE: If the mind's purity, the mind's nature being clear light, had existed prior to ignorance, then there would have to be a reason for ignorance arising. But neither ever had a beginning.

There was never a time when there was mind's nature and no ignorance. They are both beginningless.

STUDENT: Then why is there an end to ignorance, but not wisdom?

RINPOCHE: The reason why ignorance can be eradicated and the nature of mind is indestructible is that ignorance is a composite thing. It is therefore impermanent. The nature of mind is not composite, and therefore it is permanent.

Part of the problem we have in talking about this is that when we use words we have an image of ignorance as a thing, as some kind of mass of darkness or obscurity that somehow envelopes or covers something brilliant and perfect. Ignorance is not a thing that continues through time; *ignorance* is a word or name that we apply to a continuous process, which is actually changing moment by moment. The process is simply a lack of knowing. The problem is that although ignorance is changing in every instant, it is uninterrupted, like a waterfall. If you look at a waterfall, you think that this year's waterfall is the same as last year's waterfall; in fact the water is entirely different. Each drop of water is distinct, and the drops of water that are present at any moment are not the ones that were present in the previous moment. Ignorance is like that.

STUDENT: Are you saying that ignorance never actually arises?

RINPOCHE: It depends what on you mean by actually. From the point of view of the nature of things, since the nature of things has never changed, ignorance has never arisen because it has never obscured or sullied that nature. From the point of view of our experience, which is bewildered and is affected by ignorance, ignorance definitely has arisen.

STUDENT: I have to think about this. Thank you.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am trying to understand about the **root guru** and the transmission of the recognition of the true nature of mind. If we view His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa as the nirmanakaya embodiment of all buddhas, why is it necessary for him to receive such a transmission?

RINPOCHE: From their point of view, what you say is true. His Holiness does not need pointing out instructions from anybody. From the point of view of the lineage, it has to continue in an uninterrupted fashion, therefore in each lifetime the lineage holder receives this from their master. There has to be some concession in the activity of such great masters to how we experience the world as cause and result. Therefore they display the manner of receiving and passing on the transmission that, from their own point of view, you could say they are already born with.

For example, in Kyerku there was a **Sakya tulku** called Chanak Tulku whose predecessor had been extremely learned. The predecessor passed away and he was reborn. When he was a young child he was being trained by his tutor who was trying to get him to memorize the *Manjushri Nama Samgiti*, the expressions of the names of Manjushri, which is a **tantra** that is quite commonly used as a personal liturgical recitation practice. The tutor was trying to get this young tulku to learn this, but the young tulku would not chant it. He would not do it. The tutor was beating him, and of course, the child was crying and then was sent to bed. He went to sleep, and while he was sleeping, he started talking in his sleep, and in his sleep he perfectly recited the whole *Nama Samgiti* without any break, imperfection, or mistakes. The tutor, who was staying in the same room, heard this and the next day he did not bother beating the child anymore. Nevertheless, even though such a person would remember from a previous life all of these things, he would still go through the process of being taught and learning it again in this new human life.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, what is the solution to discouragement during meditation? If you have been doing shamatha meditation and the mind is continually distracted no matter what antidotes you use, especially if you have been meditating for several years and you do not see any improvement. What should you do about this?

RINPOCHE: There could be several reasons for it. One reason is that it may be that the methods of tranquillity meditation you have been using are not actually suited to your constitution. Another problem is that maybe you simply have not tried hard enough. A third possibility is simply that the hope of transcending the distraction may be a cause of distraction as well, because it agitates the mind.

With regard to the first, not all people respond equally well to all the different techniques of tranquillity meditation. That is one of the reasons why so many different techniques exist. One of the first things you might try is to employ a number of different techniques until you find one that your mind is comfortable with and that you respond to.

The next thing you need to do is let go of anxiety about the distraction. Because tranquillity meditation is aimed at the attainment of a state of tranquillity, one of the problems we have with it is that we become anxious about attaining that tranquillity and we feel bad about our practice and about ourselves if our mind remains distracted. That anxiety about the result of meditation is an obstacle to tranquillity, so in order to prevent that you need to not care. Beyond simply doing the practice as well and as sincerely as you can, you need to not care about how well or

how poorly it goes and not to care about whether or not your mind is distracted or undistracted.

If you stop being anxious about the result, eventually your mind will relax and you will achieve a state of stillness. At that point you must not overreact because you have achieved a state of stillness that you have been waiting for so long. If you become excited by the stillness, then that of course is another form of distraction. Before the stillness happens, you need to be prepared to just continue practicing without regard for how long it takes for the mind to become still. Once the stillness has arisen, do not be too excited by it and just continue.

STUDENT: What is the antidote to disturbing, negative, angry thoughts coming up during meditation?

RINPOCHE: There are many possible approaches to dealing with anger or angry thoughts that arise in meditation. The approach that is characteristic of the Kagyu lineage is to look directly at the anger. Rather than attempting to fight with it or attempting to avoid it or run away from it, if you look directly at the anger to see what the anger really is, it will at least be weakened. If you do this persistently whenever anger arises, it will eventually stop arising. Otherwise, if you attempt to conquer the anger with some kind of intentionally applied remedy, you will actually find that

the anger is stronger than any remedy you can come up with. Nevertheless a distinction needs to be made about exactly how far the anger has developed. If you allow the anger to reach full bloom before you deal with it, before you look directly at it, it may be so strong and so captivating that you will not be able to look at it is nature. You will be swept away by the anger itself. It is important to deal with it when it first arises, when it first starts as a feeling of vague displeasure or irritation.

STUDENT: When I was first starting to meditate, I had a lot better experiences than I do now. I tended to relax more to the technique and it tended to be easier for me. As the years have gone by, it has actually disintegrated in some large part. Of course, I have had that explained to be an exhaustion of merit. At the same time, you are still on this path and presumably you are still accumulating some merit. I wonder if Rinpoche could say something about that.

RINPOCHE: When impediments arise in general and also in our practice, you can call that an exhaustion of merit or just an insufficiency of merit, but what is important is not to just be fatalistic about it or give up. In other words, do not just think, “Well, my merit is exhausted. That is the end of it. I might as well give up now.” If your merit is insufficient, you can always replenish it. The way to do that is to put more effort into or

more emphasis on practices for gathering the accumulation of merit and dispelling obscurations that are the remedy in general to the type of situation that you describe.

When you perform any practice for accumulating merit, do not think that you are just doing it to accumulate merit for yourself, but that you are doing it so that every being throughout the **six realms** accumulates merit. With that motivation, every little bit of practice you do will accumulate a tremendous amount of merit because of the motivation. If the problem is a lack of merit, you can always fix that by doing the practices that accumulate merit. For example, if you want to drink some tea, you look at your cup, and if you find it is empty, you simply have to pour more tea into the cup.

This is a problem that we all have in one form or another. As long as we have flesh and blood bodies, we have to survive and we have to take care of ourselves, and we have to do whatever we have to do in order to get along. We will have to do this until we attain buddhahood. At the same time, if we call ourselves practitioners of Dharma and we think of ourselves as such, we must develop at all times a motivation where our actions are altruistic. We cannot do anything, especially any Dharma practice, for our own sake alone, because it will have very little power and very little benefit if done that way.

If you think, “I am doing this for the benefit of all beings without exception,” every little bit of practice you do will have much more power. It is also important to give away all of the merit and virtue you accumulate through practice, to actually think, “I give this to all beings of the six realms so that they may be happy, so that they may experience freedom, and so that they may experience liberation.” You need to give it to all beings in a way that is actually full of joy at having given it and without resentment.

The attitude one has toward the dedication of merit and toward this altruistic motivation is like the attitude of a mother who is nursing a newborn child. Although the act of nursing the child may be uncomfortable for her and it may affect her body adversely, she is more than willing to do it because this is what she has to give to her child. In the same way, we have to give our merit to all sentient beings, and the more intent we are upon directing our practice to the benefit of others and giving the merit we accumulate through our practice to others, the more merit, ironically, we ourselves will end up with.

STUDENT: Could you say something more about mixing? My understanding is from something that I read somewhere that there were two main things: one was mixing and the other one

was **transference of consciousness**. I would like to understand somewhat about what mixing is and how we do that.

RINPOCHE: The root meaning of mixing, which is one of the two key terms in our lineage, *mixing* and *transference*, refers essentially to uncovering the buddha nature within your mind, which allows the apparent separation from the buddha nature of others, to be dissolved. One instance of this is the buddha nature within the mind of any given sentient being and the buddha nature within every other sentient being of the six realms. Their buddha natures are ultimately indistinguishable or indivisible and, finally, inseparable like the water in India and the water in Tibet, as was used as examples in the text. Nevertheless just as we can distinguish between water in one place and water in another place by its location, we can distinguish between the buddha nature in the mind of any given being and the minds of other beings through the obscurations that are individual to each being. Therefore when those obscurations are removed, that which makes the distinction between the buddha nature of one being and that of another is no longer present. That is one meaning of mixing, the removal of obscurations.

Another ramification of this, which was also mentioned in the text, is the mixing of your mind and the mind of the guru. The only thing that creates the illusion of the separation of your mind

and that of the guru's is the presence of your obscurations. In the same way, as in the previous example, when the obscurations are removed, there is the experience of the inseparability of your mind and that of the guru. The process that leads to that experience, which is the removal of the obscuration, is therefore called mixing.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, when we are trying to develop one-pointed meditation it is necessary to drop other practices, such as other liturgical practices. If we were involved in a practice such as ngondro, to what extent can we also be trying to develop this one-pointed meditation, as well as being involved with other practices? Or is it necessary to wait until after we finish the preliminaries to develop one-pointed meditation?

RINPOCHE: The difference is in context or time. When you are doing the preliminary practices is the time to introduce and practice as much elaboration and as many different devices as possible for gathering the **accumulations** and purifying obscurations. That is the time for that sort of thing. When you are doing ngondro practice, what you restrict, in a sense, is the practice of simplicity, which you just undertake at the conclusion of the session when the field of accumulation and so forth dissolve into you. The question is emphasis. When you are doing the preliminary practices, the emphasis is on elaboration because

you are trying to create the conditions that will enable you in the future to dispense with elaboration. You can only dispense with it once you have actually caused the elaborate practices to yield their results. As a result of your completion of the preliminary practices and other elaborate practices, when you have reached their result, then at that time the situation is different.

STUDENT: I thought it was said that anything can arise in the mind of a practitioner. Does this happen more so in the mind of a practitioner or in the mind of someone who is not practicing?

RINPOCHE: A person who is not practicing will have many different kinds of thoughts but will not have the same meditation experiences that a practitioner will have. The analogy used compares a summer field to the mind of a practitioner. Flowers, weeds, and so forth are analogous to the meditation experiences, but meditation experiences only arise if you practice meditation.

STUDENT: Does that hold true for obstacles also?

RINPOCHE: A person who is not practicing can definitely experience obstacles but the obstacles that arise are the result of the accumulation of karma and the person's own mental afflictions. When obstacles arise for practitioners, they may be the result of their previous karma but their experiencing

them will cause that karma to be purified. The experience of obstacles or suffering itself does not guarantee purification, so the undergoing of such obstacles by an ordinary person does not necessarily bring about any good thing. Their undergoing it may make them more resentful and accumulate more karma rather than purifying it. If a practitioner recognizes obstacles as the purification of the negative karma, then it becomes such.

STUDENT: I am not sure I understand the purpose of liturgical practices. Are they to get us so far and then the ultimate goal is Mahamudra? Rinpoche mentioned mixing the mind of Mahamudra with liturgical practices. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

TRANSLATOR: When you specify liturgical practices, do you mean the outward form, the use of chanting, or do you mean practices involving visualization in general?

STUDENT: I mean both.

RINPOCHE: Elaborate practices, such as liturgical practice and all the related sorts of aspects of practice, are approaches that are designed to facilitate your emergence in unelaborated practice. Unelaborate practice is, by definition, simply resting in the nature of your mind or looking at the nature of your mind. The nature

of this practice, the fact that it has no devices or methods in the conventional sense of that term, makes it difficult to do in the beginning. All the other practices that we do are designed to enable us to be able to do this unelaborate or simple practice. As long as we cannot simply do that, and we need to be able to do something, we do the elaborate practices. Through the process of the accumulation of merit and the purification of obscurations, which those elaborate practices accomplish quite effectively, we become closer and closer to being able to simply rest in the nature of our minds.

At a certain point, you could say that it becomes appropriate to place more emphasis on the simple or unelaborate practice than on elaborate practices, but there never really comes a point where you do not need the elaborate practices at all. They always remain as some part of your path, some part of your practice. The best is if you can practice the unelaborate and the elaborate practice simultaneously and integrate them completely.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, could you repeat the four formless realms and what state of consciousness causes rebirth into the realm of nothing at all?

RINPOCHE: The four varieties of the formless realm are *boundless space*, *boundless consciousness*, *nothing whatsoever*, and *neither*

perception nor its absence. The cause of being born into the third of these, nothing whatsoever, is to have a fixated apprehension of nonexistence or nothing and to cultivate that as a meditative state and, especially, to die in that state. That will cause rebirth in the realm of nothing whatsoever. It is misleading to say, “born,” but when you have been born in that realm, for the duration of your existence there, which is held to be many kalpas or aeon, you will not generate any coarse thoughts. When the momentum of the causes that brought about that rebirth is exhausted, coarse thoughts will arise, causing the samadhi, and the realm is a samadhi more than a place, to degenerate. Then you will take rebirth in wherever of the six realms your karma dictates.

STUDENT: You spoke about the four experiences: cognitive lucidity, calmness, and I forgot the others.

RINPOCHE: The first two are *well-being* and *cognitive lucidity*. The third one can be called either *nonconceptuality* or *emptiness*. The fourth one is *rough* or *unpleasant*. You can think of it as upheaval.

STUDENT: In a yidam practice like Chenrezik, one sometimes visualizes very clearly. Is that cognitive lucidity when you reach a state in which you feel this?

RINPOCHE: Such experiences are probably not what is typically meant by the term *meditation experience*. Usually day-to-day changes in the quality of visualization, for example, it sometimes being extremely clear and at other times not so clear but being pleasant, and so on, are caused by changes in your physical constitution. These day-to-day changes, caused by fatigue and so on, do not really constitute meditation experiences. What we are talking about as meditation experiences here are overwhelming experiences that arise in the context of a profound state of shamatha.

STUDENT: The only place where you would have those experiences in a yidam practice would be at the end when you do the dissolution of the visualization.

RINPOCHE: At that point you are resting your mind, but there is probably no intense meditation experience. Intense meditation experience arises when, through the power of resting your mind for a long time, these overwhelming experiences arise. What is called meditation experience here are things that arise through intensive practice that are precursors of realization. The problem with them is that they are mistaken for realization, taken as the goal and that stops the progress, which would otherwise lead to realization. They are like, for example, if you are rubbing two sticks together to get a fire, long before you actually have a flame the sticks will start to heat up. If you have only a primitive idea

of what fire is, you might mistake that heating of the sticks or the smoke that arises before there is actual fire, to be the fire and stop rubbing the sticks, in which case we could say that the heat was an obstacle because you mistook it for the fire. It is related to fire, but it is not fire and cannot be used for the same function that the fire can. In the same way, experiences are precursors to realization. They are not themselves realization and they cannot be of any use the way that realization is. If experience leads you to stop progress, then it is an obstacle and a problem.

STUDENT: Earlier you mentioned that there is no boundary between mind and space. Later you spoke of the mixing of the mind of the guru with all of the buddhas in the ten directions and all sentient beings. What is absolute truth and does that encompass things that are not sentient, like stones and air and water?

TRANSLATOR: Are you asking if sentient beings and inanimate objects have the same nature in absolute truth?

STUDENT: That is one question. I also would like to know what Rinpoche means by this.

RINPOCHE: It depends upon what perspective you want to take to examine this question. From the perspective of wisdom,

everything has the same fundamental nature, and the animate and the inanimate have the same fundamental nature. For example, in the Vajrayana context, from the point of view of wisdom, we would say that the five elements, which normally typify the inanimate, are the **five female buddhas**, who are certainly animate. From the point of view of wisdom, we could say that there is no valid distinction; but from the point of view of bewilderment, there is a great deal of difference between cognitive or sentient beings and an inanimate object. They are entirely different.

STUDENT: From the point of view of buddha nature, what is the relationship between buddha nature and ultimate truth?

RINPOCHE: Buddha nature and absolute truth are synonyms.

STUDENT: Then from an absolute point of view, does everything that is have buddha nature?

RINPOCHE: We cannot, for the reason you mentioned, say that anything does not possess buddha nature because if buddha nature is the **dharmadhatu**, which is by definition the expanse that is the all-inclusive nature of all things, then everything must partake of the qualities of that nature, since it is its nature. Therefore we cannot say that things do not possess buddha nature, however,

buddha nature as the motivating force behind the path, and the capability of awakening, is unique to sentient beings.

STUDENT: My question is related to buddha nature in terms of the emphasis on luminosity and clarity and the *Madhyamaka* emphasis on emptiness. Does recognition of emptiness have to precede recognition of Mahamudra?

RINPOCHE: Ultimately, the object of realization of these views is the same. It is the dharmadhatu. So in that sense, according to the object of the view, there is no gradation. Nevertheless there is a gradation in the way that this object would be recognized or ascertained by different individuals and you could say that there is some concession made or correspondence to that. It is like, for example, people looking at the same thing but one person from fairly close and another person from some distance.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said, “Appearance is possible because things do not have ultimate existence,” and used the rainbow and the reflection in the water as examples. Is this true of conventional objects as well?

RINPOCHE: What distinguishes those analogies from other phenomena is not that their nature is different, but that the particular physical characteristics of those phenomena make

it easier to understand the nature that it is with most things. What those analogies do point out, among other things, is that whereas we look at a conventional object and perceive it as solid and inherently existent, someone who has a recognition of the nature of the object would perceive it as having no more inherent existence than those things used in the analogies: the moon reflected in water, and so on. The terms used to describe that status of things, the *unity of appearance and emptiness*, the *unity of lucidity and emptiness*, and so on, indicate what those analogies point out. Be careful with the term *unity*. There is not as much problem with the English as there is with the Tibetan. The term can be mistaken to indicate that two things being melded were crafted into unity, but it means two things that are conceptual isolates have not, from the very beginning, been different from one another.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, why is it that realization of “self” comes before that of the “other”?

RINPOCHE: The reason is that the realization of the selflessness of persons is a result of the abandonment of coarse obscurations, and the realization of the selflessness of things in general is a result of the abandonment of subtle obscurations. Since the coarse obscurations must be abandoned first, that realization occurs first.

STUDENT: So the realization of the selflessness of oneself comes at the same time as the realization of the selflessness of other beings?

RINPOCHE: It is the realization of the selflessness of any and all persons. It never happens that someone realizes that he or she has no inherent existence but suspects that other beings do.

STUDENT: But why is it that it is more subtle from objects?

RINPOCHE: The basic reason is that in order to realize the selflessness of things, of phenomena, you must already have realized the selflessness of persons. As for the reason why that is true, it is explained somewhat differently in the sutras and here. The way it is explained here is quite easy to understand. The first thing you realize the nature of is your own mind because that is directly available to you as an object of scrutiny. When you realize the nature of your mind, you see the emptiness of your mind and that is the realization of the selflessness of persons. That is why that occurs first. Based on that recognition, you extrapolate (although that word is misleading) from that and investigate the nature of other phenomena, thereby expanding that realization through the realization of emptiness or selflessness of phenomena.

STUDENT: So it is a much greater step from one to the other.

RINPOCHE: It is a big step and it is a change in how you use your awareness in the beginning because, having recognized the nature of your mind, you then turn your awareness outward, not in bewilderment as in the past, but in a state of awareness. You experience directly that same emptiness, that same absence of inherent existence, in what were previously regarded as external phenomena. For this to occur there has to have first been that recognition of that emptiness within your own mind. There has to have first been the recognition of the selflessness of persons. Then you can experience it in external things as well.

This is the reason for that often quoted Mahamudra saying, “Knowing one liberates all, but not knowing one can be the ruin of all.” Knowing one liberates all means that if you recognize the nature of your mind, then you can go on to expand that recognition to include things because all things have that same nature. But if you have not yet recognized the nature of your mind and attempt to ascertain the nature of things through logical analysis, it is, from the Mahamudra point of view, useless because all you will do is build up more and more concepts. They may be sophisticated and elaborate concepts of nonexistence and so on, but they have nothing to do with the actual nature of

things because, not having experienced it within yourself, you cannot experience it directly through speculation.

STUDENT: I thought that at that point a practitioner had already experienced emptiness of self.

RINPOCHE: Because of habit — and this is why sometimes we think of habit itself as a separate and particularly pernicious or subtle form of obscuration — through the recognition of the selflessness of persons on the level of simplicity, the coarse mental afflictions have been pacified. On the level of lesser one taste, there is still habit that can arise at times of distraction as coarse behavior. This arises because there is still the habit of previous fixations on the characteristics of things and this has to be eradicated.

The arising of the symptoms of this habit in that context can be part of the process of that eradication. It is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be the ending of all those habits for that practitioner. It is a little bit like a strategy that is used in Tibetan medical treatment. In Tibetan medical treatment when a remedy is prescribed for a specific ailment and has taken effect so that all symptoms of the ailment have subsided and there appears to be no remaining illness, the physician will give the person something that, far from being the remedy for the ailment, will

actually increase the symptoms if the ailment is still there. If the symptoms pop back up again, it means the ailment is not completely cured. It is still lying there, possibly dormant, but still there. That means that the person needs to take more of the remedy for the ailment. If the symptoms do not arise, that means that the ailment has been completely cured. What happens at this point of lesser one taste is similar to that.

STUDENT: Could Rinpoche say something in general about the “blessings of the guru” and how we partake of that?

RINPOCHE: It is easy to answer that question today. The entrance of the blessing of one’s guru into one is what is referred to in this chapter as “the mixing of one’s mind with the guru,” in other words, the removal of the factors that obscure the unity of your mind and the mind of the guru, or the recognition of the unity of your mind and the mind of the guru. Essentially, what we call getting the guru’s blessing is achieving the result of the guru’s instruction, which you achieve through your own practice.

STUDENT: How do we understand the mind as unborn?

RINPOCHE: You only actually realize this when you achieve the yoga of simplicity as a direct realization, which is very different from anything that we could say about it. That is when it is

achieved. As far as how to understand it in a general way, the usual way to approach this is through an analysis or scrutiny of the mind. You look at your mind and you look to see where it came from. Eventually you discover that it did not or does not come from anywhere. You look to see where it remains, where it goes, and you find that it does not remain anywhere and it does not go anywhere. You look to see if it has a color, a substance, a shape, and so on. You find none of these things. Once you have exhausted all of the possible substantial characteristics of the viewed object, you then turn the same scrutiny back on the viewer and you look to see if the examining cognition has any of these things. You find that you cannot say it is nothing, because it is examining but, on the other hand, you cannot say it is something because it does not have any of the characteristics that normally we would associate with anything we would call something.

Now, what is understood at that time is a theoretical understanding of the unborn nature of mind, which is very, very different from the experiential recognition of it because the experiential recognition which arises at the time of simplicity, as we have seen, has to transcend the possible misapprehensions that lead to rebirth in the formless realms, the subtle apprehension of nothingness or boundlessness and so on that will cause those rebirths. Essentially it is a recognition that the nature of mind

is beyond all conceptual elaboration, which is what simplicity itself means. Nevertheless, *beyond all conceptual elaboration*, the term itself, is just another linguistic concept that has to be transcended.

STUDENT: Could you read just a few sentences of Karma Chakme Rinpoche's references to Mind-Only as fixation on emptiness, please?

RINPOCHE: The difference between the Mind-Only view and the view of Mahamudra is simple to understand. The Mind-Only view accepts the mind as a mere cognitive lucidity empty of subject and object as inherently existent. In that acceptance, or in that view, what is inherent is the apprehension of that as ultimate. In Mahamudra, there is nothing that is apprehended as ultimate. There is no fixated apprehension on anything.

STUDENT: What is the difference between fixation and the adoption of a view, the belief of something?

RINPOCHE: The terms that are used to distinguish between these two aspects of belief — one being a fixated apprehension and the other being an adopted belief — can be slightly misleading because one of them is connate and the other one is acquired. *Connate* here does not mean essential to the nature

of something; it means something that you are born with. It is something that is part of you, irrespective of your belief system. The other is part of your belief system; it is acquired. A clear example of the difference is that animals have as much fixation on the self as we do, but they do not have what we would call a belief system. Animals do not assert the existence of a self or persons nor do they refute it; nevertheless, they are just as subject to the problems of fixation on a self.

STUDENT: So, Karma Chakme Rinpoche's description of Mind-Only as fixation on emptiness follows more in the belief context than in the connate.

RINPOCHE: Basically he is describing a flaw in an adopted system of beliefs and that flaw stems from the innate fixation on the self.

STUDENT: What about the difference between "clinging" and "fixated"? Are they both considered inherent? Is there not any nuance difference between clinging and fixating?

RINPOCHE: The difference between clinging and fixation is that fixation is the primary state and clinging is a further development of it. *Fixation* is the fixated apprehension of something based upon its apparent characteristics: this is a man, this is a woman,

and so forth. *Clinging* is the maintenance of that fixation through finding it in some way pleasing to maintain it.

STUDENT: Is it correct that everything we perceive is the result of our own karma? If so, then the way we deal with what we perceive carries us into the future and creates conditions for what will happen to us. It seems that we have to be very careful with how we deal with situations of things coming to us. For instance, if someone is being aggressive toward you, and you perceive that, it almost seems like a tar baby kind of situation. You cannot really get away from it. The only thing that I can understand is that one has to be really careful.

RINPOCHE: As for the first question, it could be said that everything, all appearances that we experience, are a function of our karma, but not necessarily in the sense of our individual karma or our individual process. What we generically designate as appearances can be divided into two: those that are brought about by individual karma and those that are brought about by collective karma. Collective karma in this case means that, having been born a human being, you have a fairly standardized set of senses, which cause you to experience the world in a more or less standardized way. As a human being, you will experience what we call “fire” in pretty much the same way as other human beings. We all experience fire as fire, water as water, and so

on, which is by no means certain for another species. What is individual is how you will feel about it. Other people will see the same thing as you, broadly speaking, but every person has an individual feeling about everything they come into contact with. The Tibetan word that I am translating as “appearances” is used to mean both of these. Only the second of these is truly individual to a person.

For your second question, yes, the way we react to appearances does indeed accumulate karma, especially when we react with mental afflictions. In extension to that, in answer to your third question, yes we need to be careful. In the example you gave, such as when someone is being abusive or inappropriate, you do not accumulate any negative karma by recognizing that the person is under the power of their kleshas and is being inappropriate. Seeing things as they are does not accumulate karma. You would accumulate karma if you respond with kleshas yourself. Then you accumulate karma. You are not bound by the situation to do so. You may see, for example, that the person is overcome by kleshas and you may feel compassion, in which case, not only do you not accumulate negative karma, you actually purify negative karma and accumulate virtue.

STUDENT: Why are there so many different deities? Why does there have to be so much variety and where does the variety come from? Why is it not just one's own guru?

RINPOCHE: Because all the different figures are the inconceivable variety of display of a single wisdom and, having recognized that wisdom, you have access to that inconceivable display. You can distinguish between different deities by their iconographic appearance and we can distinguish between different mahasiddhas by the period of history that they lived in. We can distinguish between different buddhas by saying this is the buddha of the past and these are the buddhas of the future, yet they are all displays of that same single wisdom. This display arises as a spontaneous response to the individual needs of the inconceivable variety of sentient beings. The form taken by each deity and the activity taken by each historical figure is a direct response to that individual need.

STUDENT: So in a sense, these have a life of their own, rather than being a projection of our own mind.

RINPOCHE: It is impossible to say, and that is why they appear. From the point of view of wisdom, the question of whether they are part of you or something other than you is meaningless. The question has no meaning in that context, however, from our

impure point of view, we could say they are either you or they are somebody else. They are either within you or without you, and that is why you do not experience it. Now, because you have transcended that kind of concept is why you do experience it.

STUDENT: Why does it take so long for our conversations to be less petty?

RINPOCHE: There is a big difference between the type of reactivity described in this context and what we might think of when we hear it. When we are in a negative way stable in our reactivity, we have strongly or deeply entrenched habits, as though they were written in stone. Our kleshas are like that; therefore we have recurring problems, recurring as a reaction. This type of thing that is being talked about here at this high level of the path is possibly bewildering to encounter, but it is sudden. It does not last. I cannot appraise anyone's attainment of the path, but I can give you an example of someone who very much fits this description.

He was a monk and lama whom I met. Although I never received instruction from him, when he was in retreat at my monastery he behaved somewhat strangely. One thing was that, while he was definitely in his room practicing, they would also hear him circumambulating outside. Another thing was that he would,

not going through the door, somehow manage to get outside the building and then be unable to come back in because the door was locked. At the time, no one put it all together. No one thought that this person was a mahasiddha. They just thought that he was little bit eccentric, maybe a little bit unstable. Sometimes his conversation was fairly normal, but a little bit on the simple-minded side. He would say things like, “I had a good breakfast this morning. I had three, maybe four, cups of tea. I feel really good. It is a good day.” He would say things like that. At other times he would seem to be, for no apparent reason, almost paranoid in his reactions. He would say, “That person is trying to trick me. He is trying to pull something over on me. He means me no good. He is mean.” Then the next day he would go up to the person, give them a gift, and say, “You are my friend. You have been so nice to me. You have been so much help.” You would have no idea what he was going to do from day to day.

When he died and he was cremated, his heart and his tongue and his eyes survived the fire, which is more or less standard for mahasiddhas. When we put it all together after the fact, we realized that he was probably at the stage of the path described here. Such a person would not probably have the types of recurring thoughts, attitudes, anger, and so on that we have, but might get angry all of a sudden and say something, but then it would be over.

STUDENT: So it is not that he could not get back in. It is that he wanted to show that he could not get back in.

RINPOCHE: Probably he would be in meditation, would recognize in meditation that all things have no inherent existence, and would therefore be able to walk through the wall. He would have a moment of realization and probably just found himself walking through a wall, but once he was out there he would be distracted, enter postmeditation, and would not be able to walk through the walls and get back in. The point is that in postmeditation, such a person is subject to the same restrictions as an ordinary person.

STUDENT: For some reason, although it is not directly related, I would like to hear a little bit more about how we should approach the extraordinary preliminaries, such as not taking **refuge** in the sense of a vow, but when we do the practice of prostrations.

RINPOCHE: The basic attitude is what is described in the vow that you are chanting, “I and all beings throughout space go for refuge” and so on. Most important is that you have the attitude that you are going for refuge for the benefit of all other beings. When you go for refuge to each mentioned source of refuge among the list of six, what you are doing is supplicating each for the bestowal of refuge or for blessing or protection. When

you say, “I go for refuge to the glorious holy gurus,” you are saying, “Glorious holy gurus, please grant me your blessing.” It is the same with all six. The most important single factor for the practice to be effective is the motivation of bodhichitta. If your practice is not motivated by bodhichitta, regardless of what the technique may be, it is not a Mahayana or Vajrayana practice. This is our main obstacle. The main thing that holds us back from progress in practice is lacking the genuine motivation of bodhichitta.

STUDENT: I heard that His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa had wheels in his hands and feet. Is that so? If so, what would that mean?

RINPOCHE: To tell you the truth, although I have no doubt that persons with purified karma saw the emblems of wheels on His Holiness’ hands and feet, I never saw them.

STUDENT: Has Rinpoche heard of anyone who had seen them?

RINPOCHE: No, I never heard of that before this minute. The only thing that I ever saw that was extraordinary was that occasionally when I would be speaking to him, he would disappear and reappear and he would be sitting in an armchair and I would be looking at him and talking to him. All of a sudden, I would

find myself looking right through him. He was not there in the armchair although he was still talking and I was still listening. Then he would reappear.

STUDENT: Is there anything else that Rinpoche could say about His Holiness that was unusual?

TRANSLATOR: That is a different question.

RINPOCHE: That is the only miracle that I ever saw personally relating to His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, but there are innumerable stories of things that other people saw. I did witness him saying something that indicated his manifest knowledge of hidden events. For example, when I was fleeing from the invading communist army, I was being shot at by a machine gun. In order that I not be killed, I was praying, “KARMAPA KHYENNO, KARMAPA KHYENNO,” as I was running and actually visualizing the Karmapa covering my back. I managed to get away and was not hit by any of the bullets. About a month after that, when I reached Central Tibet in Tsurphu, where His Holiness was still living before he left Tibet, and a group of us had an audience with him, he said, “I am delighted that all of you were able to safely escape from the invading soldiers, but I wish to remind some among you that you are supposed to visualize your guru above your head, not on your back like some kind of

cape.” I had to visualize him on my back because that is where I was afraid of getting shot. To be honest it really worked because I saw bullets hit the ground on either side of me continually while I was running away and I was not hit.

Another story that is not from my own experience but is found in the biography of one of the previous Karmapas is an instance of the same thing. One particular Karmapa was teaching and, in the middle of his talk, he stopped and looked very serious for a moment and then he started to laugh. When he was asked afterwards what was going on, he said that while he was teaching he noticed that there was a small boy in Kham in Eastern Tibet who was swimming without any clothes on. He started to be carried away by the current of the river and started to say, “KARMAPA KHYENNO, KARMAPA KHYENNO,” repeatedly, praying for His Holiness to somehow help him get across the river. One way to understand KARMAPA KHYENNO, is that it means “Karmapa, know” or in this case, “Karmapa, please see me and help.” So helping the boy cross is what His Holiness was doing while he looked serious. Then when the boy reached the other side, he smacked his backside and said, “Karmapa, you can know or not know; I do not care because I am out of trouble now.”

STUDENT: Rinpoche, why does an individual still engage in activities such as the generation of merit after they have attained the state of nonmeditation or the greater level of one taste? I am trying to understand why that is and what benefit that is.

RINPOCHE: Well at those junctures of the path there is no longer any need for the person to accumulate merit or purify obscurations. It is done because it causes the person to be more effective in benefiting beings. It creates the circumstances for greater effectiveness and especially for the future. An example of this is Jetsun Milarepa, who continued to live in great austerity even though he had attained enlightenment. His aspiration while doing so, as stated in his biography and other places, was that through the power and blessing of his austerity in practice, future generations of his lineage would be able to attain the same state without engaging in the same degree of austerity. The power of that aspiration and the austerity with which he backed it up is thought to have actually let this become true.

STUDENT: Could you say that, in a way, it is obviously to benefit other beings by providing an example that empowers the example with the blessing of realization? Is that a way to look at it?

RINPOCHE: It is both of them. It is to expand their effectiveness, their influence in benefiting beings. It is also so that they serve

as a good example. The importance of their serving as a good example is so that other beings not accumulate tremendous negative karma by generating antipathy toward them. A person at such a highly advanced level could live and behave, more or less, any way that they want to. They do not want to act too unconventionally however, because people might think ill of them; and thinking ill of someone at such a level is a source of serious negative karma. In order to prevent that, they would continue to act in a way as was expected.

STUDENT: My question has to do with motivation for daily practice of meditation. Even if one believes that one can achieve enlightenment within one or several lifetimes and benefit beings, those goals seem very distant for daily practice. On the other hand, focusing on the small benefits of meditation such as being calm and focused seems like too small a vision of the Dharma. How does one find the right balance of motivation in a realistic way that keeps us motivated day by day?

RINPOCHE: It is better to have the long-term motivation and the most powerful practice will come from giving rise to the courage that the long-term motivation takes. If I use myself as an example, if I develop the attitude “I am going to walk from here to California no matter how long it takes,” and I do not give up that intention, then it might take me quite a bit of time

but I would eventually get there. On the other hand, if I think, “I am going to go for a little walk and see where I end up,” I am not going to end up anywhere. If you take the attitude “I will do this practice from today until I attain buddhahood, no matter how long it takes, I will use this system of methods, whether I achieve buddhahood in one lifetime or in a million lifetimes; I will still use it,” then you will gradually progress. Whether you achieve buddhahood in this lifetime or not, the momentum of your practice will follow you life after life and it will get better and better. If you limit your motivation to a short-term goal and you think, “I will practice just until I attain a pleasant state of tranquillity,” then you will not get anywhere.

Many lifetimes, or even a few lifetimes, sound immeasurably long to us but, in fact, it is not. If we do not practice in that way, if we do not commit ourselves to the path, then we will continue not many lifetimes, but many aeons of suffering. Those who engage in especially strong forms of wrongdoing experience lifetime after lifetime in which each lifetime lasts for aeons of agony. And all of that is useless. They still have nothing at the end of that. What we are preparing to do is engage in a process of continual improvement, lifetime after lifetime, in which we are reborn in circumstances where we can progress further on the path with access to teachers and Dharma and so on. At the end of that process, we will have attained awakening as was expected.

STUDENT: If in the intermediate state of one taste, the practitioner sees no difference between wrongdoing and virtue but still practices virtue, does that mean that the practitioner does not see the difference or he or she knows the difference and it is automatic that he practices virtue?

RINPOCHE: Someone at that level recognizes that in absolute truth there is no such thing as virtue and wrongdoing but that in relative truth there is, indeed, the appearance of virtue, the appearance of wrongdoing, and the appearance of their corresponding karmic results. Because in postmeditation they are still, to some extent, subject to the appearances of relative truth they therefore have to be careful of their actions, since they are still going to be subject to the appearance of the results of actions. *Relative truth* means that which is experienced by a confused or bewildered cognition. *Absolute truth* means that which is experienced or which is true for an unbewildered or unconfused cognition. Those are the definitions of those two terms. Someone at the level of intermediate one taste is free of confusion or bewilderment when he or she is in even-placement. In even-placement they do not experience any of that, while in postmeditation, they still experience a level of relative truth. You could say that through the force of their previous habits and so on, in other words, through the force of the subtle obscurations that have not yet been purified at that level, as long as they

experience any part of relative truth, in that context, they are still at risk from the results of their actions. They do not fixate on the permanence or solidity of appearances, but they may still experience them as solid. They do not have the concept of solidity but they still experience some kind of appearance of solidity, therefore they still need to further purify their obscurations and gather accumulations in order to remove these final stains to omniscience.

STUDENT: Is the difference between that state and a further state that they are still making decisions about what to do?

RINPOCHE: Yes, and that is partly why they still need to rely upon mindfulness. I need to remind you again that it is not like our coarse bewilderment or our coarse appearances. From the point of view of the final result or final fruition there is still some obscuring factor, some experience of relative truth but it is all very subtle in comparison to what we undergo.

The Armor of Love and Compassion: How to Protect from All Danger

Chakme Rinpoche has explained the essence of the complete path, starting with the **four thoughts that turn the mind**, going through the preliminary practices in considerable detail, and finishing with how to practice Mahamudra to its final fruition.

The present chapter is concerned with how to protect yourself and others while you are pursuing this path because you need to be able to respond effectively to both fear and danger — for your own welfare and for the welfare of others. You might assume that this involves some kind of magical ceremony or wrathful mantras, but in fact, there is a far more effective way to deal with this situation, and it avoids the danger of the objectification and demonization of those you view as the sources of danger for yourself or others. This chapter is called, “The Armor of Love and Compassion: How to Protect from all Danger, a Profound Method of Protection and Turning Back Disaster for Both Yourself and Others Through the Power of the Words of Aspiration of Various Buddhas.”

When it says “armor of love and compassion,” you can think of the armor of love as how you protect others and the armor of compassion as how you protect yourself. In any case, it means how to protect yourself and others, and how to turn back the onset of problems.

The chapter begins with NAMO ARYA LOKISHVARAYA, “Homage to the Lord of the World, the protector Chenrezik.” Karma Chakme Rinpoche continues, “Lama Tsondru Gyamtso who is so diligent in practice, you have asked me, in the context of the practices of the deities of the Three Roots, the gurus, yidams, and dakinis, for a visualization of protection and averting. Which visualization using what deities will be most effective or profound? In response to that question, my answer is as follows: for averting obstacles that come from adventitious conditions, it will be effective to employ any deity, either wisdom or mundane.”

There are two possible causes of upheaval or negative conditions. They can be the result of your previous actions, which is your karma, or they can just happen in the course of circumstances, in which case they are the result of adventitious conditions. In the case of upheaval that results from adventitious conditions alone, any means of protection may be effective. For example, if you are trying to get out of the rain all you have to do is go into a building and that will suffice. It is taught that this will

work unless the upheaval is caused by your previous actions, your previous karma.

The ripening of actions is of three types. The first type refers to actions that are so extreme, either extremely virtuous or extremely negative, that the result ripens in the same life. These are *actions of manifest or evident ripening*, because you can actually see the ripening of the action in the same life. There is no way to stop or to avert that. There are ways to avert the next two types. The second are actions that are strong and intense enough that they will definitely ripen in the immediately subsequent life and these are *actions the results of which will be experienced in the next life*. The third are actions that will ripen at an uncertain time. Unless they are counteracted they will certainly ripen, but they can ripen after a hundred lives, after a thousand lives, and so on. Those are called results that will be experienced at some future time or after an unspecified number of lifetimes.

When conditions intervene to provide the opportunity for karmic traces to ripen, they will ripen. When adventitious conditions occur or surround you, such that your previous negative karma can ripen, it will tend to do so. You experience various things throughout this life that are the result of your actions in previous lives. When upheaval is caused by the coming together of the cause, which are your previous actions, and the conditions, which

are the force of circumstances around you, these things cannot be dispelled or averted by mundane deities. They can be averted, or at least ameliorated or softened, by the wisdom deities because wisdom deities, being enlightened, have mastery over karma, which is one of the ten forms of mastery that distinguish an enlightened being or a buddha. We see this in the long sutra of *Maudgalyayana*, which points out that, whereas *Yama*, the Lord of Death, has no control over karma, and therefore the destiny of the beings who come before him, the bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara* can do something about it. This refers to the fact that, when accused of being ruthless in dealing with sentient beings, Yama has often responded, “I cannot do anything about it. It is not up to me. It is not my decision. I am not passing sentence on you.” He cannot stop beings from experiencing their karma, whereas a bodhisattva like Avalokiteshvara can help beings in this way.

It is the nature of the activity of the buddhas that after they have attained the state of perfect and complete buddhahood or awakening, through the power of their aspirations for the benefit of even one sentient being, they will engage in great difficulty for billions of aeons. Buddhas, who through their awakening have achieved the power to actually cause what they wish to come true, called the power of true words, have an unequalled and unassailable power to avert disaster. Chakme Rinpoche concludes his initial response to Lama Tsondu Gyamtso’s question, “That

is the method that I use, appealing to that power of buddhas to repel disaster. So son, use that and put your confidence in that method.”

Now he gives the actual method. To begin, visualize yourself as the main deity, the one you are most used to visualizing yourself as. Chakme Rinpoche mentions Gyalwa Gyamtso because this was his own principal yidam practice. Rays of light, from the seed syllable in your heart, shoot out toward the east and reach the eastern pure realm, Abhirati, Manifestly Joyous, and strike the heart of the buddha of that realm, Akshobhya, causing him to recollect his previous aspiration to benefit beings. Like any buddha, Akshobhya has made very specific aspirations for protecting beings, for purifying the negative karma accumulated by beings, and so on. You are appealing to him for intercession in the plights of yourself and of others. Recollecting his aspirations, boundless numbers of rays of blue light emerge from his heart. These rays of light dissolve back into you and into those you wish to protect, pacifying all fear, anxiety, harm, and danger.

While you are doing the visualization, you recite a supplication to the Buddha Akshobhya, “*Bhagavat, tathagata, arhat, samyaksambuddha* Akshobhya, previously when you were engaging in the conduct of a bodhisattva, you made commitments invoking the power of truth and the power of words of truth.

In accordance with all of those commitments and the words you used to make them, and through the power of your having achieved the perfection of truth and words of truth — through the power of all of this — may all of the fear, anxiety, sickness, epidemic, and any kind of harm affecting us, masters and disciples, all those to be protected and under my consideration, may all of this be dispelled.”

Then say a form of Akshobhya’s mantra, OM AKSHOBHYA VIGHNANTA KRITA HUM PHAT, “all fear and harm,” SHANTIM KURU YE SVAHA, which means, “may it be pacified.” You recite that supplication relatively slowly, one, three, seven times, and so on, in dependence on how much time you have.

The efficacy of this is explained in the Akshobhya sutra, which describes the aspiration and how you can pray to him and achieve this benefit. According to this sutra, unless your previous karma is already ripening, all harm will immediately stop. Chakme Rinpoche adds that the visualization and the mantra are not found in the sutra itself, but have been added from other sources. That is the basic form of visualization to deal with all problems and all fears in general.

There are also specific visualizations to deal with specific problems that follow the same pattern. If you are particularly concerned

with the pacification of sickness that is harming either yourself or others then, as before, visualizing yourself as the appropriate yidam, rays of light shoot out from your heart. The rays of light from your heart go to the realm of the Light of Vaidurya and strike the heart of the Medicine Buddha. This causes him to recollect his previous aspiration, which like those of Akshobhya, are found in the appropriate sutra, in this case the *Sutra of the Aspirations of the Medicine Buddha*. Rays of light from his heart, the color of vaidurya, which is dark blue, come back. As before, these rays of light dissolve into the body of yourself and all those to be protected, pacifying all sickness, which is removed just like rays of sunlight melting dew. Visualizing that, you chant the following supplication to the Medicine Buddha, “Buddha, Bhaishajyaguru, King of the Light of Vaidurya, I pay homage to you. Through the power of the truth of the twelve great aspirations made previously by you, the King of the Light of Vaidurya, the Buddha Bhaishajyaguru, and by the power of the truth of the words you used to make those aspirations, may all of the sickness of myself and those to be protected be pacified right now.”

Then you say the Medicine Buddha’s mantra, TADYATHA OM BHAISHAJYA BHAISHAJYA MAHA BHAISHAJYA RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA, state “the particular sickness,” then, SARVA SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA, which means, “may all

sicknesses be pacified.” The Tibetan pronunciation is TEYATA OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE MAHA BEKANDZE RADZA SAMUNGATE SOHA . . . SARWA SHANTIM KURUYE SOHA. Again, you recite this one, three, seven times, or as many as you have time for. Unless it is a karmic ripening, all sicknesses will be pacified through this, which is extensively explained in both the longer and shorter sutras connected with the Medicine Buddha. Again, Chakme Rinpoche says that he has gone outside of the sutras for the visualization and mantra, so you will not find these in the sutras.

In the same way, if you wish to protect someone from the dangers of fire, water, poison, weapons, tyrants, thieves, or any kind of danger or demonic disturbance, then again visualize yourself as your yidam. Think that the rays of light from your heart this time go to the south and reach the mountain of the **Potala**, the realm of Avalokiteshvara, and strike the heart of Arya Avalokiteshvara who abides on the peak of that mountain, causing him to give rise to immeasurable compassion with which he grants you protection in the form of rays of white light, which emerge from his heart like the rays of the rising sun. These rays of light strike yourself and all those to be protected causing all harm to be dispelled like dew being melted or evaporated by the rays of the sun. Visualizing this, repeat the following supplication to Chenrezik, “Arya Avalokiteshvara, bodhisattva **mahasattva**,

who grants fearlessness to the fearful, to you we pay homage; Arya Avalokiteshvara, please protect me, and all to be protected, from all fear and harm.”

Then include the mantra for the specific form of Chenrezik that is MOUNTAIN DHARMA called the *Wish-fulfilling Wheel*, OM PADMA CHINDHA MANI JVALA HUM, “all danger and harm,” SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA, “may it all be pacified.” Again, recite this one, three, or seven times as is appropriate to the amount of time that you have. It says in the *Lotus Sutra* that if you have no doubts this will dispel or protect you from all danger. The mantra for this particular form of Chenrezik is from the *Tantra of the Wish-Fulfilling Wheel* and from an Indian text translated by Galo, one of the Tibetan translators who was part of the latter spreading of the teachings and who brought teachings from India and translated many different methods or instructions like this.

The benefits of these three methods — the first one using Akshobhya, the second using the Medicine Buddha, and the third using Chenrezik — are clear in the individual sutras that describe them, the *Akshobhya Sutra*, the two sutras of the Medicine Buddha, and the *Lotus Sutra*. These methods show how to introduce blessing and protection through the power of the truth, through the aspirations of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you talked about various techniques of using your yidam to invoke Akshobhya or Medicine Buddha if you are dealing with physical problems. We have also been taught that the practice of **Vajrasattva** is very effective in dispelling obstacles. The first part of my question is when would we use these techniques as opposed to Vajrasattva?

RINPOCHE: It really does not matter. You should use whichever method and supplicate whichever buddha you have the most confidence in. In the case of Vajrasattva versus Akshobhya versus Medicine Buddha, all three are buddhas of the Vajra family, connected with the east. There is no real difference among them as far as their power to protect or grant blessings and so on, so you can supplicate any one of these figures for all purposes. The decision you would make would be based on what you have the most faith or confidence in and you would apply that technique and it would be more effective, not because that buddha is superior to other buddhas, but because your faith in that buddha is greater. We tend to sometimes overemphasize the specialization of buddhas or deities. Because **Amitayus** is renowned for the bestowal of longevity and the Medicine Buddha for the bestowal of health, we sometimes think that in order

to live long that you have to pray to Amitayus, but in order to be healthy while living long, that you also have to pray to the Medicine Buddha, as though they are limited in function to what they are best known for. In fact, any buddha can accomplish all of your wishes if you supplicate them.

STUDENT: I am very grateful to be here to hear your teachings. I have one comment and one question. Last night I was listening to Lama Surya Das talking about Tibetan dream yoga. He described the story of a **yogi** in Tibet who was captured by the Chinese. One night the yogi had a dream in which the Karmapa came to him and told him that if he crept out under the tent and went in a certain direction, the guards would be asleep and he would be able to escape. Several days later he gathered a number of people together and they did this. The guards were asleep and they did escape. I was wondering if you know firsthand of that story.

RINPOCHE: There are many stories like that of lamas, monks, and others having dreamed of the Gyalwang Karmapa or other teachers predicting how they could escape and then successfully escapeing based on those dreams. Especially there are many stories like that connected with the Karmapa because he has so many disciples throughout not only central Tibet, but eastern Tibet as well. Because there are so many, I cannot say which one that story is concerned with.

STUDENT: This question is more deep and personal. I have a feeling, as I am learning to let go and not be obscured, that it is a little bit like learning to walk. I do not really remember learning to walk, but I have this perception that there was a time when I did not know how to walk and it seemed an impossible task. Then there was a period when it seemed as though it might be possible and then it happened. Now I have forgotten what it was like before having learned to walk. My question is will we all learn how to walk?

RINPOCHE: A small child learning to walk is, in a sense, a good analogy for the process of awakening because it indicates that there is an innate ability to do something but that, nevertheless, does require effort and overcoming the obstacle of disbelief in oneself. One of the major impediments to our achievement of awakening is the fact that we have no faith in our own ability to achieve it. In that way, we denigrate ourselves inappropriately. If one had been born an animal, one could not achieve awakening in that lifetime. One would have to hope for rebirth as a human being and, through that, the achievement of enlightenment. But once you have achieved birth as a human being, and you have access to the teachings of the three vehicles and so on, which bring about awakening, you need have no doubt that you have the innate and natural capacity to achieve that awakening because every sentient being possesses buddha nature.

The reason why we call the fundamental nature of a sentient being buddha nature is because the fundamental nature of a being is that capacity to wake up or to attain awakening. This is equally present within every being, regardless of other circumstances; however, through the habit that we have accumulated throughout beginningless time, we disbelieve, first of all, in the existence of buddha nature. The first obstacle is that we do not believe that we have this capacity. The second obstacle is that even if we come to be convinced of the presence of buddha nature, we do not engage with enough diligence to cause us to be able to wake up.

If we come to believe in buddha nature and come to make use of it on the path, there is no doubt whatsoever that we can achieve awakening because awakening is not the creation of something new. It is the removal of the obscurations that obstruct or hide our innate wakefulness, and the wakefulness that is achieved is something that is already there, not something that has to be newly created by the path. All of the qualities of buddhahood are already there. They are not developed by the path. In that sense, our buddha nature is like a candle that is hidden inside a vase. The candle is already lit. It is already burning. It is already a source of illumination. The vase, which is like our obscurations, is hiding or concealing that candle. The candle does not need to be created. What needs to happen is the vase needs to be broken.

STUDENT: Rinpoche mentioned that you could use these methods to get rid of sickness and fear caused by karma. I thought that everything was caused by karma. Are there other causes of sickness?

RINPOCHE: Definitely, you can experience unpleasant things that are not caused by previous actions. The indication of that is that they will be remedied by conventional means. For example, if you become ill and the illness responds to medical treatment, it means the illness was caused by adventitious conditions and not by previous karma.

STUDENT: So there are all kinds of things that can happen to us that are not karmically linked?

RINPOCHE: Yes, and that is why so many methods that we have come up with to deal with situations may be effective. They are effective when a situation is not produced karmically but is produced by adventitious circumstances.

STUDENT: We aspire to liberate beings. That is why we practice. I was wondering if that is effective. Are we liberating beings or how are beings liberated by accomplished practitioners?

TRANSLATOR: Do you mean are we liberating beings while we are doing our practice?

STUDENT: Yes, we have the motivation to liberate beings when we do our practice. So is that working or, if it is not working for us, it must be working for practitioners, including bodhisattvas, who are really accomplished. How does that work?

RINPOCHE: Primarily the full result of our aspirations to liberate sentient beings is something that we start to achieve after we attain high levels of realization ourselves. In the fullest sense, we cannot actually liberate other beings directly right now, but it is not completely true to say that there is no direct benefit for beings at the present. The benefit arises in several different ways. For example, when you are engaging in the path, you cultivate states of love and compassion and your eventual hope is to be able to liberate beings entirely. You may not be able to do that now, but by cultivating love and compassion you become a nicer person, which directly benefits beings. It is not just benefiting them indirectly; it also benefits them directly. In addition, you can do things to plant the seed of liberation in sentient beings, such as pronouncing mantras or the names of buddhas in their hearing and so on. These actions are of direct benefit to that being, although they do not immediately produce that being's liberation. All of the other things that we do, for example,

starting and maintaining a Dharma center, are a source of direct benefit to other beings because you are creating and maintaining a source of opportunity for those interested in Dharma to come into contact with it and for those who wish, to meet the living teachers and so on. In that way, you are providing the environment for beings to bring about their own liberation.

STUDENT: If you have an enemy — someone who wishes to do you harm or who does you harm — and you are able to generate love and compassion using that situation as a teaching, seeing the person almost as your guru, do you free the person from the karma of doing whatever it was he or she did to you?

RINPOCHE: It will help them a great deal because they are partly responsible for your generation of love and compassion. They do not accumulate the karma they would have accumulated if you had gotten angry; instead they accumulate some part of the merit that you accumulate through generating love and compassion.

STUDENT: I have never seen my past lifetimes or my future ones so it is still very hard to believe that there is something after this. That is why it is difficult to keep one's motivation for the next lifetime. As one progresses through the path, does it become clearer? Does it feed more momentum into the practice by itself?

RINPOCHE: You are describing a situation that we are all in, that we all have to deal with. To begin with, because we cannot directly see past or future lives, we are either extrapolating or choosing to believe in them. We have to start with trust in the fundamental validity of the instructions we have received from our teachers and, indirectly, from the Buddha. Then relying upon the validity of those, we employ those instructions which, as you indicated in your question, will gradually lead us to a recognition of things that will prove the existence of past and future lives to us. We are like people who are temporarily sightless, who need to get to the place where they are going to receive the medical treatment that will restore their vision. To get to that place, they have to put enough trust in others to lead them in the right direction because they cannot see to get there themselves. Once they are there, then gradually they will be able to recover their vision.

STUDENT: Referring to your answer from one of the previous questions, is it a good idea to say mantras around non-Buddhists?

RINPOCHE: It depends on the mantra. Some mantras are all right for anyone to hear, such as OM MANI PADME HUNG (The Tibetan pronunciation is OM MANI PEME HUNG), OM AMI DEWA HRI, the Medicine Buddha's mantra, Vajrasattva's mantra, and so on. The reason why that is true is that

those mantras are such that whether the hearers have faith in them or not, they will establish a positive connection with the mantra through hearing it. So it is beneficial. At the same time, you need to take into account the cultural context. If you are around people that will actually be irritated by it, you would not want to do it in an overly flamboyant manner that would upset them. Other mantras are expressly secret. They are not to be pronounced within hearing of those who have not been empowered to recite them. If you recite those mantras in the hearing of those who are not empowered to recite them, then you violate your own **samaya** and it will not benefit them. Those mantras are ones that are not of benefit unless there is a specific connection made with them, which is why they are secret. At the same time, people were actually encouraged to recite mantras, like OM MANI PADME HUNG, aloud on the peaks of mountains, over vast oceans, and so on in order to bless these places with the sound of the mantra. At the same time you need to be aware of acting in a way that will cause others to think you are crazy. These mantras are beneficial not only to other people but also to animals. They establish the seed of liberation in anyone who hears them.

STUDENT: You said that these practices are more effective than wrathful deity practice for overcoming obstacles and such. What did you mean by that?

RINPOCHE: I did not say that these particular buddhas or these prayers were more effective than meditating on a wrathful deity. The distinction I was making was between the motivation, which is expressly encouraged in such a practice, and then the misunderstood motivation with which some people approach the practice of a wrathful deity. If you do the practice of a wrathful deity, that is to say a **wisdom deity** with a wrathful appearance, such as Vajrapani, with the motivation of love and compassion, wishing to benefit all beings, then it will be just as effective in its own way as these practices that I mentioned.

The problem with the practice of wrathful deities is that we misunderstand the iconography of wrath to be the glorification of anger. We think that meditating on a wrathful deity means that it is appropriate to actually be angry when we do it and we try to act our imaginary notion of how this wrathful deity would act, actually making angry gestures and glaring about. This is especially a problem if the purpose in doing this is some kind of magical manipulation of others, objectifying or demonizing someone external to one, thinking that the object of reciting the deity's mantra is to somehow control, subdue, or defeat something that is external to oneself. If someone has that attitude, then it is not going to work, not because there is anything wrong with the wrathful deity or the deity's mantra. They embody inconceivable benefits because they embody wisdom. The problem in this type

of situation is not the mantra, but the mantrin, or practitioner of mantra, whose motivation is improper.

Geomancy: The Collection of All That Is Precious

Although the general topic of the text is how to practice in retreat, one of the issues involved in that is how to determine if a proposed retreat site is appropriate and if it has the necessary conditions conducive to practice. We now begin the study of the examination of the ground, or **geomancy**, and it is called “The Collection of All That Is Precious.” The presentation of geomancy here is not something that Karma Chakme himself made up, but is drawn from the various older traditions that he has brought together.

The Topic of Geomancy in General and the Reasons for It

“The Collection of All That Is Precious” is divided into six sections. Following the invocation to Manjushri, NAMO ARYA MANJUSHRIYE, the topic of geomancy in general and the reasons for it are introduced. For someone who has realized absolute truth and therefore experiences samsara and nirvana

as inseparable, there is no need to be concerned with geomancy because that person is no longer affected by the conditions of relative truth. As long as you are affected by such conditions, then some of the conditions that affect you have to do with the conditions of the place in which you live. The arrangement or form of a place has a definite effect on the beings that are associated with or inhabit that place.

All physical things, the external environment, and the contents and inhabitants of that environment, are physically composed of the five elements. The strength and stability of these elements determines the strength and stability of the circumstances of the beings who inhabit the environment. This is especially true with the element of earth, which is extremely powerful. The reason that the earth element is so influential is that the earth element primarily determines the structure or content of our environment. All of the various ways that the different countries and societies on the four continents including **Jambudvipa**, India, China, Mongolia, Tibet, and so on have developed and prospered or not prospered throughout history is fundamentally a result of the physical environment in which these societies have developed. When the environment is flourishing, the inhabitants will flourish. When the environment is ruined, the inhabitants will be ruined. You could say, of course, that the cause of this is their own previous actions, but the circumstantial conditions

that allowed these causes to ripen, were for the most part, found in the environment.

There are many texts, such as the *Geomancy of Phurba*, that present the reason why the arrangement of the land and the arrangement of the building in which you live are very important. It is important for the living because as long as you live there you are affected by this. It is also important in terms of where the dead are placed. This is the reason for the great amount of geomancy concerned with cemeteries or burial grounds. Every person, while alive, has three aspects to his vitality. One is *sok-lung*, which is the actual equivalent of the Sanskrit *prana* and means your life force and your vitality. The second is *la*. *La* is not your soul, it is not your consciousness, and it is not your vitality. Literally, the word *la* means “above” or “higher,” but I am going to translate it as “spirit.” The third element is *consciousness*, which is the person’s mind.

The vitality, the physical vitality that keeps a person physically alive, the *sok-lung*, or *prana*, ends when the person’s life ends. The consciousness is what proceeds to take rebirth. The *la* or spirit is what remains behind.

When people see the ghost of the deceased a long time after the person has passed away, which will look like the person

and can actually talk, that is the person's la or spirit. It is not actually the person; the person has gone on to be reborn. It is kind of like an imprint or image of that person's presence. The la or spirit tends to remain wherever the body is buried. If the body is buried or the remains are kept in a good ground, which is in a ground with a good geomancy, then the person's spirit flourishes. If the spirit flourishes, this helps their family members and descendants. Colloquially, this is called, "protection by the spirit of one's ancestors." If someone is buried in an inauspicious place or bad ground, then his or her spirit suffers. Through the weakening of that person's spirit or la, the family members and descendants suffer as well. They suffer because the spirit has no power to protect them, and beyond that, they actually suffer a kind of adversity that will correspond to whatever is lacking or wrong with the ground in which the ancestor was buried. They can suffer various disasters and upheavals, such as lack of prosperity and illness. For that reason, not only the placement of the dwelling of the living, but also the placement of the bodies of the dead, is very important. If you bury a family member in bad ground, it will bring disaster on your family. Even if you bury a domestic animal in bad ground, it will bring disaster on your family. All of this is taught in a tantra by Manjushri, which is called the *Tantra of the Chinese Temple*. This concludes the first section on geomancy, which is an explanation of the significance of place.

Traditional Sources

The second of the six sections is a statement of the traditional sources for the geomancy that is going to be presented here. The sources for the most part come from two traditions: the Chinese tradition of geomancy and the Indian tradition of geomancy. The Chinese tradition of geomancy that is drawn on here includes the presentations composed by the five forms of Manjushri who were active in emanations in China, as well as the four emanated emperors, Confucius, the four great scholars, and so on. In that way, there are an innumerable number of ancient treatises in Chinese on geomancy. The second source for the tradition of geomancy is Indian, most of which comes from the sutras and tantras in which there is some presentation of what is needed for a proper practice environment. There are commentaries, for example, the *Golden Key to Geomancy* composed by Padmakara, Guru Rinpoche. These are called “beneficial geomancy,” which means what is positive in the environment and what to look for. There are texts such as the *Bum Nak* by Gelong Namkhai Nyingpo and others that are called “harmful geomancy.” This does not mean ways to use geomancy to harm others. It means what to avoid in the environment and what to watch out for. There are also a number of works on geomancy composed in Tibet by Machik Lapkyi Drönma in connection with the practice

of *chö*, which covers what types of environments are needed for peaceful *chö* practice and what environments are needed for wrathful *chö* practice. Karma Chakme says, “If scriptural quotations from all of these sources were provided to convey each point, it would be too long.”

Practical Guidance in What to Do

Karma Chakme Rinpoche introduces the third section by saying, “I am just going to give actual practical guidance in what to do.” The first point is that the rear of the dwelling should face any of three directions: north, northwest, or west. Southeast, south, or southwest are good for the front of the building. I realize this does not coordinate with the requirements for the back of the building. What it means is that these situations are the optimal situations for the back and the optimum situations for the front. The actual topography you are looking for is one where behind the dwelling there is a high mountain and the mountain in front of the dwelling is not as high, and both should be as though they are bent or curved to face in toward the dwelling. There should be a river flowing on either side to the right and to the left, and these rivers should meet at some point in front of the dwelling. Immediately in front of the dwelling before the meeting of the

rivers, there should be meadows and trees. That is the kind of place you need to look for, which is obviously rather difficult.

The *four columns of the ground* correspond to the four directions and are the four characteristics that you want an ideal place to have. In the east, the lay of the land should open like a door. It should be piled or heaped in the south, which means that there should be some hills in the south. It should be closed in the west, which means that there should not be an open valley in the west. It should be blocked by a curtain in the north, which means that there should be some sort of precipice, such as a rock face, that closes off the north. You want all of these things, but it is not easy to find all of them in one place. An example of one place that does have all of these characteristics is Tsurphu Monastery.

You want roads coming from the east and from the south to your dwelling because those are roads that will bring friends and prosperity. You do not want roads from the west or from the north because those roads will bring enemies, impediments, and maras. This is difficult in this country because there are roads going in all directions; in Tibet it was easier to control because there were fewer roads.

With regard to trees, it is not considered good to have one tree to the right and one tree to the left. One tree in front of the

house is good and promotes stability. It is called a stake or peg of stability. To have one tree behind the house is not good. It is considered oppressive and will actually hold down or oppress the inhabitants. This is difficult to apply here in New York where there are so many trees, whereas in Tibet there are fewer trees.

The next subject is the shape of the sky. The shape of the sky refers to the shape of the amount of sky that is revealed by the topography of the valley; in other words, if you are in a bowl then the sky will be round. It is best if the sky is round so that when you look from the valley, or wherever you are, you see a round or circular sky that is wide open. It is especially good if it has a shape like the spokes of a wheel. If the sky is narrow, for example, if you live in a kind of gorge, where you just see a narrow space of sky, this will harm the health and probably cause the death of any women that live in that place. If the sky is pierced by a sharp peak, this will harm the health and cause the death of a person born in the year that corresponds to that section of the sky.

From the east, the sky is divided into twelve sections that correspond to the twelve animals of the astrological calendar. If the sky in one of those twelve sections is pierced by a point, that will cause the death of someone who lives in that place and was born in that year. If in the southeast there is a space that

is like the slit in an arrow where it fits on the bowstring, this indicates that the qualities of learning will increase in those who live in this place.

The *four bad signs* are connected with the elements. The bad sign of the sky is when the sky takes the shape of huge fangs like the fangs of Yama. Yama holds the wheel of life and he has fangs that hang over the top of the wheel. If, because of the way the land is shaped, the sky takes this fang shape, this is not good. If the earth with the rocks and so on looks sharp like spears, this is not good. If the rising and setting rays of the sun shine on the water that is near the dwelling and the light is reflected off the water directly into or onto the house, this is not good. If you have trees, one on the right and one on the left, and they blow in the wind, this is not good because it is like someone casting a black banner in summons. If the wind hits the house like arrows in the winter when it is snowing, this is not good. All the above are generally not good.

Ample amounts of water, woods, meadows, and mountains in front of the house are signs that there will be attainment on the part of those who live there. If there are three mountains to the east in front of the house, then the prosperity of the dwellers of the house will correspond to the height of the mountains. This depends on their age. The prosperity of the oldest residents of

the house will correspond to the height of the central mountain, that of the middle-aged members of the household will correspond to the mountain that is on the right, and the prosperity of the younger members of the household will correspond to the mountain to the left. Fathers and uncles should be buried at the top of the mountain, young men and women in the middle, and the younger ones at the base of the mountain. It is good for the geomancer if the peak of the mountain in back is not uneven and if it is a flat surface, which means that the person who analyzes the area will be able to do so accurately and it will benefit the people. "Mountains behind the mountain to the back getting higher and higher progressively indicate that the dwelling is good for leaders, and in general, for the family itself."

The ground and land of the east and south indicate the prosperity of the daughters of the house and of their spouses. The sky can be divided into twelve sections, three for each of the four directions, corresponding to the twelve animals of the twelve-year cycle, which will indicate the effect the place will have on someone, depending upon the year of birth. For example, if you were born in the Year of the Tiger, and there is a feature in the northeast part of the sky that looks like a tiger or is reminiscent of a tiger, this means that place is going to be very, very good for you. If you were born in the year that is the enemy of the Tiger, which is the Monkey, its astrological opposite, this is going to be bad

for you. One of the reasons why most of the Chinese emperors would actually change the location of their palace each reign is because the palace had to be in a location that was appropriate for them based upon the year in which they were born.

The *four guardians* are four animals; they are metaphoric and have nothing to do with the astrological animals that correspond to the year in which one is born. Having a road that is going to the east is the protection of the east, which is like the protection of the tawny tiger. If the road has fissures or gaps in the ground, it will deprive you of the protection of the tawny tiger because he has been hit by the arrow of the earth. Water, such as a river, to the south is the turquoise dragon. If the water is broken, for example, when you look at the water it seems to disappear and then reappear due to the topography, the dragon falls into the gap and you do not get the dragon's protection. If you have red ground or red rocks to the west, then you are protected by the red bird from the west. If it is divided in the middle by a road, the red bird is caught in the trap or the net of the road. The text is giving metaphors for the benefits of certain features and also how the benefits of those features can be cancelled out by defects. If you have rocks in a dry riverbed, and in general, a lot of rocks and cliffs to the north, then you are protected by the tortoise or turtle in the north. If there is a pool that collects to the north and the water that flows in does not flow out again,

then the turtle drowns and you do not get his protection. If you have these four protections without the defects that cancel them out, you will be stable, strong, and vigorous and will be able to stay where you are. You will do well. If the protections are cancelled out by the defects that affect them, then children born in the dwelling may have birth defects and other serious problems. If you do not have the four protections from the beginning, then you probably will not be able to remain in that place. You will leave, or if you do not leave, a lot of wandering beggars will come all the time.

If it is excessively steep or precipitous in front of the house, it is said that it will be difficult for you to settle down, stay put, or do well in that house. You can remedy this situation by putting a **tsa tsa** house on the steep hill in front of the dwelling. A tsa tsa house is not a **stupa** but rather a simple building of normal shape in which the tsa tsas are placed to protect them from the elements. This is quite common in Tibet. Placing many mani stones and planting trees also helps.

It sometimes happens that although there is nothing wrong with the ground itself, we mess it up by building things in the wrong places. For example, if you build a stupa or a tsa tsa house, or put a lot of **mani stones** in the east, you are blocking off the eastern gateway of friendship and prosperity, therefore there

will be a lack of prosperity, and there will be poverty and ruin. In the same way, if you put a tsa tsa house, a stupa, or a lot of mani stones in the south, it is like your tongue throwing out the friend from your mouth, which is like putting food in your mouth and then spitting it right out again. The south is also a gateway of friendship and prosperity and you are blocking that off in the same way. To build a tsa tsa house or put a lot of mani stones in the west or north is good because those are gateways of enemies, enmity, and ruin. If the building of these structures actually overshadows the dwelling, then it is considered oppressive and will limit you, consequentially it is not good.

We have covered the category of general geomancy and I hope that you will learn about geomancy. It is very hard to find places to live that actually fulfill all of these criteria. Even if you find something that is good in general, there is still the effect on specific people because of the year of their birth. If you have a family of four people, what may be good for one person may be terrible for the other three. You really have to accept whatever dwelling you find yourself in based upon your own merit and karma, and you cannot necessarily expect to find a dwelling that has all of the criteria presented in the texts. The more you know about geomancy the more difficult it is to choose a dwelling. I do not know about in India, but certainly in China, each emperor would build his palace in a place that suited not only

the general criteria, but also the specific criteria determined by the year of his birth, the animal, as well as the trigram, with which his particular year of birth was associated. When the son became emperor, he would have to move because he was born in a different year with a different trigram than the father. It becomes very complex. We have looked at geomancy in general and learned how to identify good and bad sites for a dwelling and how to fix some of the problems in sites that are not ideal.

The Geomancy of the Dead and the Topic of Burial Grounds

We now begin the study of the geomancy of the dead and look at the topic of burial grounds: what constitutes an auspicious burial site, and what constitutes an inauspicious burial site. Here the idea of a burial ground is a ground that can serve any of three functions: the actual site where the body is buried, the site of sky burial where the body is cut into pieces and fed to scavenger birds, or the site where the ashes and other remains are kept after cremation. In any case, it is where the body of the deceased ends up. In general, if the person comes from a family lineage of great quality, which means someone who is descended from a bodhisattva, mahasiddha, Dharma king, a family exalted

in any way, or if a person, even though impoverished, is very old when he or she dies and has seen several generations go by, the text says they should be buried (we will say buried, but it can mean any of the three) on top of an area that has many stages to it, which is like a throne. If you cannot find that, at least “bury” the person in a high place.

You have to gauge these two aspects of family lineage and age and coordinate them. If the deceased came from a great family lineage but was very young when he passed away, you have to adjust for it. If the body of a person who died at a great age is buried too low, or if the body of a person who died young is buried too high, then at least one young person in their family will die. This is not good. Although the body of a young person should not be buried too high, at the same time, you do not want it directly overshadowed by something like a mountain peak. The type of thing that brings oppression is if the body is right at the base of a mountain or right at the corner of a rock. Consequently you want to put the body on the side so that the mountain does not directly overshadow it, because to the degree that it is overshadowed or oppressed by the mountain behind it, to that degree will it bring the deaths of other young people in the family.

If someone has died through violence, such as having been killed by a weapon, he or she must be buried in a narrow place, not in a wide-open place. The place in which they are buried should not be wider than the flight of an arrow. In other words, if an arrow is shot from a bow by a person of average strength, the burial place should be no wider than the distance that that arrow can fly. You should especially avoid burying a person who has died by violence between two rock surfaces that face each other. In other words, you want a narrow place, but you do not want to bury them between two rock edges or faces that are close together.

In general, it is a good burial site if there is a proud mountain behind, in other words, a prominent mountain, and gentle hills or mountains in front. You need to observe the special characteristics of the site depending upon the year of birth of the person who died, which corresponds to the twelve animals of the twelve-year cycle. If there is a tree or a forest to the east of the burial site, it is bad for burying people of the Dog, Dragon, Ox, or Sheep years. It is good for burying people of the Tiger or Rabbit years and it will help the life force or vitality of the families of the deceased. If there is red ground or a red rock to the south of the burial site, it will prolong the lives of the families of persons of the Horse or Snake years buried there, but it will kill the families of persons of the Bird or Monkey years who are buried there. If there is a white rock, white cliffs,

white ground, or white clay to the west of the burial site, it will protect the life force of the families of buried people of the Bird or Monkey years, but will impair the life force of the families of buried persons of the Tiger and Rabbit years. If there is a flowing river or waterfall to the north of the burial site, this will prolong the lives of families of buried persons of the Rat or Pig years, but will kill or exterminate the families of buried persons of the Horse and Snake years.

If in any of the four corners — not the four directions, north, east, south, and west, but rather the intermediate directions, northeast, southwest, etc. — there is a temple, stupa, tsa tsa house, ruins of a building, or a square small field, this will help the lives of families or survivors of buried people of the four animals that are on the four corners, but will harm the life of families of the deceased persons who were of the Rat or Pig years. If someone is buried under the negative circumstances described, harm will come to the family within three years.

Although these problems were described as problems for the burial of the dead, they also will be problems for the living when they affect the site of the dwelling of the living. The difference is that in the case of the dwelling of the living, there are things you can do to alleviate or remedy these problems. In the case of a burial site, you must avoid a site with those negative characteristics.

For example, in the case of a dwelling, if you have the problems that occur on one of the four corners of the house — south, west, north, and east — it will help if you plant a tree on that corner. If you have the problem of red rock and red ground to the south, then you should bury a vase filled with water from different places. If you have the problem of trees to the east, then drive nails, which have been cast from the molten metal of weapons that were used to kill people, into the tree or trees. If you have the problem of water to the north, then combine earth taken from three different mountains, and pour it into the water. If you have the problem of white rocks and cliffs to the west, put up red prayer flags or carve the “all-powerful ten,” the monogram of the **Kalachakra**, on red stones and place them where the problem is. These things will fix the problems if it is a house or dwelling, but not if it is a burial site. If it is a burial site, those types of places have to be avoided altogether.

The next topic within this section is the particular instructions for the burial sites of children who have died. The rules are slightly different in these cases. Normally, you do not want the circumstance called oppression or overshadowing in which a burial site is directly overshadowed by a mountain behind it, but in the case of the death of small children, especially infants, you want to do something that will stop the continuing death of infants in the family. If the oppression or the overshadowing of the burial

site is too much, it will cause the death of the child's father and if it is too little, it will not stop the recurrent death of infants in the family. You should appraise the need for overshadowing or oppression by the number of children who have died. If the child being buried is the second or third child that died, then you need to have more overshadowing or oppression. In general, to have a road passing behind a dwelling is bad because it is like a yoke pressing down on the necks of those in the dwelling. It is actually good in the case of the burial site of an infant or small child because it brings the right amount of overshadowing or oppression to stop the continuing death of infants.

Normally it is bad if there is one tree growing to the right of a dwelling, but in the case of the burial site of a small child, it is good because it is called "the arrow of protection," which will stop continued infant death.

Having a small field in front of the burial site is good. It is called "the mother's lap." If there is no small field in front of the burial site of an infant, it will prevent the birth of further children. If there is such a field, then it will insure the birth of healthy children. If the field in front of the burial site is too large, it will cause the death of the deceased child's mother. It is very, very good if there is a small waterfall that is mixing with a larger river in front of the burial site. It is called "the

combination of the mother and child turquoise dragon.” It is good because it indicates that the family will have more children that will survive. A noisy waterfall making a great deal of constant sound indicates that there will be male children, and a quiet waterfall indicates that there will be female children. In the case of the burial sites of infants, what you need to assess is the phenomenon of oppression; the presence of the mother’s lap; the arrow of protection, which is the tree to the right; and the waterfall coming into the river. Those are the most important things to look for. You do not need to worry about the general geomantic features that are otherwise important.

The last section on burial grounds is a ceremonial practice that is done in order to end animal epidemics. Since there was not much veterinary medicine in Tibet it was not uncommon that disease would become epidemic among farm animals and domesticated animals. The way that you would try to end the epidemic was to remove the head of one of the animals that had died from the epidemic, bury it in a certain place, and then perform the practice of chö in order to alleviate the epidemic. You have to bury the animal head in the right place, otherwise it is going to backfire, and the epidemic will spread. Geomancy determines where to bury the head of the animal that has died from the epidemic in order to stop the epidemic.

A mountain or a rock mountain that is either red or black in color is not good because it is a place where there are *tsen* and *maras*, the different kinds of carnivorous spirits who like flesh, and therefore their appetite will be whetted by burying the head and the epidemic will increase.

It is good to bury the head in a place with white rocks that are not a huge rock cliff or in a place with a stable white boulder. In general, a boulder can be the one on top that is liable to be disturbed, or it can be the one on the bottom that is in a stable place. You want to bury it near boulders that are stable. If you bury the head at the foot of rocks shaped like animals, and it does not have to be the animal that died but can be anything that looks like any kind of animal or amphibian, it is important that in front there be a field or meadow, water, and grass, all of which are auspicious. It is good if you can bury the head where the spirit tree associated with that species grows. Since most species have trees that are associated with them, if you bury the head of the animal in a place where there are naturally occurring trees that are associated with that animal, it will help to stop the epidemic.

If it is horses that are afflicted, you want to bury the head in a place where there is juniper or tamarisk. If it is a yak or dri that is afflicted, you want to bury the head in a place where there

are yangsheng, which are a kind of pine tree. If it is sheep, you want to bury the head in a place where you find white smoke trees. If it is cattle, then you want to bury the head where there is a penma tree, which is good for cattle. If the problem is an epidemic among goats, a redwood or muk is good. If there are a lot of langma where you bury the head, it will increase the health and the prevalence of females of the species that you are trying to protect. If there are takpa trees, it will cause more health and increase of males of that species. Regarding the burial of the heads of animals that have died in an epidemic, if there is the right oppression of the epidemic through the burial site, and the right auspiciousness of the field, it does not matter which direction the heads face. You do not have to worry about east, west, north, and south. The reason is that in stopping an epidemic with animals you actually need more oppression, consequentially, what would otherwise constitute negative characteristics and effects are useful here. That concludes the section for which the general topic was burial grounds.

The Specific Geomancy Concerning Dwellings

We will first discuss dwellings in general. It is not good if there is an open downward slope in the north or if the western direction

is wide open because those are openings to enemies and sickness. If you have this problem with your dwelling, put one hundred mani stones piled up or build a tsa tsa house in whichever direction the problem is. In those dwelling places where there is just a narrow space in the eastern direction, it will cause one to have a short life. If you can see straight through from the front of the house down into the valley, into the other dwellings, without anything in the way at all and there is a straight downward slope, this is not good and will bring obstacles. What you want is something like they have at Kar-me Ling. It is curving, with a hill or a mountain here, and then a hill there, so that there is no straight way through.

Although this principle is true for most dwellings, it is especially true for a monastery. The best site is one that is like a hill of heaped grain that looks as though it has been piled up from the bottom and is about to overflow from the top, like it is ready for a land slide. That is good. It is not good if there is a spring in front of the monastery or dwelling because that is like a leaky vase that has a hole in the bottom. It is good if there is a spring either to the right or to the left of the monastery because that is like a serkyem offering. It is not good if the source of a river is on the mountain behind the monastery. Red rocks or red ground to the southeast will harm the horses that are associated with the monastery because it is connected with the tsen spirit. You

can remedy those things by building a stupa that has been filled with the properly consecrated **dh**aranis and mantras in whichever place or direction has the problem. Just one tree growing to the west of the dwelling or monastery is not good because it is connected with the presence of spirits. The remedy for this problem is to drive nails, which have been made of metal from a weapon that killed somebody, into the tree. It is not good if there is a cave to the northwest of the monastery because it is the bedroom of the matrikas, or mother spirits, and will cause a lot of sickness for those who dwell in the monastery. If you have this problem, you need to paint an image of Buddha Vairochana inside that cave. A pool to the north of the monastery will cause many adverse conditions to the inhabitants of the monastery. We have a pond to the north of here; I did what it says in the text and poured earth gathered from Mount Shasta and two other great mountains into the pond. So do not worry.

It is not good if there is a river flowing by the dwelling that exactly follows the courses of the rising and setting sun and moon. Since it is stealing the sun and moon, this is not good. There is nothing that can be done about this problem; you must avoid this at all costs. It is not good to build a dwelling or monastery on the peak of a mountain. You can build it on the side of a mountain, but not on the peak of a great mountain. It is not good to build in the middle of a vast meadow or valley or

at the juncture of a flat valley and mountain. In all those places it is called “the exhaustion of the earth,” so it is not good. It is not auspicious.

The Specific Geomancy of a Practice Place

The next part is concerned with the specific geomancy of a practice place, in other words, a place where you are going to build a retreat facility, or a place where, in general, people are going to do intensive practice. The qualifications depend on which of the four karmas or activities is going to be emphasized in the practice to be done there.

In the case of the accomplishment of the activity of pacification, it is best if the place has white or light colored earth and white smoke trees grow there. If the shape of the place is such that the sky is round and that the ground is smooth, you will accomplish pacification. You will accomplish the activity of enrichment in a place with a forest that has lots of trees, lots of flowers, vast meadows naturally occurring, and where the mountains, whether made of rock or clay, are shaped like jewels. A place where the color of the rocks and the earth is primarily red or reddish, where there are juniper and tamarisk trees, caves, a small field that is semicircular in shape, and where there is a great river coming from the west, in such a place you will accomplish the activity

of magnetizing or power. A place that is the meeting of three valleys or where three rivers collect, where the ground itself is triangular, where there are lots of thorns, where there are dark red or black rocks that are frightening or rough in appearance, in such a place you will accomplish forceful activity.

If there is a spring that is associated with a vicious local spirit directly adjacent to the dwelling or site, no matter how good the geomancy of the place may be, many problems will occur. It does not matter whether it is a dwelling, a burial place, or a place of practice and it does not matter if everything else is good and fits all the criteria explained for that particular type of place. It will only help if you are particularly accomplishing forceful mantra, which is the practice of an extremely wrathful deity, and in which case it is best if the place is very scary and has scary local spirits as well. In other cases, you do not usually want that, but in that specific case, you do.

You need to distinguish between environments based upon what types of practice you are doing. The place, especially the place where a retreat is built, should have a mountain behind it that is shaped like someone meditating and should have a field or meadow in front that is like someone sitting with their legs crossed in meditation posture. There is some discussion about whether to build the towers and monuments to local spirits on

top of the peak of a mountain or not. It depends upon whether that particular local spirit is willing to accept it or will be offended by it; therefore it is not good to do it. It is fine to build it on the top of a peak if the peak is not the highest peak in the place and if it is rather hidden. It is also fine to build it on the side of a mountain where there is no negative feature to the environment and all the positive features are present, because in that case, it will be in the form of an offering, like a mandala offering to the local spirit. We now conclude the part that is concerned with the geomancy of the external environment.

Next the text goes through the geomancy of the internal arrangement of the house. Much of it corresponds to the external geomancy with the four directions. If the door to the dwelling is in the east, then you have the protection of the tawny tiger of the east, and that is good. If you put water, containers of water, or water facilities in the south, that is the turquoise dragon from the south, and that is good. If you have your kitchen or hearth in the west, that is the red bird of the west, and that is good. If you grind tsampa in the north, that is the tortoise of the north, and that is good. It is good if you have three columns in the middle of the house, which is called the golden monkey. If you have all those things, you have the complete “four-fold protection of the dwelling.”

If your dwelling has two stories, you should not have the beams of one story and the beams of another story parallel because it is like the joined bellies of poisonous snakes and that is not good. Even if you are building a small dwelling, do not build it with one column in the middle because that is like the hub of the “wheel of wind,” and it is no good. Do not sleep underneath the joining of beams or walls; do not sleep under an exposed beam; and do not have your bed under an exposed beam or a joint.

This next part is best explained by reference to this shrine building. The end of a room leading to the outside of a building should be a couple of inches higher than the inner room; it should never be lower. It is built with the floor in the foyer two or three inches higher than the floor inside. When you go outside onto the balcony, it is a couple of inches higher than the foyer; it should never be lower. The back of the dwelling should not be very bright. For example, we do not have windows in the back, because if the back of the dwelling is very bright, you will not be able to hold onto or accumulate wealth. You want some darkness in the back. It is good if outside the entrance to the dwelling, the ground seems to rise a little bit, as though stuff will pour in. You do not want it going straight down. In spite of the fact that you want the vestibule to be a few inches higher than the inner room and the porch a little higher than that, you do not want to have to go down very far when you

come in the door because it will harm the life of people who live in the dwelling. If you put a lot of junk to the right and left and above your doors — which is very common in a Tibetan household — this will attract negative spirits, so it is not good. If you build a nice shelf or table, and on top of that you put things like a bow and arrow, swords and spears, and sharp knives, it will attract *dralas*. Dralas are literally like war gods but they are good spirits and you want them. This concludes the section about the houses of lay people.

Retreat Dwellings or Retreat Houses

The rules for retreat houses are slightly different in terms of directions from the rules for dwellings in general. The first thing is, do not put your tsampa grinder in front of the door. The second thing is that the directions in which things are placed are coordinated with the presence in the various directions of what are called the *mundane protectors*. In the southeast, which is the direction of Agni, the god of fire, you put your hearth, which is different from the general dwellings. You put your protector shrine in the southwest, which is the direction of the *rakshasas*. In the west, which is the direction of the nagas, you put any animals that you have to keep, like horses or yaks. In the northwest, which is the direction of Lunglha the god of wind, either you put a mani wheel that is propelled by the wind

or you put some clothes, such as robes, on a line so they will be blown by the wind. In the north, which is the direction of the **yakshas**, who are associated with wealth and prosperity, you put your pantry, where you keep whatever you are going to eat, such as your tea, butter, and tsampa.

In the northeast, where you are going to sleep, you put your bedding. When you sleep you should not have your head facing a descent, in other words, if outside the dwelling the land goes downward, you should not have your head facing that downward slope, unless that is the direction that faces the residence of your root guru. It is important that your head face the residence of your root guru when you go to sleep. If your root guru lives in a direction that is past a downward slope, it is worth it. If in that direction there are great images of the body, speech, and mind of Buddha, and you wish to face your head to those, then that is fine also, in spite of the slope. If you have to face that direction, make sure that you do not use your shoes or eating plates and dishes as pillows. Do not forget this is written for yogis, who are trying to make everything serve two purposes, so they might think of doing that. Also, and this was mentioned in the case of dwellings in general, do not have an exposed beam cross your bedding, in other words, do not have a beam cross above your body when you are lying on the bed.

The actual dimensions of the retreat facility, which in this case is a solitary retreat building, are based on what is called a square *fathom* or a *great span*. Each side should be twelve of the Sugata's fist lengths, in other words twelve fist lengths based on the Buddha's fist, not on one's own. This is identified as being one and a half of your great spans: if for the sake of simplicity this is six feet, the length would be nine feet to a side. That measurement and design is the dimension of the house called the "dwelling of a renunciate." Once you have built the house, the first thing you should do is set up your shrine and put a statue of the Buddha there. That will be an auspicious beginning for your retreat. That completes the section on dwellings.

The Geomancy of the Practice of Chö

The sixth and final section is concerned with the geomancy of the practice of chö or severance. In general, you can practice chö anywhere. If it becomes your principal practice and if you develop realization and wish to expand that realization, and also desire to directly benefit other beings including spirits, you need to go to certain places where this practice can be the most effective. This section outlines the places where you would go and where you would not go.

A place where the rocks and the ground are predominantly white is likely to be a place where virtuous local spirits are living. A place where the rocks are naturally in the shape of buddha images or stupas or where there is a shiva lingam naturally abiding is where there are likely to be wisdom *dakas* and *dakinis*. These places are fine to do regular chö practice, but are not appropriate to do the special intense type of chö practice in which you are trying to confront spirits.

A type of place that is not good is where the land is disorganized without any real coherence to the topography of the place, where there are very dry mountains and no water whatsoever. Even if you try to do intense practice of chö, you will not be successful in such places. You will not be able to cut through. Places where there are a lot of mountains, a lot of rivers, and a lot of valleys that all meet at one place, will be very, very difficult to practice intense chö. Such a place has too many local spirits; you might be able to handle one, but not all of them. You might please one spirit but another spirit will not be pleased, and you risk having your *la* stolen.

Places with predominantly red rocks tend to have many *tsen* spirits; places with black rocks tend to have *dön* or *mara* spirits. Places with a lot of grassy hills or mountains and a lot of lakes or springs will be inhabited by *nagas*. Places with meadows will

be predominantly inhabited by nyen. Rock mountains that are exposed rock and not predominantly grass will be inhabited by *gyalpos* and *teurang*. Whether it is a rock mountain, an exposed rock mountain, or an earthy mountain with grass on it, you do not want to be on the exposed slope; you want to be on the sheltered slope. This is telling you what you are going to be dealing with if you are practicing in any of these places.

There is a kind of significance to the shape of the mountain connecting it to the type of local spirit that will inhabit it. If the peak of the mountain is wide, it is considered male, and if it is narrow, it is considered female. The mountain is like the body of the spirit. A lake on the mountain will be like its heart. A spring will be like the aorta of the spirit and the trees growing on the mountain are like the spirit's hair.

What follows are the best places for doing the intense practice of chö. The first type of place that is really good is one whose shape is like the head of a bull, like a human heart, or like the back of a horse or other animal. In such a place, if you do the intense practice of chö, you will be able to overpower whatever you meet. This is where those who take chö as their main practice would live. Such places are called “danger spots.”

There is a second type of place that is ideal for a more specific type of chö practice. This is the type of practice that is done by someone who is really good at chö, someone who has a tremendous ability to overpower spirits. When someone is ill and it is evident that the illness is connected with the la having been stolen, you bring the person with you and you have the person lie down as though he or she were a corpse. This person is not dead, but he is barely alive. You have them lie down beside you and you do the chö practice; you invite and confront the spirit that has taken the person's la and you demand that it be returned. If it is successful, the conclusion will be that the person returns to health. Such a practice requires a place that has a shape like a pig's snout, or like the tongue of a snake, or like the fangs and claws of carnivores, or like the horns of horned animals, or like the trunk of an elephant. If the tops of the mountains or the peaks of the rocks are in these shapes, it is the kind of place that is used only for the particular type of practice, called "**thram mik**." It is a place where a really good chö practitioner can get the la of an ill person back from powerful spirits, and it is a place where anyone who is not a strong practitioner can become ill if the person stays there too long. It is not a place for general use.

Our last concern is where to camp, which is mentioned because chö practitioners tend to move around and camp a lot. The place for a chö, or a nomadic encampment, should be a place where

there are no earth enemies and none of the defects of geomancy that have been described. The qualities of the ground should be good and it should be an auspicious place. If you camp in such a place, you will be happy from the beginning. The door of your tent should face good water or a good road, whether it is a nomadic yak hair tent, a large square tent, or a very small one-person pup tent. If you have to camp in a place where there is bad geomancy and where there are earth enemies, you should put images or texts of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind in the direction of the problem. That completes the sixth chapter, which is on the geomancy of severance.

This study of geomancy in its entirety, which was divided into six sections, ends with the following. "These six sections on geomancy are like the butter churned from the ocean of milk of the many texts on geomancy that have arisen in both the Indian and Chinese traditions. In response to the request of Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, this was composed by Raga Asya, Karma Chakme, in the Pleides month of the Wood Snake Year. Step by step, in each evening session, this was a statement of whatever I remembered about the topic, taken down by Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso as dictation, and completed on the fifteenth day of the month. If there are any mistakes in this, I confess it to the learned. Whatever virtue there is in writing this, I dedicate it so all who come in contact with it come to increase

their qualities, that it please those who are learned, and that it bring auspiciousness to all patrons.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche is the la the consciousness of the deceased, and if it is not, is it a different sentient being? What is the connection?

RINPOCHE: The la or spirit is definitely not the consciousness of the deceased, because the consciousness has departed the body. Nevertheless, the spirit remains somehow associated with the body and it is almost as though it is another being. I cannot say that it is not a sentient being because in some way it behaves like a sentient being. It behaves as though it has a kind of attachment both to the body of the deceased and to the family of the deceased, and therefore will help them when it can, and therefore it reacts to how it is treated. There is other evidence that the la is not the consciousness of the person. Sometimes when you request a divination, the medium will actually tell you that your spirit has the form of, for example, a sheep or a lamb, and they will tell you what state it is in, whether it is prospering, flourishing, or weakened. It can actually be stolen from you by

other spirits, in which case you have to do various rituals and so forth to reclaim it. Therefore it is not your consciousness, because you are still conscious, even though the spirit has been waylaid.

STUDENT: If every time you die, you leave behind this kind of imprint thing, then there are going to be a whole lot of las out there floating around. There must be some way just to get rid of them, and what I am asking is, do we not get rid of them because we are not sure if they are sentient?

RINPOCHE: They are like sentient beings so we do not try to do anything to them. Because they are like sentient beings, they bring prosperity to the family of the deceased, and they can bring adversity to the family if they are not properly maintained or nourished. Once you attain buddhahood, you will no longer have uncontrolled rebirths, therefore you will no longer accumulate these la. They are affected positively by anything virtuous that you do including the one that is presently with you. They are not literally like this, but a useful analogy for understanding the relationship between someone and their spirit, is that the la or spirit is like someone's pet dog that was fed and housed by that person. After that person's death, it becomes the responsibility of the family to take care of the dog, but they are not literally dogs.

STUDENT: How do they affect us?

RINPOCHE: They usually appear in the form of the person whose spirit they are. Because they have a human appearance, in a sense you could say that they are part of the human realm, but they do not have all the characteristics of a human being. They appear to have bodies that are almost like the mental bodies of **bardo** beings, and so they are insubstantial. It is difficult to classify them by realm. As for how they affect us, if the burial place is good, then it makes them happy and it makes it easier for them to actually help the family, which they will try to do. If it is a bad or unfortunate burial place, they become uncomfortable. They suffer, and it is not said that they actually become angry and actively harm the family; it is just that they do not have the ability to help the family when they are called upon, because of their own poor state. This is one of the reasons why in the customs of some countries such as China, for example, after one's parents pass away, you put up pictures of them and put offerings in front of them. In part, it is done to honor the kindness of your parents, but it is also done to honor the spirit or *la* of those departed parents as well. As far as exactly where they abide and how long they remain there, in books on geomancy it is taught that the spirit of a person sinks about one **cubit** into the ground every year. For example, someone has died and the remains were placed on the ground where they were consumed by birds, consequently, that person's *la* would be there. Three years after the death, it is determined by a geomancer that the

ground was no good and that is why things are happening wrong for the family. You would have to dig up that ground down to a depth of three cubits and transport that amount of the ground to a good place. There are ceremonies to be done and rituals to be chanted to remedy this situation.

STUDENT: If somebody was buried in a bad place twenty-five years ago and you want to rectify that, do you have to dig down twentyfive cubits and do rituals?

RINPOCHE: After three or four years they do not worry about digging it up and fixing it so there is no reason that after twenty-five years you would have to dig down to twenty-five cubits. It is hard to know how long the effect of the la remains active and at what point its habit of fixating on that family dissipates and it wanders off. I do not know. Of course if you consider it a sentient being, then it would have to at some point die and take rebirth in one of the six realms. But if it is not a sentient being, then that might not be the case.

STUDENT: Is there a tradition in Tibetan culture of communicating with the spirits and is there any possibility of communicating with the dead person directly?

RINPOCHE: There is a custom of a trance-medium's communication with the spirit of the departed. The problem with it is that you do not know whether you are talking to the consciousness of the dead person in the bardo or the la, which is masquerading as that consciousness. It sometimes happened that after someone was murdered, a medium would be able to speak for that person and say accurately how the person had died, but that does not mean that you are talking to the person's consciousness. It could still be the la. The problem with this type of thing is that you do not know which one of them you are dealing with.

STUDENT: Is there any relationship between the la and the consciousness after death? Let us say that the la has a problem that needs to be resolved, would ceremonies or prayers affect the consciousness that goes on to the next life?

RINPOCHE: What is going on with the la does not affect the consciousness of the person because the consciousness of the person follows that person's karma. It is propelled by that person's karma into rebirth and is no longer affected by the activities of the la.

STUDENT: Is the la emotional? I am thinking of it as a ghost having an emotional attachment or fixation to the family or the place.

RINPOCHE: It has an emotional nature and mental afflictions just like a sentient being. It exhibits them in being attached to the family, hoping for things to go well for the family, and trying to assist the family; yet in certain circumstances the la is unable to assist the family, and consequentially experiences pleasure and displeasure. Aside from the fact that these spirits are known to display these types of emotions, it is hard to say because it is not actually said in the text that they are sentient beings. If they were sentient beings, then they would actually have these emotions. They behave like sentient beings, but it is not actually said that they are sentient beings, and if they are not, then they would merely be the appearance of that type of emotion.

STUDENT: Is it like an accumulation of the emotional or attached activity from a lifetime that would be congealed in a certain area, you know, as one lump?

RINPOCHE: No, it is not really of the same nature as the person's emotions and habits. It manifests attachment to that person, to that family, and so on, but it is not really the person. It does not have the same personality as the person.

STUDENT: Are the las of monastics or those who are strong practitioners different from those of householders or farmers?

RINPOCHE: I do not know how to answer that because everything I am telling you here is coming from a text that I have studied, and I have never seen anything in the text saying that there is a difference or that there is not a difference, so I cannot answer it. One story that I can tell you is based on the experience of the uncle of Deshung Rinpoche, who was a great lama of the Sakya lineage. The uncle was an intense practitioner of chö. He went to an area in the part of Tibet where Deshung Rinpoche was from. At this place there were three roads meeting and it was considered to be haunted, which is the kind of place you are supposed to go to do chö if you are really into it. The uncle went there and was doing chö practice and he saw all these spirits or demons coming that are supposed to be la stealers. All these demons were coming and saying, "I am hungry. I am going to eat your flesh. I am going to drink your blood." He was doing chö, giving them everything that they wanted, and then he felt one of them grab something out of his back. He saw the spirit carry off what looked like his lungs and his heart, dripping blood. He realized that his lungs and his heart were still physically in his body; nevertheless, he saw the image of his lungs and his heart being carried away by the spirit or demon. He felt a sense of being cold and being physically weak and mentally kind of dull and depressed. The next night he went back to do chö in the same place and the same spirit showed up again. This night he said, "Fine, take it, take it all. I do not care." The next night the

spirit showed up again and said, “I am giving this back to you only because you let me take it away and you said you did not need it,” and he threw it back into his body and immediately he felt warm again. He felt vigorous, healthy, and cheerful. Based on that, it really is possible to have your *la* stolen.

STUDENT: How much effort should people put into remedying any bad circumstances they have concerning where they dwell or where someone is buried? I have spent a lot of effort on this in my life and I have gotten to the point where I just feel like collapsing with it, saying, “Oh, who cares!” even though I do recognize that certain things that I have done or have not done have been effective or ineffective. Could you address this?

RINPOCHE: This is my opinion; basically what happens to us is a result of our actions in previous lives, which is to say that if you have accumulated a lot of good karma, you will be happy. If your karma is middling, your experience will be middling, and if you have accumulated a lot of negative karma, you will be unhappy. Along with that, the immediate conditions including the environment and so on will affect you or alter the outcome a little bit. The principal thing to be concerned with is your karma because basically most of what happens to you is a result of your previous actions. In my opinion, it seems unnecessary to worry too much about the temporary or present conditions,

which would include this examination of the environment and the house. One might say that I hold this view simply because I am to some extent ignorant of these things, or because I am lazy. But in my opinion, for an individual, you do not need to worry about it too much, because it takes up too much time and becomes too much a source of worry and concern and unnecessary effort. On the other hand, if you are trying to build a monastery or a retreat facility, it is good to make use of what you know in this regard, because it is not simply for your own benefit, but for the benefit of others. Just do what you know and once you have exhausted your knowledge of geomancy, then do not worry about the rest.

STUDENT: What benefit are dralas and wermas?

RINPOCHE: Dralas and wermas are definitely beneficial and they are worth attracting because they do promote your welfare. We saw this in today's discussion of the arrangement of a household. If you keep the house very clean and neat, and on top of a nice table, you place an arrangement of weapons, like bows, arrows, swords, and knives, clean and nicely sharpened, this will attract dralas and wermas. You are not keeping these arrangements of weapons because you are going to use them to fight with anybody. To that extent, we would have to say that dralas and wermas are real. They increase your qualities, your power, your welfare,

and they protect you. Sometimes, for example, some people will actually see one thing or another or hear one thing or another that indicates the presence of dralas or wermas.

STUDENT: Originally land was donated in Putnam County and I am curious if the reason that KTD never took place there and came here was for geomantic reasons.

RINPOCHE: The reason why the land at Putnam County was not used to build KTD was not, at least primarily, geomantic. It was that you could not build a road on that land. The only road was a primitive one that could only be used for carts or for walking. The only other way of getting to it was over a very difficult mountain; it just was not practical. An indication that His Holiness was no longer pleased with the Putnam County property was that whereas initially he had given it the name Norbu Ling, Garden of Jewels, he started calling it Hill of Jewels. It seemed a little bit as though he was not as pleased. After leaving that land he said to me, “By May twentyfifth of next year, make sure you have moved to the new place and opened it.” I was shocked because there was no new place. There was no notion of moving. Close to that time Jamgon Rinpoche came to Woodstock to visit what was then a very small center of Lama Norlha’s. While he was there Jamgon Rinpoche and Lama Norlha came up the hill to visit this property. Jamgon

Rinpoche did not say anything in particular, but Lama Norlha vigorously encouraged me to come and look at it. He said, “You really have to see this.” When they came, they actually bought it. They looked it over and they bought it on the day that they first came to see it. It took a little while for the transfer to go through legally and then a little while to do some minor repairs on the house, but eventually we were able to move here and have a formal opening where people were invited for a dinner. That happened on April fifteenth. There is no particular reason to believe that His Holiness’s choice of this land was based upon geomancy, or that it was not. It was just his wisdom that caused it to happen.

STUDENT: How do vales fit into the whole scheme of geomancy?

RINPOCHE: It is hard to say. In general, what we call hidden valleys, hidden habitations, or vales are places predicted by Guru Rinpoche and other mahasiddhas as ideal environments for the practice of Vajrayana. No doubt they are for advanced practitioners or siddhas, but they are not always ideal for ordinary persons. For example, they are often places that are very difficult to get to, very difficult to get out of, and very difficult to get food in and therefore very difficult to survive in.

STUDENT: This morning you mentioned magnetizing power.

RINPOCHE: In the mundane sense, it means power, influence, and charisma, such that without your ever having to use force, people will naturally like you and do what you want. In the internal sense, it refers to gaining control over your own mind and everything that is in your mind, bringing it under your conscious control.

STUDENT: You mentioned something about the twelve animals corresponding with the directions. I did not get that.

RINPOCHE: It is divided into twelve, so the intermediate directions are not truly northeast. It is like north-northeast, or east-northeast, so if I say one direction twice that means it is closer to the east part than the north part. For some reason, you start with the Tiger Year, which is east-northeast. Rabbit is east. Dragon is east-southeast. Snake is south-southeast. Horse is south. Sheep is south-southwest. Monkey is west-southwest. Bird is west, and Dog is west-northwest. Pig is north-northwest. Rat is north, and Ox is north-northeast.

STUDENT: I have a question about the geomancy of the shrine, especially for a protector like Chakdrupa.

RINPOCHE: If you have only one shrine, you would put it to the right or left of the main shrine, which is devoted to the Buddha,

and slightly lower. If you are talking about a monastery, then the protector shrine is placed in the southwest, which is why we are building ours over there.

STUDENT: I live in a converted church, which is about half the size of this room. North is this way, south, east, and west. It is in the valley between two mountains. There is a river coming down in the back of the house. It is above ground. The other mountain river is below ground. They travel until they get together and then go over a waterfall. The people that were part of the congregation were buried up the street. Maybe Rinpoche could make a comment.

RINPOCHE: Everything sounds pretty good; especially having two rivers is good. It would be better if they both flowed above ground and met above ground. It is unfortunate that one of them goes under the ground. I cannot guarantee that it has all the necessary and all possible positive conditions, but basically it sounds okay. This is a funny analogy. Geomancy is very difficult because you can have everything you want, then one thing will throw it all off; or you can have everything you do not want, but one thing can make it all work. For example, you are analyzing someone's face to see if it is a nice face. You look at the shape of the ears and the ears are nice. This person has a nice chin, nice mouth, nice nose, nice cheekbones; everything is so nice, but

one of the eyes is missing which spoils the effect. On the other hand, if you are analyzing a face that has funny-shaped ears, a strange chin, and a funny nose, nothing is quite good, but the face is absolutely brilliant. That changes the whole thing. It is the same thing with land.

STUDENT: If you have not worked on developing your own inner bodhichitta, how relevant is geomancy to your practice?

RINPOCHE: If someone has not generated bodhichitta then simply understanding geomancy will not enable him or her to accomplish very much. On the other hand, if you have generated bodhichitta, an understanding of geomancy might help you create the proper conditions for the flourishing of your practice. A rough analogy for this is that although the sun may be shining, if you close your eyes tightly, you will not benefit from the sun. You will not be able to see with the light of the sun. If you open your eyes, you will be able to see and you will be able to function effectively. In either case, it is not the sun's fault. It is whether your eyes are open or not.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, what underlies the reason for geomancy? What makes it work? Is it just how it affects your mind, like things that look like fangs make you think like that?

RINPOCHE: The effects of the shape of land are inherent in the shape itself. It is not merely that they produce a psychological effect on you. It is not dependent upon your attitude toward it like being frightened by a shape that is reminiscent of the fangs of Yama. For example, if you have a place that is in the middle of a straight valley, you are going to get a lot of wind. That wind is just there. That wind is going to affect you whether you know about the fact that valleys are going to have a lot of wind or not. If you build a dwelling in the middle of a bowl, you are not going to get a lot of wind whether you know that a place that is bowl-shaped is going to be free of wind or not.

The defect of a shape of the sky, being shaped like the fangs of Yama, is not because it is shaped like the fangs of Yama. It is called that because it looks like that. The defect is that the shape produces an effect that is not good. It does not depend upon your looking at it and recognizing that it looks like the fangs of Yama.

This is not based on my own experience, but on the experience of my uncle, named Jinpa who was a monk and fervent practitioner of chö. He did chö every evening without fail for his whole life. He lived about a three-day distance from his mother and it was his custom every year to go to visit his mother. One year he went, carrying his possessions on his back with his chö

drum and bell, and when he reached about half a days distance from where his mother lived, he found himself in a pass in the mountains. The pass was called Li La, and when he looked at it as he was sitting there boiling some water to make tea, he realized that he was in the remains of what had formerly been a charnel ground that was evidently no longer used as one. He thought, “Why not do some chö practice while I am here,” and he started to practice chö.

Before he had even got to the point where he could blow his **kangling**, suddenly dark clouds appeared from nowhere, and he heard intense crashing of thunder. There was rain and terrible wind. He realized that this was some kind of trick or hallucination, that it was not really true weather, because it had happened so quickly. Behind where he was sitting, there was a large rock boulder, and it seemed to him that lightning came out of these thunderclouds and cracked that boulder into pieces, although still large pieces capable of crushing someone. He heard these pieces tumbling down. They were so heavy that, as they tumbled, the ground was actually shaking. He kept on chanting chö quite calmly as the sound of these tumbling rocks came closer and closer to him. When they actually came down to where he was, he saw that they were not rocks at all but were something that grows right on the ground, sort of like leaves. The appearance of all this as being a terrific storm with huge boulders being broken

by lightning and so on, was all just a hallucination imposed by the spirits of the region. He realized that there had been a light rainfall, but no real thunder, lightning, or terrible wind. Then the sun came out. He slept for a little bit and he did not have any bad dreams. After that, he could actually see beneficial and harmful spirits and whenever he did the *fire pujas* in the morning or evening, or *chö* practice, he would actually see the local spirits come to accept the offerings. This is what it means to overcome the manifestations of spirits and is an example of the first type of *chö* practice mentioned in the text, which is literally the cutting through or severance of fear in dangerous environments.

The second type of practice is connected with the curing of sickness, using a *chö* practice called “*thram mik*.” I do not have any personal experience of this, but in 1973 when Khyentse Rinpoche was giving the *Dam Ngak Dzo* at Khamtrul Rinpoche’s monastery, I was there receiving it and together with us there was a nun, whom we called Ani Chöma, or the nun who practices *chö*. She was, as her name indicates, an intense practitioner of *chö*. She was a very tall and austere woman, somewhat frightening when you first met her. She hardly talked at all. She just practiced and attended the empowerments. When it was time to eat, if you said to her, “Why don’t you eat something?” she would say, “Oh, okay,” and she would eat something. Aside from that, she really

did not communicate very much. She just stared into space a lot. Initially, I was actually frightened of her, but when I got to know her, I realized that she was a good practitioner. During this period, she apparently became quite seriously ill. Tibetan doctors were called and they were unable to determine or heal her sickness. After two or three days, she still had not eaten anything and we were getting quite worried. She was extremely strong willed and attended all of the empowerment and transmission sessions in spite of how ill she was. She was so ill that I and a friend, whom she started to call her two boys, had to carry her, one supporting her on either side, into the shrine room.

When it reached the point that it was clear that no conventional method of treatment was going to help her, she made the remark, “Well, I had better cure myself using my own methods.” She got my friend, whom she called her younger boy, to help her down to an old Indian charnel ground that was near Kamtrul Rinpoche’s monastery. When she expressed the wish to spend the night there, he said, “Well, shall I carry your bedding?” She said, “Ha, why would I need bedding for what I am going to do?” He brought her down there and as soon as she was there, she said to him, “Now, go back.” He went back up, and as it was quite dark, he could not see that much detail, but it looked like she had removed all of her clothing, made a mat out of it, and

lay down on top of it. This worried him and when he came back he said to me, “I am afraid she is preparing to die.”

The next morning, we were boiling water for tea and getting ready to go down and bring her back, when she turned up perfectly strong and happy carrying a number of oranges. There were no oranges available at that time; in fact, oranges did not even grow there. When we asked her what she had been doing, she said she had been performing this *thram mik of chö* to remove illness and that she laid down there and eventually she felt something sort of touching her, all over her body, grabbing her here and there. She said, “I was not scared, which is good, because had I gotten scared, I would have been finished.” She said, “I do not know whether it was humans or demons, but eventually, when I looked, I saw coming from the west a being that looked kind of like a human being. It handed me a bunch of oranges and said, ‘These are a present for you.’ I was fine, so I came back up.” She gave the oranges to us, and in any case, she was completely cured of her former illness. She later moved to Dharamasala and the Dalai Lama was so pleased with her that she had instant entry to his residence whenever she wanted. She could have an audience with him at any time without any prior arrangement or notice, which is extremely rare. I think she must have been something really extraordinary.

STUDENT: Does the text nothing was mention about lay lines or energy lines on the planet.

RINPOCHE: There is very brief mention in the text, but not in this section, of the type of special places that you are talking about. To study this topic you have to refer to other texts. The text that has probably the best known and most complete treatment of this topic is the *Profound Inner Meaning*, by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa, **Rangjung Dorje**.

STUDENT: Was such knowledge used, for instance, in the placement of the Potala or Tsurphu, or places where there were certain caves that Guru Rinpoche might have used?

RINPOCHE: Sometimes, but mostly they are places consecrated by the practice of those individuals, and they are not always correlated with a specific site among the sites that are usually listed in this type of analysis.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you mentioned that geomancy was not significant in deciding on this site, but I imagine that it was studied afterwards. I was very interested in the story of the pond and the different kinds of earth from Mt. Shasta and other high mountains. Could you tell us about this from a geomantic point of view.

RINPOCHE: First of all, the actual site for the monastery building was chosen by His Holiness, so I am confident for that reason alone that it is an auspicious one. You do see some of the features of an ideal site that are described in geomancy, for example, the shape of the mountains behind the lower hills in front, and the relationship between KTD and the town of Woodstock. I cannot say that all of the ideal features described in geomancy are here, but there are enough. Also, I do not know everything about geomancy.

STUDENT: You mentioned that in Dharma centers, if one engages in inappropriate behavior, it allows obstructing spirits to come in and impede practice. What type of obstacles would arise from this with our practice?

RINPOCHE: If a place has blessings, either inherently or because it has been blessed by visiting siddhas, that place will promote spiritual progress. Anyone who practices there will tend to develop more experience and realization than elsewhere and there will be fewer adversities. If the place has been defiled, for example, by the destruction of the images of the body, speech, and mind of buddhas, or by the murder or execution of people in that place, or the punishment and mutilations of people in that place, or if it has become like a hideout for gangs of robbers or bandits, then it is no longer a place of practice and the wisdom

dakas and dakinis that have abided there will leave. There is no point in their remaining. Because they leave, the local deities will be displeased and become spiteful towards anyone who goes there, and possibly other spirits will arrive that delight in wrongdoing as well. The result of this will be that the practice will not go well and there will be many problems.

STUDENT: The behaviors that you have mentioned are all extreme behaviors; do our transgressions cause difficulty also? Could you give an example of what type of difficulties one might encounter, such as having a difficult time practicing or do physical illnesses arise?

RINPOCHE: The principle type of thing that impairs or destroys the blessing of a place is when people who live there do not believe in cause and result, and who therefore act according to that disbelief. It really harms the blessing of the place if people, especially practitioners, break samaya by turning against their teachers and against the Dharma. If you try to practice in such a place, the least you will have is disturbed dreams at night, your mind will be torpid and sleepy, and you may have stronger kleshas than you would otherwise. There can be external problems as well and if it reaches the very worst then, like the example that Karma Chakme Rinpoche gave, everybody who tries to practice there dies. At the very worst, you would die.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, with everything that you just said, it seems to me that this is a description of Tibet today. That is exactly what has happened in Tibet in the last forty years. I wonder what this means for the Tibetan people, the Dharma in Tibet, the monasteries, and the people who continue to try to practice.

RINPOCHE: Definitely, the blessing of these places has been affected by the takeover of the country. Some of the places have been restored and reconsecrated by great masters and some are, no doubt, still impaired.

STUDENT: I have gone to some of these monasteries and some feel still incredibly consecrated. In some you can actually see and feel the interactions that are around, an incredibly intense energy that does not seem to be as full of Dharma as it does of human kleshas interacting.

RINPOCHE: I do not know what we can do. There are many great lamas still living in Tibet who are rectifying the situation by building stupas, by creating images of the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha, and by convening great practice assemblies. I think that this will serve, to some extent, to rectify the problem. Nevertheless, my experience in returning to Tibet was the same as yours.

The Virtuous Path to Liberation: Instructions on Retreat

This chapter of *Ri Chö* is concerned with the essential topic of the whole text, how to actually do retreat, and is called “The Virtuous Path to Liberation: Instructions on Retreat.” The invocation is NAMO GURU MAHAMUDRAYE, “Homage to the guru Mahamudra,” or “Homage to the precious gurus of the Kagyu lineage.”

This teaching is in response to a question posed by Lama Tsondru Gyamtso, “Exactly what is the manner of conducting retreat and living in isolation, customary to the Kagyu?” Karma Chakme Rinpoche answers, “Although I know the way in which the Kagyu have lived their lives wandering about in isolation, because I have not practiced this myself, even though I know how to explain it, I do not dare do so.” What he is saying is that he has not lived the life of a true Kagyu renunciate, and therefore he cannot fully describe this lifestyle. “Nevertheless I can talk about what I have put into practice myself, which might be useful to other unfortunates like me.” He is taking the stance that he is not of the caliber of the Kagyu forefathers. He is saying that what he is going to present here is not even the full renunciation of the

Kagyü, but is merely what he himself has experienced. “I do so in accordance with whatever arises in my mind at this time, because revulsion is the foot of meditation.”

The quotation comes from our lineage supplication prayer and introduces the first major topic, which is about revulsion and renunciation. It is taught that it is extremely important to have revulsion and disgust, from the depths of your being, for all of the activities of this life and this world, just like a Brahmin who has excrement placed before him. The reason why it is appropriate to have revulsion for this life is that the enjoyments of this life are poisonous in that they all produce an undesirable aftereffect. Most of what we do that we enjoy is a cause of being reborn in the three lower realms, yet even though we know this, we do not follow our knowledge. We are like children who have candy put in front of us. We see the candy, we recognize from the shape and color that it is candy, and we are either unaware or unable to remain aware of the fact that it is poisoned candy. We eat the candy and then we become sick and die. That is what most of the things of this life are like. Does that mean that you should not eat and not wear clothes? It does not. Karma Chakme Rinpoche goes on to say, “Of course, for the time being, food, clothing, and a place to sleep and live are important, but the attitude you must take toward them is the attitude of a guest who is staying

in a hotel for just one night.” In other words, you do not have a sense of permanence and you do not have a sense of ownership.

Keep in your mind the thought of death, the thought that you will not be here for very long. What maintains our involvement with this life is the delusion that it is going to last. This remedy reminds you that you might die at any moment and that when you die, not only your possessions but also your physical body will be left behind. You might say, “Well after I die, surely I will be reborn as a god or a human,” but you will not be unless you have accumulated the necessary merit to bring that about. The temporary comfort of being born in the god or human realms is extremely impermanent in the sense that it does not last and after being born as a god or a human, usually you are reborn in the lower realms. Consequentially other than the achievement of unsurpassable awakening by oneself and others, nothing is really worth aspiring to or wishing for because nothing else lasts, therefore the pleasures and comforts of samsara are not worthwhile.

Having the understanding that nothing aside from awakening is worthwhile is what is meant by having revulsion for samsara. An example of what this means in terms of one’s behavior is the great teachers of the Kadampa tradition who were so vividly aware of the imminence of death that before they went to sleep at night,

they would never feed the fire, because they always assumed that they were likely to die during the night. The point of this attitude is that you should be diligent in the practice of Dharma. The thought that you might die any moment — and you certainly will die soon — will produce that diligence. Nevertheless, in spite of having a vivid or intense sense of your own mortality, it is acceptable to do longevity practice in order to remain alive for a few years so that you have time to practice and in order that you will be born in the realm of *Sukhavati*. You should not think that the pursuit of longevity practice violates the idea of renunciation. Clear examples are Lord Gampopa who did the practice of *White Tara*, which significantly increased his life span; and Rechungpa who did the practice of Amitayus that he received from Machik Gunkigyalmo, and which increased his life span as well.

The next topic in connection with renunciation is that one's homeland, which means the place of birth where one grows up, is like a stake and a leash that binds one to samsara. You drive a stake into the ground and attach a leash to keep an animal within a certain area. The animal can run around, but cannot get out of that perimeter. Attachment to your birthplace is like that. What is important here is not the specific place, but whether or not you are attached to it. If you have attachment to some people, you will have enmity toward others. If you are

attached to your friends or your relatives, then you will also have enmity towards those you perceive as their enemies or their opposition. For this reason several great Kagyu teachers, such as Lord Phakmo Drukpa and Drogon Rechen, completely abandoned their birthplace and never returned there throughout their entire lives.

After leaving your birthplace, if you settle somewhere else and that place becomes a source of attachment and aversion, then you have not really left your birthplace, you have just moved your birthplace from one place to another. If you have no attachment to your place of birth, if it does not increase attachment or aversion for you, then staying there is not going to obstruct your renunciation. The issue is attachment. For example, the names of the lineages of the **Drukpa Kagyu**, Tsalpa, Drikung, and Talung, are all the names of places where these teachers settled and where their lineages began.

Wherever you live, whether it is your place of birth or some other place, it is important not to become too friendly with some or too opposed to others, because if you have a friend, you will have an enemy and if you have ten friends, you will definitely have ten enemies. Friends and family are the bondage that keeps you in samsara. This does not mean that you cannot have friends or cannot be friendly or affectionate. It means that you cannot be

so attached to some people that you have enmity towards others. That is the meaning of the statement that having no friends and no enemies is the path to awakening.

Family can be a problem in particular because they are difficult to please. We always try to please those to whom we are attached, yet it is the nature of beings and of human beings especially, that no matter how much we get from someone else, we are never satisfied; we always want more. Even if you give everything you have to your friends and your family, they are never satisfied. They always are looking for the next thing they might get from you. We are like this as children. If you think about it, when you are born, you possess nothing. You do not have one spool of thread or one needle to your name. Everything you have you get from your parents, from your mother and father. As we grow up we take this for granted and we expect them to give us more and more and more. It is never enough and we forget about the fact that whatever we have they gave us to begin with. If you think about it, all sentient beings of the six realms are your family anyway. They have all been your parents. Wherever there is space there are sentient beings and all of the sentient beings without exception have been your father and have been your mother and have been your child any number of times, therefore do not be excessively attached to your own relatives, your own friends, and your own family. This does not mean that you need

to make enemies of your family. Making an enemy of your family does not make you a renunciate. Having family around in itself is not a problem either. If you influence your family positively such that they become more involved with Dharma or become beneficial to other beings, then it is definitely worthwhile. If your association with your family does more good than harm, then there is no reason to discontinue it, because such a thing will benefit the family and eventually the teachings as well. For example, the Drikung lineage, the Talung lineage, and the Tsalpa lineage are continued through family, which is a worthwhile family association.

As Guru Rinpoche said in his testament to the people of Tibet, “You need to be open-minded about who might be beneficial. You cannot dismiss anyone because you never know who might be beneficial, not only to themselves but to other beings.” You cannot say, “Well just because this person is a member of my family, I must disregard him,” or “Just because I do not like this person, I must disregard them.” You have to be open-minded about people.

Wealth and possessions become your enemy. The more you have, the more people are jealous of you and the more they want to destroy you, or at least steal what you have. The effort of accumulating and maintaining wealth is a cause of great

suffering. Of course, if you do not have anything, you cannot make do. You cannot really live without anything, and yet if you have things they seem to produce problems; they become your enemy. It is in our nature that no matter how much we have, we always want more. It does not matter whether you have a little or a lot; you always can imagine having more. Since you have to make do with whatever you have, you simply have to let go of attachment to and craving for more wealth, which includes food, clothing, and possessions of all kind. This does not mean that you have to be poor and have nothing. You can have things if you are not attached to them and you can actually benefit beings tremendously through those things. When awakened beings have possessions and wealth, they use them to benefit sentient beings and to benefit the teachings. They have no attachment, so from their own point of view they are fine whether they have or have not. If they have immense wealth, they use it to benefit beings, and if they have no wealth whatsoever, they are content to live like a deer in the forest.

If you are poor, do not think that you need to accomplish wealth in order to benefit others and therefore engage in wrongdoing in order to accomplish wealth. You can actually think that you need to do something bad in order to accomplish something good, which is usually wrong. The traditional example is killing a fish to feed a dog. Your motivation is to feed the dog, but what

you have done has actually done as much or more harm than it did good. Even if a practitioner dies of hunger, it is better than stealing to survive. This sounds extreme, but if someone dies of hunger while practicing Dharma, the person dies in a state of virtue and definitely will not have a bad rebirth. If they steal in order to continue practicing, their motivation becomes corrupted by the action, with the result that not only will their practice not progress properly, but they will be reborn life after life as a preta and in other lower realms. Do not be afraid of austerity if it is what occurs naturally for you, like Jetsun Milarepa surviving on nettles alone. There is the custom among yogis to practice rasayana, which means surviving on mineral essences, water, or earth substances, things you would not normally eat.

Up to this point the discussion about food and wealth is on how to abandon one of two extremes, which are the extremes of indulgence and desire. The meaning of it is not to engage in wrongdoing in order to acquire food or wealth. The point is not what food or wealth you have, but how you acquire it. In a sense I am not qualified to talk about this because as everybody knows I eat meat and I am fully aware it is the flesh of beings. When I am eating meat I enjoy it very much and I look forward to the next time that I am going to eat meat. If food, wealth, and possessions come to you naturally, without your having to intentionally acquire them, you do not need to reject them. You

do not need to abandon them because they are not necessarily a source of attachment. If someone offers you a meal or gives you clothing, if you are a practitioner and you accept the gift, that person accumulates merit. When you eat such food, you should eat whatever you are given with the proper yogic way to eat food and should just take what you are given. There are two exceptions to this — alcohol, because intoxicants should not be taken, and “dedicated meat.” Dedicated meat is meat that was killed for your specific use. According to the Buddha, meat that passes the three criteria can be eaten. The three criteria are that you have not seen the animal killed for your use; you have not heard that it was killed for your use; and you have no reasonable suspicion that it was killed for your use. If it passes those three criteria, you may eat meat if it is given to you. If you are a monastic and have received the novitiate or full ordination vows, you should not eat in the afternoon or evening. It is best if you just eat one meal in the middle of the day and do not eat in the morning or the evening.

There are two extremes to avoid with food. One is to acquire food through wrongdoing because you want delicious food, for example, you want something better than what is coming your way and think you can trick someone into making you momos. Thinking that you can get food by some kind of fraud or dishonest behavior is one extreme. The other extreme is

rejecting food that is given to you. If someone gives you very good food, you should not say, “No, I am a renunciate. I cannot eat that.” As a renunciate you are not renouncing the food; what you are renouncing is the wrongdoing through which you might acquire food. According to the Buddha, both the extreme of mortification, rejecting food that comes naturally, and the extreme of indulgence, acquiring food through wrongdoing, are mistakes. If you carry the idea of indulgence to its extreme you will eat too much, you will get too much food, and you will be committing all sorts of wrongdoings. If you carry the extreme of mortification to its logical conclusion, you will starve to death, because you will end up rejecting everything, which is pointless. As was said by Jetsun Milarepa, eat moderately so that you are neither too full nor too hungry, because if you are too full you will be sleepy, your mind will be dull, and you will not be able to practice. If you are too hungry, your mind will wander, you will be weak and depressed, and you will not be able to practice.

Our next necessity is clothing and again the idea is the same. Be content with whatever you acquire naturally and do not engage in wrongdoing in order to acquire clothing. This is why yogis sometimes do not look very good. They wear whatever they happen to acquire, which can be strange. It can be dirty. Their shoes might be inappropriate to the climate or circumstances. It is just that they do not care. When you look at someone like that,

you might think the person is slovenly or lazy and it is possible this is true, but it is also possible he or she is a renunciate. You do not really know. For this reason, when the Buddha ordained himself he threw away his princely clothes, which were of very costly materials, and put on cloth that was like a shroud in a charnel ground. On the other hand, if you acquire clothing effortlessly, if it is just given to you, you do not have to reject it even if it is costly, precious, beautiful, and fashionable. It is taught in the vinaya that it is even acceptable for fully ordained monastics to wear clothing of the most precious fabric if it is given to them freely and if they do not engage in an effort to acquire it. This is true not only for monastics but also for practitioners in general. There is nothing wrong with having nice clothes if they just happen and you are not wearing them out of arrogance or vanity.

The text now discusses the actual requirements for the robes and belongings of a monastic. The colors allowed are red, yellow, and saffron, and the colors that should be avoided are grey, blue, green, white, and so on. This began in India, where the Buddha indicated which colors were appropriate for the ordained sangha to wear: first, because they were colors not worn by the population in general, and second, to distinguish between renunciates of the Buddhist tradition and those of other traditions. Regardless of how profound your renunciation is, even if you are completely

unconcerned with any activities including your clothing, if you are a monastic, it is inappropriate not to have the **three robes** and the begging bowl.

The three robes are the chögö or lagö, the inner yellow garment; the namjar, also an upper yellow garment but worn only by the fully ordained; and the shamthab, or lower garment that is the actual robe. These are the three robes. The begging bowl is as shown with the Buddha. The point of this is that even if you are as much of a renunciate as Jetsun Milarepa, if you are an ordained monastic, you should not give up those things.

The robes should be of the appropriate dimensions laid down by the Buddha and found in the vinaya. They are measured based upon the measurement of your own body, your own fist size, and your own cubit. There are specific measurements. The robes should not be bigger than, or smaller than, what has been specified. The additional belongings that monastics should have are the begging staff, which has rings on it so that when the monastic is walking about it makes a sound and people know that it is the time for alms; the sieve or strainer, which is used to prevent the killing of bugs when you are getting your drinking water; and the mat, which is used primarily in order to prevent your robes from becoming dirty. When you acquire those you

should hold onto them. You should keep those because they are appropriate for a monastic.

A monastic who has the opportunity to acquire and actually possess the three robes and who does not wear them, but rather chooses to wear the ordinary clothes of his society, breaks the rules of the vinaya. As long as you can acquire the robes, you should wear them if you are a monastic. This is clearly stated in the sutra called the *Sutra of the Manifestly Abiding Buddha*, requested by King Yulkhorkyong. It was also mentioned in the writings of the fathers and the sons of the Kagyu lineage, such as Konchok Yenlak. That completes the section on food and clothing.

Once you have enough to eat and enough to wear, the next thing that is difficult to deal with and difficult to abandon is conversation. Conversation causes many problems because we tend to react almost automatically to what is said to us. If we hear ourselves being praised, we often feel pride. We take the praise to heart and we become elevated or even inflated by the praise. This is problematic because pride is an impediment to liberation. It is an especially big problem if you are praised undeservedly. Undeserved praise exhausts your merit because you do not have the qualities that people assert you have. Whether you are praised deservedly or undeservedly, it does you no good.

At the time of your death, your reputation will not follow you; therefore abandon pleasure at being praised. This does not mean that you have to argue with people if they praise you, just keep quiet and do not get intoxicated by it.

On the other hand, whenever we hear someone denigrating us, either speaking to us or speaking about us to someone else, we tend to become angry. If at that time you can look at the nature of your mind instead of becoming angry, it will bring progress. In general, there are several situations where, provided you are used to looking at the nature of your mind, doing so can bring particular progress: when your mind is in a one-pointed state of tranquillity, when you are filled with joy, when you are very afraid, and when you are angry. These are the times when, if you can look at your mind, there will be progress. Of course, if you cannot look at your mind, then your anger will increase. In particular, if you are criticized unjustly or if you are accused of things you have not done, you should be patient with that because that alone will purify many obscurations. In order to purify these things, you have to be patient. If you react with anger it does not work, therefore whenever anyone denigrates you, you should be delighted, because it is actually more helpful and more useful than praise. Do not respond to denigration. Do not react. Just let it go and let it fall into the expanse of the view. In other words, do not fixate on it. The exception to

this is if the denigration is not personal but is denigration of the Buddha's teachings or of your lineage. If it is serious and it might be harmful, you should respond. Respond does not mean to become angry. It means to respond reasonably to whatever is said in denigration of the Dharma or the lineage, with evidence that it is incorrect, and to do so in a pleasant way so that the person is pleased by what he learned and is not offended at being corrected.

The Places Where Retreat Practice Can Be Done

The best place to do retreat is a place that from the beginning has been blessed by the presence of dakas and dakinis, such as the dakas and dakinis spoken of in the mandala of Kalachakra and Chakrasamvara. An example of this kind of place is Tsaritra in southern Tibet, which is renowned as an abode of dakas and dakinis. It is especially sacred if the place has been traveled to, and preferably practiced in, by Guru Rinpoche. An example of this kind of place is the practice cave of Maratika in Nepal, which has probably been used by many other mahasiddhas as well. In other words, the best place is a place that was an abode of dakas and dakinis and has been blessed by many great gurus.

There are primary places and secondary places. For example, Tsaritra, in southern Tibet, is a primary place. A place that resembles Tsaritra in its blessing, being an abode of dakas and dakinis, is the Tsadra Rinchen Drak, which is the retreat facility founded by Jamgon Kongtrul the Great. There are the hundred great places and the thousand and two minor places, which are all in Tibet. In a place that bears such blessing, one day of practice will do you more good than a year's practice anywhere else. These places are the best. In the absence of such places, the next best places for retreat are where the Kagyu forefathers practiced or even places where they visited, such as the six fortresses — the outer six, the inner six, and the secret six — of Jetsun Milarepa; or Dro Wo Lung, the residence of Lord Marpa; or Dak Lha Padangpo where Gampopa founded his monastery; or the Tsurphu monastery region. We are in luck because His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa not only founded but definitely visited KTD, so this counts as a place that the Kagyu forefathers visited.

In all sadhanas it says that if you lack a place that is full of dakas and dakinis, you should try to practice in a place visited by enlightened forefathers. Even though you find a site for retreat that bears blessing for these reasons, you have to watch out for two things: impairment of the place and stagnancy of the place. Impairment of the place is what occurs when in the beginning

the place bears a great deal of blessing, but because it has been used or lived in by people with violated samaya or broken vows who misbehaved in the place, then the place has been contaminated and there will be no progress in practice in such a place. If you have the highest realization, and therefore great power, you can restore the blessing of such a place by performing the **ganachakra**, the **homa** type of fire **puja**, and consecration. The contamination will be removed and thereafter those that practice will have good progress, but a beginner without very high experience or realization should avoid a contaminated or impaired place.

A sterile or stagnant place is a place where you cannot get anything out of it. It is either a place that has not been opened — a special place where the door has to be opened by an attained master — or a place that when the door was opened the auspicious circumstances were spoiled. The auspicious circumstances being spoiled could be caused by inappropriate conduct on the part of the retinue of the siddha who opened the door or some other inauspicious circumstances.

You should avoid places where dakas and dakinis are too wild or too rough because they will give you a hard time. They will test the strength of your samadhi by displaying themselves in terrifying forms, trying to make you sick or trying to make you

crazy. Of course, if you already have high realization, it will bring further progress but if you do not, it will be a problem. When Jetsun Milarepa was in the cave at Lingwa rock and he was assaulted by a rock demoness, she did not do any harm and actually brought progress to him and liberation to herself, but that would not be the case for us. If you do not have high realization and go to such a place, there will be impediments and possibly even the loss of your life. For example, there is a place in Eastern Tibet called the Puwo Mayikunrung, where anyone who tried to practice there was likely to die.

If an established retreat facility or monastery starts out with great blessings and auspicious circumstances and is then defiled by the inappropriate conduct of individuals living there, samaya-corrupting spirits can enter the place and inhabit it. Such a place will be inauspicious and a source of obstacles for anyone who attempts to live and practice there. Again, if you have a great realization, and therefore great power, you can perform a certain kind of fire ritual to overcome the spirits and you can also cause the blessings to reenter the place. Other than that, if a beginner attempts to practice in a place that has been defiled, he will be carried off by impediments.

If you do not have access to a previously consecrated place, an old place of practice, then you should practice in a place where

both the local government and local deities like Dharma. The disadvantage of practicing in a place where the government does not like the Dharma is that, like practicing in a communist country, you could actually be thrown into prison for practicing Dharma. If the local deities do not like Dharma, you again run the risk of encountering serious obstacles. It is especially important that the place where you practice, the actual site or land, be given to you by the owner, if there is one, or by the local government. You have to have permission to use the site, otherwise if you are a monastic this is a serious downfall because the misappropriation is a type of stealing. In America, this is different from in Tibet. In America there is not any place that is not owned by someone; in Tibet there were places that were not particularly owned, but to avoid this downfall, you had to get the permission of the local ruler.

You can practice in a place where you have the permission to use it if you can amass all the necessary conditions, and the ground is good and is auspicious. You can use an existing building, or if you have to, you can build a new one. In order to consecrate the ground, you should bring pills prepared from the earth of holy places and place them there; that will cause the ground to be as consecrated as though a great master had consecrated it. In a place never visited by a great teacher, if you place a set of footprints of a great teacher — like the fathers and sons of

the Kagyu tradition — it becomes equivalent to a place that they actually visited. You will often see thangkas that have the footprints or handprints of a master instead of painted images. Such thangkas are treasured because they cause the blessing of that teacher to enter into the place where they are kept, as it says in texts such as the protector tantras. It is just as though the teachers had visited the place and blessed it.

How to Prepare the Site for Use and How to Consecrate It

Inside the building, wherever it is convenient, you should set up an image of Buddha Shakyamuni, books of Dharma, and offerings to set in front of them. Next you recite the commonly used consecration of the ground and invitation to the buddhas to assemble such as is used in the briefest consecration ceremonies. That is the blessing of the ground according to the Kadampa tradition. After you have done that, visualize the ground of the place that you are going to occupy to practice as a golden double vajra and think that it is extremely tough, hard, and stable. Think that a lotus flower is growing from the middle of the double vajra; the stem is growing up out of the middle of the vajra and the petals of the lotus flower cover the entire ground overshadowing

the entire vajra. Think that there is a moon disc on top of the center of the lotus flower from which arises a white HRI that is you in the form of Four-Armed Chenrezik. Visualizing yourself as Chenrezik in that way, for one session meditate on love and compassion for all of the gods, spirits, and human beings of that region. Think that through the force of your compassion they are all attracted and with great respect and faith they recite the **six-syllable mantra** OM MANI PADME HUNG, prostrate to you as Chenrezik, and circumambulate you. Finally, think that the gods, and in particular the spirits, say to you, “Please make use of this place, its grass, trees, water, and earth are for your pleasure.” You previously received the place from the human occupants; this is from the nonhuman occupants. If you do not do this, it is as though you are stealing it from them, which is inappropriate. That is the blessing of the place according to the tradition of the mountain Dharma.

If the retreat cabin was newly built and had not been used before, then you need to perform the ceremony called “the taking of the ground” according to mandala ritual. You can find the ceremony in the extensive rituals of the great mandalas of the tantras and it should be performed just as you would if you were doing a sand mandala. If it is an old building, one that has been previously used, you set up a **kartor** “white **torma**,” and a **gektor**: “obstructor’s torma.” The kartor is dedicated to the naturally abiding spirits

of the region; when you present it to them, you address them as follows, “Please lend me this place and I will use it to accomplish awakening. One share of the virtue I accomplish here will be given to you. It is for the benefit of both of us that I will practice Dharma, so please do not be jealous, but rather assist me.” You address them in that way and then you offer the torma toward the mountain in the back, or the highest mountain surrounding you. The obstructor’s torma is presented to obstructive spirits in general and especially to the potentially obstructive spirits of the place and region. Addressing them, you think, “I am here to accomplish awakening so do not be angry with me and do not cause obstacles because in the future when I accomplish awakening, I will remove your suffering as well and I will accomplish all happiness and well-being for you.” On saying that, you throw the obstructor’s torma outside.

You consecrate the water in the vase using the practice and dharanis of either Mewatsek or Vajravidarana. After the water has been consecrated walk around the outside of the building, and while walking around the building, pour the water over the surface of a mirror in which the building is reflected from all sides. Upon reentering the building, sprinkle water from the vase around the room and then fumigate the room with incense. The necessity for this, even though the building has been previously used, is that if it has been empty for a while,

it may have become the habitation of spirits and it could also have the obscuration of mountains and so on, as was discussed in the presentation of geomancy.

After that, you dissolve the dwelling into emptiness by reciting the Sobhawa mantra and you think that from the state of emptiness there arises a lion throne with a lotus and moon disc, on top of which from the syllable BHRUM arises Vairochana. The Buddha Vairochana is visualized as white and his hands are in the *mudra of perfect awakening*. Visualizing him, you then invite the wisdom Vairochana and dissolve him into Vairochana. You then invite the deities who bestow empowerments and cause them to empower the visualized deity; then he is sealed with the lord of his family. You make offerings and praises to Vairochana and then you think he melts into light and becomes the dwelling. In this case, what you are visualizing as Vairochana is the house not just your body. That is how to bless the building and the place.

Regarding the Qualifications of the Assistants and the Cook

In the Chakrasamvara tantra, it says that the cook should be a woman who bears the signs of a dakini, implying that it could

be either a human or a wisdom dakini; however, this is intended for mahasiddhas who have already attained mastery over their channels, winds, and drops. For people like Guru Padmasambhava, the mahasiddha Kantapa, and Lord Marpa the translator, when they were practicing in solitude and method and knowledge were never separated from one another, it was appropriate to rely upon a dakini as an attendant, whether human or wisdom. For an ordinary person, especially a monastic, it is inappropriate to have a retreat attendant who is of the opposite gender. If the retreatants are male, the cook and the retreat attendant should be male and not female. If you are female or if a group of women is doing retreat together, the retreat attendant should be female and not male. Especially if you are a monastic or a solitary retreatant, if you stay alone in one dwelling for even one night with someone of the opposite gender, that is a downfall. It is something to be avoided at all costs.

Next the text gives instruction, depending upon the gender of the participants, on what to say to the dharmapalas, the protectors. If they are male retreatants they say, “Other than dakinis, goddesses who possess the rainbow body, please prevent any other women from crossing this threshold.” If it is a women’s retreat, they say, “Other than dakas, gods who possess the rainbow body, please prevent any other males from crossing this threshold.” Then in front of the door you set up a sign, as is done in all

traditional Tibetan retreats, invoking the four great kings. For the convenience of others, you make it known that no one is allowed to go in with a sign that says “Private. No Admittance.” This is very important.

In certain tantras a great deal is said about the characteristics of the retreat attendant. In summary, it should not be someone who has violated samaya, not only with you but also with any teacher. It should not be someone who is a murderer or someone who has an antipathy towards your lineage or your teachers. It should not be someone who is psychotic or someone who was particularly sinful. In short, the person should have faith in the Dharma and be devoted to the accomplishment of qualities. You should try to find a retreat attendant who is as little given to deception as possible, someone who will listen to what is said to him or her. Never rely on a bad one. The section concludes by saying the best attendant you could have is your own prajna and your own diligence. If you can be completely self-sufficient and solitary, then you will become the best of practitioners, like Kharak Gomchung and Jetsun Milarepa.

How to Prepare the Necessary Resources for the Retreat

First, it is important that you not be overly dependent on friends or relatives and not be constantly asking people for things. Your necessities for retreat should be accomplished through begging for alms, which was granted by the Buddha as an appropriate means of sustenance for monastics. With regard to the practice of begging, where you would beg for the necessities before entering the retreat, you should not have too much hope or fear about what you acquire. Do not become too attached in your begging if you acquire good things or many things, and do not be angry or resentful if you do not get anything or you do not get much. Try to have evenness or equanimity in your mind about what is acquired through the begging. It is especially important to dedicate the virtue of your practice, particularly to those who are your benefactors and donors, so that through the result of their generosity they attain full awakening. It is said that in begging a monastic should be like a bee. When a bee is taking nectar from the flowers, the bee does not discriminate between different flowers the way we would, based on color or scent. All flowers are the same to the bee as long as they have nectar. The bee does not have attachment for some flowers and aversion for others. In taking the nectar from the flower, the bee does

not harm the flower and does not diminish the flower's beauty or scent. It merely takes what it can use and then returns to its hive. In the same way, when you are begging you accept what you are given without discrimination and return to your place of practice.

If your conduct and your practice are really in accordance with the Dharma, in other words, if you are not trying to fool people or swindle people in any way, and you are not trying to lay aside unnecessary provisions, you will never become completely destitute and starve to death as a practitioner. Because of his extraordinary intelligence and acumen, Buddha Shakyamuni speeded up his path from the time that he generated bodhichitta to the time that he attained buddhahood, with the result that he attained buddhahood more quickly than he would have otherwise. In fact, he generated bodhichitta after Maitreya but attained buddhahood first. Maitreya should have been buddha before Shakyamuni Buddha but Shakyamuni attained buddhahood first due to his speed and acumen. Therefore when he attained buddhahood, he had an unused karmic residue of five hundred births as a chakravartin that normally, as a bodhisattva, he would have undergone before finally attaining buddhahood. Since he did not use those up in his pursuit of the path, he dedicated them to his followers, his shravakas and his monastics, as a store of merit to ensure that they would have enough to live on. The

Buddha said that even if a famine becomes so extreme that it costs a pearl per grain of rice, his followers will not starve.

Keeping this in mind, do not worry about acquiring the necessities for retreat. Do not think that you have enough for now, but do not know what you will do later; just put it out of your mind. At the same time, there is some difference in what will happen to individuals based upon their previously accumulated merit. If some individuals have been more generous in previous lives, they will find it easier to acquire sustenance than those who have been less generous. Because of this, if you are short of what you need in order to do a retreat, according to Lord Gampopa, it is acceptable to do the practice of a wisdom wealth deity. A wisdom wealth deity will be one that does not have any kind of **shadow spirits** that come along with it. Some practices of mundane deities bring along a kind of problem with it. This will not. In addition, it should be a deity that is not that difficult to practice, in the sense that you do not need to acquire many difficult things in order to do the practice. This will prevent your having the obscuration of misappropriation, which is when you acquire things either in an inappropriate way or things that were actually dedicated to someone else. Misappropriation will bring obscurations and possibly shadow spirits attending you. This concludes the section on how to prepare for the retreat and how to get what you need.

It is important that you practice only those practices for which you have received the complete empowerment, reading transmission, and instruction. If you practice something that you have not received instruction for or the instructions have not been given to you completely enough so that you are certain about exactly what to do, then even though you may be diligent in the practice, because you are in doubt as to exactly what you are supposed to be doing, there will be a lot of impediments and a lot of possibility for error or deviation. Therefore abandon practicing things that you have not been properly instructed in. If you practice something for which you have not received the empowerment and the reading transmission, then it is like churning water to get butter. If you want to get butter, you have to churn milk. If you churn water, no matter how much you churn, it is never going to turn to butter because it lacks the potential. In the same way, practicing something for which you have not received the empowerment and reading transmission will lead to no result.

It is possible that simply through the fact that such a practice is Dharma and through the power inherent in the mantras that you could receive some indication of blessing, but in the long run it is a cause for rebirth in the lower realms. The reason for this is that if you have not received the empowerment and the reading transmission, something will go wrong and the blessing

will become a cause for arrogance or jealousy. It is something to be avoided at all costs. It is essential when you do a practice that you have the complete empowerment, reading transmission, and precise instructions for that practice.

The actual preparation for the retreat in the sense of setting up the shrine and practice materials should correspond to two things: your degree of knowledge and your degree of resources or affluence. If you are both affluent and knowledgeable and you have the resources to set up a very elaborate shrine and know how to do this properly, then you can assemble all the necessary requirements for a **drupchen**, or “great assembly practice,” which is extremely elaborate. You can use that as the basis for your practice.

If you are less knowledgeable and have fewer resources, you can assemble the less elaborate setup for practice called a “minor practice” or “less elaborate practice.” If you have few resources and little knowledge aside from actually how to do the practice, you can set up a very simple unelaborated shrine. In short, how you set up for the practice should be in accordance with both your resources and your knowledge. One or the other is not enough. For example, even if you have the resources necessary to set up the most elaborate shrine, if you do not have the necessary knowledge, it is not going to do you any good. If you have

the knowledge to set up an elaborate shrine, but you lack the resources that is not going to do you any good either.

Once you have gone to the place where you are going to practice, assemble the necessary wood, water, and other supplies to last for the period of your retreat. If there is a need for you to go out and collect water or such during the retreat make sure that it is not more than a hundred paces from the retreat. It is best if you can get it from nearby beforehand and not have to go out. In any case, make sure that you have enough so that you are not going to have to leave the retreat for any reason.

Start the initial period of the retreat by instructing yourself. This is based on the assumption that you are in a solitary situation where you do not have access to a teacher, but where you have received the complete instructions for all you are going to practice from beginning to finish, including all the necessary empowerments and reading transmissions. If you have texts of instruction, you view them as the representative of your teacher, your root guru. If not, if you are recollecting the instructions, then you simply recollect the instructions you received.

You start by instructing yourself in and contemplating the four thoughts that turn the mind: the difficulty of acquiring freedom and resources, death and impermanence, the results of

actions, and the defects of samsara. Each of the four thoughts should be meditated on almost exclusively and very intensely for no less than three days and up to a week. You should not think that just meditating on a topic for the requisite number of days is sufficient. It is important that you meditate on each topic until you generate certainty. Certainty here means that your outlook is changed in the sense that you turn away from mundane concerns and are only concerned with the Dharma.

After you have generated certainty, you may begin the uncommon preliminaries: the prostration practice accompanied by the refuge and bodhisattva vows, the Vajrasattva practice, the mandala practice, and guru yoga. It says in the text that each of these should be done for a week or more. It is not important how long it is done. It is important that it be done until the practice has actually taken effect. It must be done with a one-pointed mind and with a complete and intense involvement in the meditation as you are doing each one, without any distraction whatsoever.

Rituals to Remove Impediments to Practice

The first of these is **sang**, the “cleansing smoke offering,” which is offered to the **Three Jewels** and Three Roots in general and

especially to the local deities. After this you perform the practice of **water torma**; in this case you perform a more elaborate one such as the hundredfold water torma. You would also perform additional prostrations, **circumambulation**, the creation of tsa tsas, the recitation of sutras, and so on. Each of these should be done for at least a day and for more time if possible, to remove impediments to your performance in the retreat.

After that you can actually begin the full retreat by setting up the retreat sign, which in Tibet was done by making a pile of earth or stones and planting the sign on top. This is set up to establish the perimeter of the retreat and to seal it. You then offer a kartor, a white torma, to the local deities or local spirits, and you instruct them as follows, “Until I have completed my retreat practice, do not allow obstacles to enter from outside, do not allow attainment to leave from inside, and keep these two commitments of protection and benefit.” In this injunction you are addressing two groups: those local spirits that normally abide there and those that are visiting the locality. You should then dispatch, in an elaborate fashion, a gektor (obstructor’s torma), and expel any **obstructors** by fumigating the retreat place with gugul.

You need to know beforehand if there is going to be anyone coming into your retreat for any reason. You need to actually

write that person's name on a piece of paper, wrap it around a pebble or stone, and put that in front of you inside the retreat building. In this way the person is represented and you think that it is the actual person. The retreat attendant or cook needs to be inside the retreat building because after you expel the obstructors you are going to seal the retreat environment with a protection circle.

If someone has been authorized, through your writing the person's name and putting it around a pebble, to come in and out to assist you, that person will not bring obstacles in nor take attainment out. The seal will not be broken.

You would use the protection circle that is the one for the particular yidam practice you are going to be doing in that retreat. It could be, for example, the one for **Vajrayogini**, Chakrasamvara, or White Tara. Next you perform a formal ablution with consecrated water such as that used in the Vajravidharana practice. After that you use incense to fumigate the clothing, cushion, mat, bedding, and so on that you are going to be using during the retreat.

You should draw or paint a white swastika that is turning clockwise below where you are going to be sitting, and then put your seat on top of that. You do not move it for any reason. This is what

you would do when doing a retreat for one particular yidam. Prepare your mat, cushion, and everything else properly so that it serves well and you will not have to alter it, because once you have set it up, you are not supposed to move it for any reason during the retreat. From that point onward, you should adopt the perception or outlook that your retreat room or building is the palace of the yidam that you are going to be practicing. Whether it is Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara, or whoever, regard the seat as a lion throne, lotus, and moon disk. Visualizing yourself as the yidam, sit in vajra posture on your cushion in your meditation box or meditation place, and make the promise to remain in the retreat for however long you have decided to do it. It could be a month, several months, a few years, or five years, whatever.

If your promise to remain in retreat and your vow or commitment is too long, this can bring the obstacles of mara, especially if you tell people. You may have the plan to remain in retreat for a long time, but do not tell people that, just tell people you are going to do retreat for one or two months. Make a short commitment and then gradually lengthen it. This has nothing to do with the three-year retreat, so do not get confused about that. This is about individual retreats.

Once you are in retreat, probably not long after you have gone in, it is not unlikely that something will happen outside that

will seem to really demand your attention and your exit from the retreat. It could be that a relative, patron, or someone close to you, who has some claims to your affection and loyalty will become ill, possessed, harmed by demons, or will die. You will receive a message saying, “You must leave retreat now, and we really need you now.” It may be something very, very strong like, “Either you come out to help me now, or we are finished. I will have nothing to do with you.” It may simply be insistent like, “How can you abandon us at this time of great need?” This is actually Mara trying to prevent you from doing retreat by creating circumstances to avert you from practicing. No matter who it is, whether it is someone who has genuine claims on your affection and loyalty or someone who is in a position of power and influence bullying you to get you out of retreat, it is important to refuse and not to leave, because if you leave when that happens, the obstacle has carried you off and you will never be able to practice. You may never be able to get back into retreat.

If a close family member has passed away just after you have started your retreat, you should pray for them, you should make aspirations for them, and do things for them from inside the retreat, but do not leave. If you yourself become ill, do not leave retreat. It is fine to have a physician brought in for medical examination and whatever treatment is possible, but no matter how bad it gets, neither leave nor relax your retreat. Do not break

the retreat schedule. You have to be so committed that even if you die, you are going to die on your meditation cushion in that retreat. This attitude alone will make you impervious to any kind of obstacle. Not only will you not die, but Mara, discouraged, will run away from you. Nevertheless, if you do become ill, you should have medical attention brought into the retreat.

This is not the context of the practice of equal taste or severance. In the practice of equal taste, when you reach that level, then you actually try to perceive the equal taste of pleasure and pain; in that case you would not seek medical attention. If you were doing a particularly intense practice of severance or chö, where you were giving your body away and so on, you would not seek medical treatment; but for most practices, you should. If you become seriously ill in retreat and refuse medical treatment, it is actually a root downfall of the Vajrayana because this is a denigration of the aggregates. Your aggregate of form is being harmed by the illness. Since in nature it is a deity, if you fail to take proper care of it, fail to seek appropriate medical attention, then you are denigrating the aggregate, and therefore the deity. It is a root downfall and you should seek medical attention.

How to Actually Practice in Retreat

This is based upon what Karma Chakme Rinpoche heard from his root guru, Chokyi Wangchuk. In general, there are two styles of practice. One style is the practice of those who follow Dharma and are of the highest acumen, and the other one is the practice of those who follow with faith and of a less astute acumen. The first of these, the practice of those who follow Dharma with the highest acumen is the path of a pandita, which is wonderful, but it is very rare to find anyone who can actually follow this properly. It is excellent if you can, but nowadays, according to Karma Chakme Rinpoche's root guru, Chokyi Wangchuk, most people can only follow the practice that is based on faith, and that is the tradition of a kusali or renunciate yogi. Fundamentally the difference between these two is that in the case of the path of a pandita you have resolved thoroughly, through hearing and reflection, the true meaning of the teachings, therefore your practice is based upon understanding through reasoning. In the case of the practice of a kusali, your practice is founded on faith. You are practicing what has been taught to you by your teacher and because you have complete faith and confidence in your teacher, you have complete faith and confidence in what has been taught. You do not attempt to figure it out and you do not worry about why it works; you just do it. In the case of a

pandita, you have all this additional understanding or knowledge about why you would do such a practice and why it would work.

These correspond to what one could call an ordinary degree of sensitivity, a middling degree of sensitivity, and a higher degree of sensitivity. I am using the word sensitivity here because I think the word intelligence might be misleading and you will see why as we go through it.

The simplest way of practice, which oddly enough is the most profound, is appropriate for one who has received the necessary empowerments and reading transmissions, but does not have a great deal of understanding or knowledge and does not know about the many aspects of practice and Dharma. Such a person has received the complete instructions for what to practice in retreat and the level of understanding or development is such that this person can rest in looking at the nature of the mind. That is all he or she can do. That is the basic level. Although such a person may not know a great deal about Dharma, this person may have an intense desire to practice because he or she has a lot of faith and recollects death and impermanence. This person has resolved that Dharma practice is the best way to prepare for death and future lives and therefore wishes to practice. Such a person might be completely illiterate, but can still practice in retreat because of the power of faith and because he or she has

received the necessary empowerments and transmissions. If someone like this does retreat, this is what he or she should do.

Wake up very early, well before the sun rises, and as soon as you wake up, as soon as you become conscious, you should recollect your root guru, who is the embodiment of all buddhas. As soon as you wake up you start calling to the guru and you supplicate your root guru with some very simple supplication such as, “Glorious root guru, please know.” If you are someone who does not know any melodies or recitations, you do barking supplication very loudly. It is called “barking supplication” because as soon as a dog hears a sound outside the house it will start barking, which will be loud and not particularly melodious. In the same way, as soon as you wake up, you immediately think of the guru and start barking your prayer to the guru. Another analogy for this is a child who falls down or becomes hurt. The child will immediately start shouting for his mother, which might not be melodious, but will be loud and will be heartfelt. In the same way, as soon as you wake up, to immediately start shouting or barking for your guru serves not only the function of a supplication, but the suddenness and the loudness of this supplication will serve to wake you up fully. It will also clarify your awareness and separate your awareness from the dregs or sediment of your mind.

After barking for your guru, you recite the usual stanzas of refuge and the *four immeasurables*. Each of these would be recited three times. You then instantaneously visualize yourself as Chenrezik and above your head you visualize your root guru in the form of the Buddha Amitabha. In supplication of your root guru, visualizing the lord of the family, Amitabha, you recite the *Ma Nam Zhi Kor* three times. The *Ma Nam Zhi Kor* is the four-line prayer that begins with the words *ma nam* in the guru yoga section of the ngondro text. This is a supplication to the guru as buddha, as dharmakaya, as *sambhogakaya*, and as nirmanakaya. After reciting this three times, and for the greater part of this first early morning session, you recite the six-syllable mantra, OM MANI PADME HUNG. You do not want to do your recitations too loudly because you are going to be doing it all day long and you do not want to use up your voice. At the same time, since it is not a mantra that is supposed to be recited silently, it is not good to do it too quietly.

Continuing to visualize yourself as Chenrezik, think that where you are is the realm of Sukhavati and that all beings, human, animals, and so forth, within that area are Chenrezik. You visualize them all as Chenrezik. While reciting the mantra, and until you generate a clear perception of the place as Sukhavati and the beings as Chenrezik, you rest your mind on the visualization. This “form recitation” means that it is recitation of the mantra

while you are concentrating on the visualization of the form. It is also called “the bearing or outlook of appearances and body” from among the three-fold bearing.

Once this has been clarified and stabilized, you think that all of those beings whom you are visualizing as Chenrezik, lead by you, recite the six-syllable mantra together with you, so that the whole world resounds with the sound of OM MANI PADME HUNG. Continuing to chant the mantra and directing your awareness to the sound of the mantra as it is being recited by all beings is “sound repetition.” You are repeating the mantra while concentrating on the mantra’s sound. It is also called “the bearing of sound and speech” or “the outlook of sound and speech.” Essentially you are directing your awareness to the sound of the six-syllable mantra. In summary, those two phases of the practice, those two bearings of form and sound, or appearance and sound, include the full meaning or essence of the generation stage of practice, which is the first of the two stages.

While you are still in the first session of the day, continuing to visualize yourself as Chenrezik, in the middle of your heart you visualize a white sphere of light the size of a pea. You try to rest your awareness as much as you can on that alone. To get your mind to stay put on that without wandering around too much includes the essence of all practices of holding the mind in

tranquillity or shamatha. Then without thinking anything with your mind, simply rest looking directly at your mind with your mind. Although you do not see any form, color, or substantial characteristics whatsoever, nevertheless, thoughts arise. When through analysis of the arising of thoughts you resolve that they have no origin, location, or destination, rest evenly in that certainty. That is the summary that includes the essence of *vipashyana* or *lhaktong*, the practice of insight meditation.

Once the certainty has been gained that thoughts arise although they have no location, origin, or destination, you do not need to continue the scrutiny. You can simply look directly at the nature of your mind whenever you recollect it. Although we say, “look at the nature of your mind,” you are not seeing anything in the literal sense, because the mind has no substantial entity or characteristics to be seen. Nevertheless you rest relaxed in the state of looking. When thoughts arise, they are experienced like waves on the surface of water, in that they emerge from the mind and they dissolve back into the expanse or space of the mind. Continuing to recite the six-syllable mantra while all this is going on, you foster or maintain this awareness of your mind’s nature. That is the first session that ends when the sun rises. At this time, when the sun rises, perform one or two hundred prostrations, whatever you wish, and then have breakfast, which is likely to be some form of soup or oatmeal.

After breakfast go to a place where you can see a lot of sky and that is very bright and spacious. Recite the six-syllable mantra while in that environment, maintaining the recognition of your mind's nature and giving rise to devotion. When true devotion arises, supplicate your guru as in "Calling the Guru from Afar." Here "calling the guru from afar" does not refer to a long liturgy. It refers simply to a one-sentence supplication like, PALDEN LAMA KHYENNO, which is what you said when you first woke up. Say something like that three times; it will bring progress.

At the end of the second session, when it is time to eat lunch, you will do a visualization of Chenrezik. If you eat three meals a day, you do this visualization at supper as well. If you are a strict monastic who only eats lunch, this is the visualization for lunch. You visualize Chenrezik in your heart and when you are eating, you visualize that the food is offered to him.

At the end of the meal you start the third session, beginning with refuge and bodhichitta as before, and you practice until the sun sets. If you have a physical condition which causes torpor, normally identified as an imbalance or excess of phlegm, it might help to attach a text or a statue to a column or a pillar that is inside your retreat house, and circumambulate the pillar. If you circumambulate it too closely, so that the turns of the circle are too sharp, it may make you dizzy, and you might actually fall

down, so make sure that there is a wide circle. Doing twenty or more circumambulations will help with the problem of torpor.

You begin the fourth session as soon as the sun has set and it is dark. At the beginning of this session, recite either the Guru Rinpoche mantra, OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM (The Tibetan pronunciation is, OM AH HUNG BENZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG), or the Vajrapani mantra, HUM VAJRA PHAT, or another mantra of the type to remove impediments. You do not need to visualize any deities when you recite it, simply recite the mantra, and look at the nature of your mind. This session actually begins, after this mantra recitation, exactly as the other ones with refuge, bodhichitta, and the “calling to the guru.” At the end of the fourth session, if you know the way to gather the accumulation of a kusali, which is the practice of severance or chö, then do that visualization. You do not have to chant a liturgy; just do the visualization. At the beginning blow the kangling three times to summon the recipients. During the visualization you say PHAT three times to punctuate or generate the phases of the practice, such as the feeding of your body, its transformation into pure ambrosia, various things such as the **three whites**, the **three sweets**, and so on. If you do not know the visualization for the generosity of the body, you just omit it and you do not need to say PHAT

or to blow the kangling. At the end of the session you perform whatever dedication and aspiration liturgies you know.

As you go to sleep, visualize in your heart your guru who is inseparable from your yidam and appears as a sphere of white light, like a very bright, luminous, and resplendent crystal. You think that the light from this sphere of light in your heart illuminates the interior of your whole body. Directing your awareness to that, you recite the six syllables very, very quietly and you try to go to sleep within that state or that practice, either sitting up or in the sleeping position of a lion. You try to keep the visualization and the repetition of the mantra continuing until you actually fall asleep. If you do that, it will make it easy to grasp the dream process and to recognize the luminosity of sleep. However long you remain in retreat, whether it is months or years, and this is the simple style that you are doing, you practice the four sessions exactly the same way every day. It does not have to be varied at all.

This is the manner of practice for someone of lesser capacity or one with little knowledge about Dharma. At the same time, it is actually the way of practice that, because it is the simplest, is the most profound. It is not just for beginners or for those without access to a lot of knowledge about Dharma.

The second style of retreat practice is appropriate for those who have slightly more knowledge about Dharma, and therefore access to more variety of practices and supplementary practices. When you go into retreat as an intermediate practitioner, in addition to what was explained before, you should prepare the tormas for your practice, both the tormas to be offered daily to the protectors in the evening and the support tormas for your specific main practice.

At the beginning of the day, as soon as you wake up, do the complete liturgy of your system of preliminary practices including the four thoughts that turn the mind and the four uncommon preliminaries. This text was written to be applicable to practitioners of both Kagyu and Nyingma traditions so it does not specify what liturgy you use. After completing the preliminaries for the morning, while still in the first session, you do a longevity *sadhana* such as White Tara, reciting two or three hundred of the principal mantra. This is all done at the beginning of the first session in the morning.

The main body of the session consists of the practice of the principal yidam of the retreat. The text says if you were doing the practice of the New Translation School it would be yidams such as Gyalwa Gyamtso, Chakrasamvara, or Vajrayogini. In this case you would recite the basic liturgy with the *self-visualization* of

that yidam. If you are doing Nyingma practice you would recite the **lejang** or liturgy, which would be for a deity such as Pema Öbar. Whatever practice you are doing, you recite the liturgy up to the mantra and then you continue with the mantra recitation for the duration of that session. This is written for people without clocks, so it says you do it until the sun rises. At this point you light the fire and start boiling the water for your tea.

At the end of the first session, before breakfast, do at least one hundred prostrations, recite liturgies of confession such as the Confession of Downfalls referred to as the Thirty-five Buddhas, and others. In short, you recollect whatever you have done wrong, whatever downfalls have occurred, and you confess them. Next, if you know how, perform the water tormas offering, which consists of ten different bowls of water, and the **Jambhala** tormas offering. The first session is completed.

While you are eating breakfast, it is recommended to study a little bit, looking at the writings of the great siddhas, for example, Jetsun Milarepa's biography or songs, Lord Marpa's songs, or some text that is directly beneficial to your mind, like The Seven Points of Mind Training. Look at just three or four pages because if you read too much at this point in retreat it will prolong your breakfast and you will have too much to think about, which will disturb your practice.

After breakfast you begin the second session of the day, the morning session, which is exactly like the early morning session. You then have lunch and continue with the third session. In each session you emphasize the repetition of the mantra. Before lunch and before supper you heat the water for whatever it is you are going to eat, which is very, very simple food. At the end of each session, chant the daily recitations that you know by memory and do not wish to forget. If you cannot chant all of them every day, chant them in alternation. You do this so that you will not forget them, which might happen if you do not chant them for the duration of the retreat. At the end of the third session you recite various averting liturgies to ward off bad things, this includes the *Heart Sutra* or the Singamukha averting liturgy.

“You sneak out like a thief to get your water and you sneak back in so no one sees you.” When the sun sets and anyone that might be wandering around outside your retreat has gone back home, this is when you run to get water from outside since no one will see you. At this time you renew your support tormas by adding something to it for that day’s offering.

Again, for the fourth session, you do your principal practice. If you are doing a Nyingma practice, you do the entire lejang. If you are doing a *Sarma* practice, whereas in the previous sessions you did the self-visualization, this time you do the *front-visualization*

and you recite the mantra. If there is a particular protector whose liturgy is available to you and that is associated with the particular practice you are doing, you recite it in this session. For example, in the Chakrasamvara sadhana you would at this point do the Four-Armed Mahakala, otherwise you would do your usual protector liturgy with the dedication of torma. This refers to the daily Mahakala done here at KTD.

When you are chanting the protector liturgy, the text says that if you are alone and somewhat isolated in retreat and there is some danger that thieves might come and try to take your things or that wild animals might try to get into the retreat house because they do not know anyone is there, you might want to beat a drum because that will chase the animals away. Hearing this, the animals will definitely know someone is there and will stay away. Moreover, it will discourage thieves. This refers to a more auspicious era when thieves did not steal from a practitioner; the drum would announce it was a retreat facility being used for practice. Nowadays there is no guarantee this will help. If there is no danger of thieves or wild animals, you do not need to beat the drum because it might cause people to mistake what you are doing and think that you are practicing some kind of magic or sorcery. At the end of the fourth session you do chö or severance practice. If you know the practice, you do the slightly more elaborate daily generosity of the body; if not,

you do the brief form of chö practice, “the means of gathering the accumulations of a kusali,” which is the short chö practice composed by Karma Chakme himself.

In all of the sessions throughout the day, what you are principally doing is reciting the mantra of your yidam continuously like the current of a river. Throughout the four sessions, while reciting the mantra, you should initially alternate focusing on the visualization, the generation stage, and looking at the nature of your mind. Once you get used to doing each of these separately in conjunction with the repetition of the mantra, then try to see if you can bring them together so that you can do the visualization and look at the nature of your mind simultaneously. That is a way of gradually unifying the generation and completion stages.

After everything else is done and you are about to go to sleep, you repeat the visualization of the dissolution or withdrawal of the self-generation, dissolving it into emptiness. You go to sleep resting in recognition or observation of your mind’s nature, which is the instruction for the practitioner of this intermediate capacity to grasp or recognize the luminosity of sleep. That completes the second of the three, which is the style of retreat practice for an intermediate practitioner.

The third style of retreat practice is for someone with a great deal of knowledge and an even wider scope of access to many different practices. In the early morning as soon as you wake up, think that all the dakas and dakinis playing damarus and bells emerge from the expanse of space and wake you up with this sound. In the three-year retreat there is an accompanying liturgy done especially at the beginning of the first session, and often at the beginning of every session. It is taught that you should not recite mantras until you have washed your mouth out, and it is also taught that in retreat you should not wash your mouth, or any part of your body, with unconsecrated water. Consequently before you recite any mantras, you need to take water from a vase that has been consecrated with a purification mantra or procedure. After washing your mouth, to increase the power of your speech so that your mantras have more power and more effect, you perform what is called the speech consecration or speech blessing. Either this can be an elaborate one or the very simplest one, which is the repetition of the vowels and consonants of the alphabet three times. Understand that since this transforms the power of anything that you say for that day into 100,000,000 times its regular power, any mantras you chant that day are like having chanted 100,000,000 times as many. This is both beneficial and dangerous. It is appropriate to do this in retreat when you are silent except for the recitation of your liturgy and mantras, but if you do it and you then

speaking inappropriately, it is as though you spoke inappropriately 100,000,000 times. It is risky.

The visualization that accompanies the blessing of speech is that your tongue is a sharp sword, and the handle, which is the base of the tongue, is on a white lotus petal marked with the syllable DHI. This visualization will dispel the defects of speech caused by obscurations. After the consecration of speech, you begin the preliminaries. You should do all four of the preliminary practices, or at least the refuge and bodhichitta, until your outlook is definitely transformed. This means that your mind has turned away from this life and is only concerned with future lives; that you have completely entrusted your welfare to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; and you are full of love and compassion for all sentient beings.

Before you begin the main practice, for part of the session do the visualization of **tummo**, expelling the stale breath and holding the vase breath. This will purify your constitution, dispel sickness, and prolong life. It prolongs your life because you are dispelling the karmic air and strengthening the wisdom winds. You then do a longevity practice such as White Tara or Amitayus, whichever longevity practice you know, and you do considerable amounts of the mantra of that deity. Exactly how much of the mantra you do depends on your particular circumstances. In general, we

need a long life in order to practice Dharma. In terms of doing longevity practice in retreat, if you are approaching what is called a life impediment or a life obstacle, you should do more mantras. You would know this based upon the history of your family, the longevity of your siblings, parents, and ancestors, or based on some kind of divination that might indicate the approach of an obstacle. You would recite more mantras if you have one of the life obstacles, and you would do fewer if you do not have an obstacle coming up.

You are now ready to begin the main practice of the yidam for which you have entered retreat. If you are doing a practice of the New Translation School, you recite the self-visualization. If you are doing a practice of the **Old Translation School**, then you recite the liturgy, the lejang, and you visualize the self and front simultaneously. In any case, you chant the liturgy up to the point where you recite the mantra and then you recite the mantra until the sun rises. That completes the first session. At the end of the session, especially if you are doing a practice of the New Translation School, you dissolve the visualization of the self-generation, re-arise in the body of unity for postmeditation, and begin the conduct of postmeditation. Prepare your breakfast, boiling water for your tea or your porridge.

After breakfast while facing west, generate a clear mental image of the realm of Sukhavati with Amitabha and his retinue and perform one hundred prostrations to them. If you are only going to do a few prostrations, you would do them saying the prostration multiplication mantra, which I am sure everyone wants to know, and which is “Homage to the Three Jewels: Namō Manjushrīye, Namō Sushrīye, Namō Uttamashrīye, Svahamutomasharya Svaha.” If you say this mantra while doing one prostration, that prostration is worth 100,000. This does not mean you can get out of doing your other prostrations. The text gives a list of alternate chants you can do while doing your prostrations. You can chant the verse of homage to Amitabha, which is “Bhagavat Tathagata Arhat Samyaksambuddha Amitabha, homage to you.” To perform prostrations while saying this homage is a cause to be reborn in the realm of Sukhavati.

Alternatively, to purify the obscuration of misappropriation you can say “Homage to the Bhagavat Tathagata Arhat Samyaksambuddha, King of Complete Light, Brilliant with Fire Light.” This is because when you receive offerings or any kind of service, if you even slightly do not fulfill the requirements of receiving, you become obscured by what is given to you or the service that is paid you. It is important that people who give offerings be able to gather the accumulations that they wish to gather. It is also important that the person receiving

the offerings not be obscured by the offerings. You have to do something to prevent that obscuration from happening, and you use this mantra to do so.

Another few lines of homage are addressed to Amitabha, Chenrezik, and Vajrapani, the principal figures of Sukhavati. It reads “Homage to the Bhagavat, Tathagata Arhat Samyaksambuddha, the Lord All-Seeing,” which refers to Amitabha, then “Homage to the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Arya Lokeshvaraya,” then “Homage to the Vidyaraja, the Supreme King of Awareness, Vajrapani.” The text says if you do one prostration for each of those three, then it is the same merit as reciting the names of and prostrating to as many buddhas as there are grains of sand in sixty-two Ganges Rivers, which is obviously impossible for us to do because we do not know that many buddhas’ names. In this way you can get the equivalent. This is taught in two sutras and one tantra, the *Sutra of the Realm of Manjushri*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Tantra of the Empowerment of Vajrapani*.

Someone who knows how to accumulate a vast amount of merit without great difficulty is, indeed, wise. For example, inside the house, on a column you normally have to walk by, attach a text or an image of the Buddha, reciting once the mantra OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNA KETURAJAYA TATHAGATAYA ARHATE SAMYAKSAMBUDDHAYA TADYATHA OM

RATNE RATNE MAHARATNE RATNA VIJAYE SVAHA. Anytime you leave your seat throughout the day to go to use the bathroom and so on, if you walk around the pillar once, it is the same as doing 100,000 circumambulations.

Throughout the day, whenever you go to the bathroom, there are visualizations to be done and mantras to be recited. We divide this into two parts or two activities. When you urinate, visualize your body as a large golden vase, and visualize the urine that you are emitting as a stream of ambrosia, dedicating it to all those pretas who actually thrive on urine. There are pretas for whom urine is as good as it gets and it will actually alleviate their thirst and suffering to receive it. They can only receive it if it is intentionally dedicated to them. While you are urinating, as you recite the mantra OM AH MUTRA AHARE BHYA SVAHA, think they are receiving the urine and are delighted, satisfied, and relieved; afterward recite the aspiration, “May those yidaks who enjoy urine be satisfied.” When you defecate, imagine the excrement to be excellent food because there are pretas who eat that and can only receive it if it is dedicated to them. As gross as this might seem to us, it is very, very good for them and it relieves their suffering tremendously. As you are doing that you recite the mantra, OM AH VISHTHA AHARE BHYA SVAHA SARVA PRETA NAM KHA KHA KHAHI, and afterward recite the aspiration, “May those pretas who enjoy excrement be

satisfied.” In this way, the two things that you have to do anyway become sources of great merit because you are actually directly relieving the suffering of pretas by intentionally dedicating these substances for which you yourself have no use.

Returning to our day, at the end of the first session when the sun rises and it begins to get warm you perform your water torma offerings and the Jambhala torma offering. You can do the hundred-part water torma or whatever elaborate water torma offering you know. There are days on which it is appropriate to propitiate nagas and days on which it is appropriate to leave them alone. The Samye Ling Tibetan calendar identifies these days. When you get to a day that is a naga propitiation day, then at this point, you would offer a naga torma. If it is a “leave the nagas alone” day, then you do not make offerings because it brings more problems than benefit, because it would disturb the less benevolent nagas. After you complete these offerings, you have your morning meal after which you do a bit of studying or copying texts, and as before, looking at a few pages, but not too many.

You begin your second session. If you have an extremely stable generation stage practice, you do not need to repeat the liturgy; you can just do the visualization and go on from there. If the generation stage is not especially stable, you should repeat the

practice just as you did in the first session. You would repeat the self-generation or self-visualization and then you recite the mantra as before for the rest of the morning until lunchtime.

If you are observing the discipline of eating once a day, at lunchtime you do the sutra practice of eating lunch, as is done at Lama Norlha's retreat center and when you do *nyungne*. A select portion of the food is offered on the shrine and *changbu* are prepared for and dispatched to the hungry ghosts. When you eat you do the Vajrayana practice of eating in which you visualize yourself as the yidam with the body mandala of that yidam. Then you recollect the fact that the tummo wisdom fire, which abides at the navel, is like the fire in homa. Your mouth is like the homa receptacle or fire pit; your tongue is like the tongue of flame that consumes the offerings, and your hands are like the pouring and filling spoon, which are the two spoons used in the practice of homa. You do visualize yourself as your yidam, but you do not have to literally visualize your mouth as a pit, your tongue as a flame, and your hands as spoons. It is sufficient just to recollect. Think that all of the food that you eat is like the substances offered in a fire puja and think that you are offering it to the deities of your body. While eating you mentally — you cannot do it verbally because you are eating — recite the mantra of your yidam. That is an *internal fire puja* or internal homa; it is sufficient and fills the requirement for fire puja.

The water you drink should be consecrated with the mantra, OM AMRITE HUM PHAT, which you repeat several times to consecrate the water; this is true of the water you drink and any water you use to rinse your mouth out. That water will be able to protect you from all obstacles and obstructors. When you are in retreat doing mantra practice, you should not rinse your mouth with unconsecrated water. Other observances connected with retreat practice are: do not stick anything sharp into your mouth, like the point of a knife or needles, do not eat tongue, such as beef tongue, do not chew on your own tongue, and do not blow on fire. If you need to fan a fire use a bellows or a fan. Do not cut your hair or your nails. Do not wash your body with any water that has not been consecrated using purification dharanis, like OM AMRITE HUM PHAT. Other than when doing feast practice, where the food has been consecrated as ganachakra ambrosia, do not consume meat, alcohol, garlic, or daikon. These are samayas to protect the power of mantra. You refrain from eating these things and sticking knives or swords into your mouth so that the power of your speech is unimpaired. If you do not care about the power of your speech, if you are not doing a practice that involves mantra, these things are less important; however, during retreat you still should not consume meat, alcohol, garlic, or daikon except at a formally consecrated feast practice.

These three levels of practice, the simple, the elaborate, and the extremely elaborate, are for the three types of people — those of a lesser capacity, intermediate capacity, and greater capacity. These three types of practice are in the tradition of a kusali who follows faith. In India, these three types of practice were collectively called the approach of a kusali. In Tibet, where they formed the basis for retreat practice, they were also called the approach of those who follow faith, although they are by no means directed at beginners alone.

The other style of practice is for those of the highest faculties who follow the Dharma and who base their practice on knowledge or understanding of Dharma.

Whereas the former approach was called the approach of a kusali or yogi, this is called the practice of a scholarly and wise pandita. In order to do this type of practice you need to have received a vast number of empowerments, transmissions, and precise instructions, and to actually know how to do the ritual details and the visualizations of every one of these practices. For example, you would have received the great collections such as *Rinchen Terdzo*, *Dam Ngak Dzo*, and *Kagyü Ngak Kyi Dzo*.

A person who will do this type of retreat practice is someone who is a lineage holder and is going to practice as many different

practices as possible actually developing a practical experience of each one of them. Not leaving it as something that has been received and simply understood, such a person will do the practices of all the major tantras of the New and Old Translation schools. Examples of this type of practitioner are Jamgon Lodro Thaye, who is Jamgon Kongtrul the Great, and **Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo**. Such practitioners will practice everything, write commentaries on everything, and master and understand everything because they actually practice until they receive the signs of attainment of that particular deity or the realization of that particular practice. In their case this happens somewhat quickly, so they may not need to do a practice for very long, as we will see. Nevertheless they practice until they realize the particular practice. For such practitioners it is not certain that they are going to have one lifelong practice. They move from one practice to another, realizing each one before they move on to the next one. Whatever practice it is they are going to do, they have a complete knowledge of how to do.

Within this type of practice the same distinctions are made as with the lesser types. There is the highest, the middling, and the lesser capacity of such a type of practitioner.

The highest capacity means that your knowledge of how to do the most elaborate form of the practice and your ability to

amass the necessary materials is of the utmost capacity. Such a practitioner is capable of doing the most elaborate form of whatever practice it is, as well as acquire the practice materials and the assistants, because you will need assistants for this type of elaborate practice. It varies a little bit depending on whether it is an old style Nyingma practice or a new style Sarma practice.

If it is the Nyingma style then you follow the manual for the “elaborate great practice.” You do everything exactly as it is taught in those manuals with the exception that you do not do the unceasing mantra repetition. In a great practice assembly, one large group of people recites the liturgy six times a day and another group constantly recites the mantra so that even while others are chanting the liturgy, the sound of the mantra is unbroken throughout the twentyfour hours of each day. Since you are doing the practices in retreat, you will not have the unbroken sound of the mantra. You will be reciting the mantra when you are reciting the mantra and reciting the liturgy when you are reciting the liturgy. You can do four sessions each day, but if you have slightly higher capacity you can do three sessions, with fewer breaks, and if you are of the highest capacity you can do two sessions with only one break. You begin each session reciting the liturgy and spend rest of the time reciting the mantra.

For this level of practitioner, the practice should be done for about one month or longer, but not prolonged too much. After the completion of one particular yidam practice, you do not take down the retreat signs and the external boundaries because you are going to immediately move on to another practice. This is similar to what is done in the three-year retreat where after you finish one practice, you immediately move on to another one. At the end of the elaborate part of the practice, after a month or longer, you perform the concluding ritual of the mandala, the dissolution of the mandala, and so on, as the particular manual and liturgy of that practice prescribes.

If you are doing the New Translation or Sarma type of practice, you begin with the preparation for the taking of the ground, the laying of the lines, and the placing of the sand for the sand mandala. This entire elaborate way of preparing a mandala is a practice offering. In other words, in the Nyingma tradition it is “great practice” and in the Sarma tradition it is “practice offering.” Both refer to the same elaborate level of practice. In the Sarma style, for one month you do the approach of the self-visualization and the accomplishment of the front-generation or front-visualization; at the end you take the self-empowerment. You then do the concluding ritual of the mandala as it is indicated. That is how to do the Sarma style.

In any case, whether you are doing Nyingma style drupchen, “great practice,” or Sarma style *drupchö*, “practice offering,” at the end you do the elaborate *homa* “fire puja of the *four activities*.” This has two functions. The first function is that it repairs the defects of mantra repetition, both excesses and omissions. An excess does not mean saying too many mantras. You cannot say too many mantras. Excess means adding syllables to the mantra inadvertently, such as if the mantra has one OM and you sometimes say, “OM OM.” An omission means leaving out syllables, for whatever reason.

The other function of the concluding fire puja is to quickly bestow or ripen the siddhi that has been accomplished doing the practice. For one week after that, you do a less elaborate form of practice, essentially meditating on the body mandala of the deity, whatever deity it is, meditating on the channels and winds, and doing the physical exercises associated with the channels and wind practices. After that, for another week you engage in the practice of the utmost simplicity, simply fostering recognition of your mind’s nature, which in a sense is as though you are taking a rest. You are not actually goofing off; you are still practicing, but you are taking a rest from ritually elaborate practice.

By doing these three stages, elaborate, unelaborate and extremely unelaborate practice, you fulfill the criteria of the traditional path of both the Nyingma and Sarma traditions. In the Nyingma terminology it is *the three yogas*, and in the Sarma terminology it is the *elaborate, unelaborate, and extremely unelaborate* practice. In short, you are fully practicing both the generation and completion stages. At the end of that cycle of practice you recite extensive liturgies of aspiration and dedication. You then continue and you repeat the whole thing again with a different mandala, starting with the elaborate, then the unelaborate, and then the extremely unelaborate. This is what you do in retreat. For example, you do the Vajrayogini practice and once that is completed you go on and do the Chakrasamvara practice, and so on. In that way you are completing the full practice of each deity, yidam, and dharmapala, and you are doing the complete practice not only of the generation stage sadhanas, but also of the completion stage. Going through practice after practice in this way, you will complete the mantra practices for each of the great tantras, and incidentally, because of the unelaborate and extremely unelaborate practices, you will train yourself in the all the various systems of instructions of the completion stage that come along with each yidam.

You are very fortunate when you practice that way, because even if you die immediately after doing that practice and you

never have the chance to benefit anyone else, it is not a source of regret because you have practiced so well. If you do not die, and in the future you come to have students, then your lineage will have blessing because you have actually practiced everything that you have received and you actually know the details of how to do it all and can transmit the details of how to do all of these different practices. Such a person who practices in that way and fulfills all of these different practices will be of the greatest benefit to the tradition of practice because this person can give practical instruction.

The text now discusses the practice for those who emphasize understanding the meaning of Dharma but are of the medium degree of discernment and resources. What determines the difference between what is described for those of the highest capacity and those of medium capacity is one's degree of knowledge about the means of elaborate practice and whether one has the resources and materials to engage in the elaborate practice described previously. If one does not have the resources and the knowledge to do the great assembly practice, or drupchen, one would do an intermediate style of practice known as *drupchung*, or "minor practice."

In this case you do not need all of the elaborate materials that were described for the drupchen, however, you do need the

mandala of the deity. At best, this would be a painting of that mandala; in the absence of that, you could use piles of grain that would be the number of piles equaling the number of deities in that mandala. In addition, you need whatever other materials are described by the fundamental practice of that deity including a vase, a tormo, and so forth. You do the practice according to the liturgy and manual of that practice, whichever deity it is — Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, or Mahakala. The difference between what is recited and practiced here and what was explained for the elaborate practice is that you do not need all of the inserts that are used in the drupchen. Instead you use the basic liturgy of the practice itself, with possibly some inserts from a manual or other text.

As mentioned before, there is a slight difference in the procedures of the Sarma and Nyingma styles of yidam practice. The meaning is the same, but one difference is that according to the Sarma tradition, especially the Karma Kagyu tradition, when you are doing a yidam practice you do only the self-visualization of the yidam for the main body of the practice and in that context you recite the mantra of that deity. When you are practicing in that way, you do not actually need the mandala at all because you are doing only the self-generation. This is the way it was done in the Karma Kagyu monasteries in eastern Tibet such as Thrangu Monastery and Benchen Monastery.

In the case of the Nyingma tradition, and in the central Tibetan way of practicing the Karma Kagyu tradition as found at Tsurphu Monastery, you need to do the self-visualization, the front-visualization, and the vase visualization. In this case you would need the mandala for the whole practice.

At the conclusion of the practice of the yidam sadhana you are doing, you would do a period of simple or unelaborate practice of the completion stage as was described before in connection with great assembly practice. There is no difference between the completion stage practice performed in a great assembly and that done in a less elaborate context. This completes the discussion of the practice for those with a medium degree of discernment and resources.

Someone with the least amount of resources who emphasizes an understanding of the meaning of Dharma is someone who has received all of the necessary empowerments, reading transmissions, and instructions for the various practices. Although they could, as was described above, complete one practice and move on to the next one, nevertheless, they wish to concentrate on one practice and emphasize one yidam. They do not necessarily have the least resources; it is actually a decision based upon how one wishes to practice. This choice would be made because they see the danger of spreading themselves too thin and having too

many intentions or too many directions in their mind, so this person would choose to concentrate on one practice.

Nowadays this can be a valuable decision because with the everreater access we have to teachings, and given the present situation this means not just the teachings of one lineage, but the teachings of all four lineages, we run the danger of becoming too eclectic. The problem with this is that when you are doing any one practice you remember the other ones and you wish you were doing one of the other ones. You spend your life wishing you were doing something other than what you are actually practicing. Because of this, someone of this type would choose to emphasize one practice.

This is valid because although there are many different practices that have their own particular style or qualities, if you pursue a practice until you actually achieve the realization associated with that deity, you have achieved the realization associated with every deity because they are all the same in essence. Seeing the face of any one deity is in essence seeing the face of all of them.

Even though one emphasizes one practice — meditation on one deity, the repetition and accumulation of one mantra, and the use of one sadhana — nevertheless it says in our text that you should not prolong a period of intensive practice for more than

one month. What is being pointed out here is that most of us, especially in the beginning, run the risk of becoming somewhat stale and even lazy if we try to practice one particular practice intensively for longer than a month at a time. If you are of the highest capacity such that you can prolong your practice endlessly without becoming stale and without losing your enthusiasm or momentum, there is no harm in doing so. What is recommended here is that after one month of intensive sadhana practice you complete that part of the retreat with the attending fire puja and then do a simple or unelaborate practice such as meditation on the completion stage. After that you go back to the sadhana practice and do it again.

If you alternate these two types of practice, the elaborate practice of the generation stage and the unelaborate or simple practice of the completion stage, then no matter how unreceptive you may be, no matter what the problems you are facing in your practice, no matter what obscurations or obstacles you experience, you will definitely be able to achieve the fruit of the practice.

On the other hand, if you force yourself to go straight through you run the risk of encountering more problems. It is said that no matter who you are, if you repeat this process seven or nine times, of practicing intensively for a month, and then simply, then again intensively, it is impossible not to achieve the realiza-

tion of the practice. This type of practice is the practice that brings enhancement or progress because the elaborate practice supports and enhances the simple practice, which supports and enhances the elaborate practice, and so on. Although in the one month of sadhana practice you may not achieve the realization of the deity, if you repeat it enough times you will achieve realization just as when enough drops of water fall into a cup it will eventually be full.

If you try to force yourself to continue one practice for too long without interruption, your body, speech, and mind will become more and more sloppy and relaxed and you will gradually give in to sleepiness, depression, boredom, and laziness. The obvious exception to this is someone like Jetsun Milarepa who could practice for the rest of his life with no problem. He never surrendered the commitment to practice, but for most of us the attempt to practice without interruption is going to bring obstacles. Essentially what goes wrong when you try to force yourself to practice intensively for too long is that your enthusiasm vanishes. Because of that your mindfulness and alertness diminish. As they diminish, of course, the benefits and the signs of the benefits of the practice start to disappear and impediments increase, especially the arising of mental afflictions.

It is much better to practice with fierce intensity for a comparatively brief period, such as a month, because that will not wear you out. You will find that from the beginning to the end of the practice you will retain your enthusiasm. By alternating elaborate and simple forms of practice, you will be able to enhance each one with the other. This is a natural way to practice because as we know from our own experience, sometimes we actually feel like pursuing elaborate practice, and other times we feel like pursuing the simple practice of the completion stage.

This completes the section concerned with the three styles of practice for those who base their practice on an understanding of the meaning of Dharma. Next follow general remarks.

When practicing a drupchen, a great assembly practice, in retreat, the rules are very strict. A periphery or border will be established. This border is normally established by placing images or representations of protectors, such as the four great kings, in the four directions. After establishing the border, the actual deities are summoned, presented with offerings and praise, and enjoined to prevent obstacles from entering the retreat and to prevent attainment from leaving the retreat. When you are in that type of situation, you must not transgress the boundary. Examples of boundaries being established in this way are the three-year retreat at Karme Ling or the site of a great assembly

practice. When you are in that type of situation, no one who is not supposed to come in should come in and no one who is in should go out.

If one is doing drupchung, a minor practice, the rule is a little less strict. The rule in this case is that you should not go further from the place of practice than you can hear the sound of a bell. As long as you are within the sound of a bell you are fine, but if you go outside that, which is outside the perimeter of the sound of practice, then obstacles will arise.

When you are doing a retreat and are between practices — for example, the major or minor assembly practice has been completed, or you are doing the simple form of meditation on the completion stage, or you are doing the simple daily practice of a previously practiced yidam in which you do only the self-generation, in short, if you are doing any practice that does not involve the elaborate creation of a mandala and practice materials — and if there is a necessity to leave for the benefit of someone else, someone for whom you have responsibility, then you may do so temporarily. Some examples of this are if either of your parents, a close Dharma friend, or a patron becomes ill or passes away. This commonly happened in Tibet where lamas in retreat were called out to perform the transference of consciousness or to perform ceremonies and other similar functions.

In summary, if you have to go out and you are not performing an elaborate practice, you can and should do it in the following way, which has been the custom for a long time: you should leave after dark so that you do not see anybody and come back before the sun rises the next morning. Make sure that you do not encounter anyone other than the person you are going to see. If you are maintaining silence in your retreat, when you are out try not to talk to anyone other than the person you are going to see.

Before you leave there are some preparations to make. The place where you practice and sleep, your meditation seat or meditation box, is left intact. Inside your clothing or blankets put one of your texts, a statue of the Buddha, or your mala. You think that the retreat building is the mandala of your yidam, the palace of the self-generation yidam. You think that what you have left on your seat — the clothing and the mala, statue, or book — is the principal deity of the mandala, the self-visualization yidam. You think that it is you. It does not dissolve. It remains there, and you imagine that you as the yidam are actually still in the room. When you leave you think that a secondary form of that yidam, like a wisdom being for example, is emanated from the heart of the yidam. You, the person who is leaving the retreat, are the emanation of the yidam, but the main yidam stays there.

You go and take care of giving an empowerment, or blessing, or performing the transfer of consciousness. When you come back and you enter the retreat building think that you are entering the gate of the yidam's mandala. When you get to your room and to your meditation seat, you think that this emanated form of the yidam dissolves back into the principal form who abides on your seat in the center of the mandala. That evening when you are reciting the yidam mantra, you add the **hundred-syllable mantra** and recite it a few times. If you go out again, when you return you would do an elaborate fulfillment practice or fulfillment liturgy connected with your particular yidam.

If you are seen by other people when you are in retreat that is a “hole,” like a hole in the protection circle surrounding the retreat. If you see someone outside the retreat, that is a “tear.” A tear is worse than a hole. It is bad if people see you, but it is worse if you see them.

If you are keeping silence while in retreat, then it is best if you do not speak. If you must communicate, what was traditionally done was to write on a sand board, a board that held sand in which you could write notes. If you have paper and ink that makes it easier, but paper and ink were not common in Tibet. If you cannot make the retreat attendant understand what you are trying to communicate by writing on the paper or on the

sand board such as in Tibet if the retreat attendant could not read, then the second best thing is to speak without any air coming out from your mouth. You breathe out from your nose while you enunciate the words. You are not breaking silence if you talk through your nose. The retreat attendant may not understand that either because it is obviously not as easy to understand as when you talk normally through your mouth. The third option is called semi-speech. Semi-speech is when you talk without separating your teeth. That is not, of course, complete silence, but it is all right. It is better than nothing. Those are your three options.

It is taught that mantras should be recited uninterrupted by human speech. If you are doing a mantra practice where you are accumulating and counting a particular mantra or mantras, the number of mantras that you are required to do in order to complete that practice is always calculated under the assumption that you will be silent and that you will not be engaging in ordinary speech at any time during that practice period. If you are not silent, if you speak during the period of accumulation, you need to multiply the number, whatever it is, by three. For example, if the mantra requirement is one million and you are not keeping total silence aside from the liturgy and mantra, then you need to recite three million of the mantra to complete the practice.

For that reason, in the Nyingma tradition when people do these kinds of mantra practices they are silent all the time during the retreat; they do not even talk between sessions. In the Sarma tradition and this is commonly true in the Karma Kagyu practice tradition, you can speak between sessions, but you cannot speak during a session. For example, from the time you begin until the time you complete any one of the four sessions, you must not speak, but you can speak in between sessions because you have dissolved the visualization and re-arisen as the postmeditation deity. This is allowed so that you can do your other daily practices. You have many practices that you must do every day. For example, for all of the yidam practices that you have previously completed you have to do the simple daily practice every day. If you have to give instructions, you can also communicate as needed to the retreat attendant, and so on. In the Sarma tradition, you can speak between sessions and you do not have to talk with your teeth clenched. If you are doing a retreat on the completion stage, such as when great practitioners meditate on the channels and winds or by simply fostering recognition of the mind's nature, although it is good to have a strict retreat for this, you can nevertheless speak. It is not necessary to be silent.

To conclude this section, when you have completed the period of retreat that you set out to perform, whatever you committed yourself to do, whether it was an elaborate or less elaborate prac-

tice, conclude it with a fire puja if possible. This should consist of the four activities. If you have set up supports or receptacles for the protectors such as the four great kings in connection with an elaborate practice or particularly strict retreat, and if you gave instructions to these protectors to protect the perimeter of your retreat, then you need to conclude these and dissolve the perimeter and withdraw or collect the established receptacles. Finally, you conclude with an elaborate ceremony of dedication, aspiration, and expression of auspiciousness.

Following your retreat it is best if you do not meet anyone for one week, or at least for five days, or at the very least for three days. Do not go too far. You can leave the retreat area because the boundary has been dissolved, but you should not go any further than, for example, a security guard would go. After that period of a week, five days, or three days, you can go wherever you need to.

This section was a very brief and rough presentation of instructions on how to do retreat. There are many details beyond this that have to be learned from the instructions connected with specific practices and also from future chapters of this text, for example, how to avoid pitfalls and mistakes in practice, how to dispel impediments, how to bring further enhancement, and also what the indications of success are in particular practices.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: How simply should a layperson live, and when does one's lifestyle become indulgent?

RINPOCHE: A distinction has to be made between the lifestyle appropriate for a monastic and the lifestyle appropriate for what is traditionally called a dharmic householder, which means a layperson who practices Dharma. The lifestyle of a monastic is when one is supposed to avoid the two extremes of indulgence and mortification. In the case of a householder, you have to accept more complexity in your life, for example, you have some kind of work that you have to do that entails additional responsibilities. The main criterion for the validity of one's lifestyle as a dharmic householder is the honesty with which it is lived. If your work and lifestyle does not involve harming others or being dishonest in any way, then regardless of how much you own or how much you have, it is considered virtuous because you are not harming anyone. As a practitioner you can use the opportunity of being a householder to benefit others as well.

The Buddha never taught that householders cannot fully practice Dharma. From the beginning, the Buddha taught what are called the two sanghas. The literal terms in Tibetan are the *white robed long hairs* and the *saffron robed short hairs*, which means lay people

— who in Tibet wore white robes and did not cut their hair — and monastics. These two sanghas both have to be present for Dharma to be fully active and present. There are two ways to practice Dharma. The most obviously straight forward and successful way is one of extreme renunciation, like that of Jetsun Milarepa, in which there is renunciation even of the most basic necessities. This does not mean that someone cannot practice in the midst of a conventional lifestyle with a busy family life. In fact, if you understand what renunciation is, and you understand and are engaged in the practice of secret mantra, then you understand that the presence or absence of opulence is actually irrelevant. The only thing that is important is whether there is attachment. If you live amidst great opulence and are not attached, this does not harm you; if you live in poverty and are attached to what little you have, that does harm you.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I wonder if you could explain the Buddha's advice on when it is permissible to eat meat. I have always had a lot of confusion about how eating meat cannot be harmful.

RINPOCHE: Basically, meat is in three categories. One category is clearly forbidden; one category is clearly allowed; and another category is pretty much allowed. The category that is clearly forbidden is what is called “dedicated meat,” which is meat that is killed for your express use, in other words, like ordering a live

animal or a live fish. That is not permitted by the Buddha. The category that is definitely allowed is the meat of an animal that has died naturally, that was not killed for its meat. There is no wrongdoing in eating that. The category that is pretty much acceptable most of the time is the meat that is bought at the market, which means you know that you did not see, you did not hear, and you have no reason to suspect that it was killed for your purpose.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, would you explain, “separating the clear aspect of awareness from the dregs.”

RINPOCHE: As soon as you become conscious or awake in the morning, you immediately give rise to the strongest possible devotion and faith. In order to do so, you pray very loudly. It sounds very poetic to say to “separate the clarity of awareness from its dregs,” whereas all it means is that physically it completely wakes you up.

STUDENT: Thank you. For those who cannot do retreat for a month or longer, but who can do a weekend, other than having your normal shrine set up, is there any other special consecration that you are supposed to do and is it okay just to follow the daily schedule for the four sessions?

RINPOCHE: Aside from setting up your shrine, the only thing you need to do is throw some rice blessed by the fathers and sons of the Kagyu lineage. Other than that you do not need any other kind of ritual or consecration especially if it is a place that has previously been used as a retreat facility. It is fine to do the simple or unelaborate practice where, in all sessions, you are concentrating on Chenrezik meditation. Even though you are doing a fairly simple or unelaborate practice, you should not dispense altogether with offerings. The more offerings such as lamps and incense and offering bowls of water and so on, the more merit you will accumulate, so do not think that because you are doing a simple practice that you do not need any offerings.

STUDENT: If the place is not some place that has already been used for retreat, it is just your own shrine in your apartment, is there anything that is required for that?

RINPOCHE: Nothing special, just prepare fresh offerings and perform the practice starting from early morning until late at night as it is described here; that is enough.

STUDENT: I am not sure what “opening the gate” means in terms of stagnation.

RINPOCHE: In any country, including the United States, there are many places that are inherently sacred, which means that they are the abodes of wisdom dakas and dakinis. What is called “the opening of the door or gate” to such a place is when a realized master comes there and identifies it as such. Up to that point, people do not know what it is. The master comes, identifies the place as a holy place, and explains the reasons why. The normal procedure at that point is to convene a great ganachakra that is usually witnessed by a large crowd of faithful and devoted people. There will be some miracles, such as the appearances of extraordinary rainbows in the sky, rains of flowers, sometimes rains of medicinal herbs that are unlike anything that grows in the region, and so on. After that, the teacher will usually compose or explain verbally the benefits for people when they practice in the place, worship the place, and circumambulate the place. When that is completed, the gate to the place is opened. People know where it is, what it is, and what the benefits are. If that is not done, nobody knows about it.

The other thing mentioned at that point in the text was inauspicious circumstances that occur surrounding the opening of the gate. This is when Mara enters people’s minds while the feast or ceremonies are being performed. If in the large crowd, there are people fighting, even verbal fighting, or if someone is killed, that can spoil the auspiciousness. I do not know any specific

instances where that happened and thus prevented the use of a sacred place, but it sounds similar to what happens when, for example, a tertön finds a treasure but the necessary external circumstances are not present for them to reveal it and so they leave it hidden.

STUDENT: What is lion posture?

RINPOCHE: The posture of the sleeping lion is the posture that the Buddha took when he passed into **parinirvana**. It is to lie on your right side, with your head pointing north, your feet pointing south, your back pointing east, your front pointing west, with your right hand under your right cheek and your left hand laid along the top of the side of your left leg.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, please define dakas, dakinis and dharma-palas.

RINPOCHE: Dakas and dakinis are male and female beings who have attained realization and wisdom through the path of Vajrayana. They can be human or nonhuman, or they can be nonhuman and appear as human. There are all sorts of variations. Dharmapalas or Dharma protectors are, in nature, enlightened dakas and dakinis who serve to protect those who practice Vajrayana and beings in general, to remove impediments, and

to promote the generation of qualities. Dharmapalas are dakas and dakinis, but among dakas and dakinis they are the daka and dakini police, and their function is to do pretty much what the police do, except that they are enlightened.

STUDENT: In the past you have told us that once anger arises, it is too late to watch our minds. Now we hear that the arising of anger is one condition that could potentially lead to spiritual development. I wonder if you could clarify that for me.

RINPOCHE: These are different contexts. The previous instruction, that once anger has arisen it is too late to try to locate your mind, is instruction designed for beginners, which, in this context, means people who have not developed a momentum or habit of meditation. If the anger is not pacified by its antidote in the first moment when it is not yet strong, then once it becomes strong, the momentum of the habit of indulging in anger is too strong to be reversed by a small or weak degree of recognition. It is instruction designed for beginners using the approach taught in the sutras. In the case of someone who either has a decisive recognition of their mind's nature or at least knows how to rest in some experience of the mind's nature, any strong emotion or klesha, not just anger, is an opportunity if you can take advantage of it. The presence of a strong emotion or a strong klesha in your mind focuses your mind in a certain

way, so that if you can look at the nature of the mind, you can have a more complete and more decisive experience of its nature. This is true with any klesha, including anger, fear, and also with embarrassment. There are two stories about this.

The first story is about a young Tulku who was very much respected in spite of his youth. His behavior was exemplary and he was extremely disciplined in his dress. Everything about him was perfect. He was an excellent student and everyone had the highest hopes for him. And he was naturally very decorous. Somehow, in the midst of a large assembly of monks and other tulkus in the shrine room in his monastery, he let out an extremely, resoundingly loud fart, which in Tibetan society is considered very embarrassing, even more so than it is for us. Everyone was laughing. It was the worst possible form of embarrassment and yet he took the opportunity to look in the midst of that embarrassment at the nature of his mind. He later wrote that it was at that moment that he really recognized his mind's nature.

A second example is that in Nangchen there was a lama called Pema Dorje. One day, for no apparent reason, his lama became incensed and became extremely angry with him. He scolded him terribly and told him he wanted him to leave, to get out, to go out of the whole province, to go as far away as possible. He told him they were finished forever, not only for this life but also

for all lives. He said their connection was over as of that day. Pema Dorje was completely heartbroken by this, completely horrified in every way. He had been kicked out. As he was leaving, he stopped on a rocky ledge thinking that he would just jump up to get one last look at his teacher's face. He jumped up to look at his teacher's face, landed back on the rock, and left his footprints in the stone because he had achieved realization of his mind's nature through the intense disappointment, fear, and sadness that his teacher had produced in him by seeming to utterly reject him. Of course, his teacher had not really done so. It was all just a trick, but it worked.

STUDENT: What are the four maras of the mind?

RINPOCHE: The first is *devaputra mara*, “the mara that is the child of the gods,” the second is *klesha mara*, “the mara that is the mental afflictions,” the third is *skandha mara*, the “mara of the aggregates” and the fourth is *mrityu mara*, “the mara who is the lord of death.” The mara that is the child of the gods refers to attachment to and craving for pleasure, possessions, wealth, fame — all the things that we usually regard as good and pleasurable. This includes pride and any form of intoxication with pleasure causing attachment. Because these things lead us to engage in unvirtuous actions in order to promote them or sustain them, they are a kind of mara. The second mara, the

kleshas, is the mental afflictions that are maras because they lead one or cause one to take rebirth in the six realms of samsara. The third one is the aggregates because the aggregates are the cause or the basis for the presence of suffering; therefore they are also a mara. The fourth one is mortality. It is the fact that, unless you are one of those extraordinary individuals who attain the state of immortal realization, you are going to die and there is not much you can do about it.

We tend to personify mara and think of it as some kind of external being like a demon that torments us or beats us up. In fact, it refers to these four things, which torment us far worse than any external demon ever could because these have throughout beginningless time sent us repeatedly into the misery of the six realms.

There are external maras as well. The reason for this is that a lot of our suffering comes from fixating on appearances as external to ourselves, and therefore perceiving them as real. That places us at risk from the characteristics of those appearances. For example, if someone dies because of lack of food and water, then you could say that is a kind of mara because it is the characteristics of external appearance that have caused the death. We tend to think of mara as something ferocious that is going to come along and cut us up or drag us off; it is not necessarily that dramatic

or that overtly unpleasant. Mara is anything that obstructs the practice of Dharma and seduces you into abandoning the practice of Dharma and favoring worldly activities.

STUDENT: It sounds like it only exists if you identify it in those terms. If you separate it out and say that you are being obstructed instead of just looking at whatever is going on and accepting it as being part of what is going on, then you really have not created a mara. Is that right?

RINPOCHE: In a sense you could say it is your own identification of something. Even when it is something external, you could say it is your own outlook in calling it mara, but that does not mean that without that outlook it is not still an obstructor. For example, when I was fleeing from the Communist soldiers, they were shooting at me. I managed to get away, but if they had actually shot and killed me that would have been mara. Whether I thought of it that way or not, I would have died.

STUDENT: You mentioned that right before we would go into our retreat that some kind of event would happen, such as sickness of a loved one, and you identified that as mara. Could you expound on that just a bit?

RINPOCHE: Mara makes use of your family and friends to prevent you from practicing, especially if you are going to develop qualities through practice.

STUDENT: When we experience anger, fear, or embarrassment starting to well up in ourselves or in someone else, before it snowballs, is there some way that we can do a mantra or do something to calm that state and turn that situation around?

RINPOCHE: In general, with an attitude of love and compassion, to recite any mantras that you know or any supplications that you prefer will be effective. If someone has recognized the nature of his or her mind, or at least has been taught how to recognize it, then that person can rest in the recognition of mind's nature. You must be one of those fortunate individuals who have learned how to do this, but it is not something that is impossible. Nevertheless, you need to gauge which type of remedy is more appropriate in your particular situation.

STUDENT: You mentioned that a white swastika going in a clockwise position be created under the place where we actually sit. In Tibetan Buddhism, what does that specifically symbolize?

RINPOCHE: The symbol refers to unchanging stability; the use of it here means the unchanging stability of your seat or place, and therefore your state of meditation.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, is there anything one can do to pacify external maras before entering retreat?

RINPOCHE: As it said in the text, any virtuous thing you can do will increase your merit and make you impervious to the attacks of maras. The recitation of sutras, the performance of prostrations and circumambulation, the cleansing smoke offering, the offering of one hundred tormas, you can do all these different things to increase merit and make you more impervious to the attacks of maras. Maras will continue to attack those on the path until they attain buddhahood.

STUDENT: So there is nothing one can do to pacify the external effects that come right after one goes into retreat?

RINPOCHE: There is no guarantee that doing these things or anything else is going to prevent those obstacles from arising. It is best to develop an attitude that recognizes these things as the obstacles of mara, so that you do not fall prey to them.

STUDENT: What kind of rituals are there to allay obstacles during retreat?

RINPOCHE: All the practices that you do during retreat focus on the pacification or vanquishing of the internal maras and the defeat of the kleshas. You are supposed to focus on that because if you worry too much about external maras, then you focus on either preventing them or fighting with them, with the result that even the thought of external maras or the paranoia of that will be a problem.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, is this kind of retreat possible to do before finishing ngondro?

RINPOCHE: Anyone who has not started the preliminaries would be doing tranquillity meditation, and it might be better for them to start gradually. If someone has started the preliminaries, he or she could do a retreat on the preliminaries.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said that on some days you are able to do more practice than on other days. Is there a natural ebb and flow to your practice that allows that to happen, or are there days when you just cannot practice very well? Do you regard that as an obstruction and something you should just strive to get through?

RINPOCHE: With regard to the situation where external things, like other responsibilities, are preventing you from doing the amount of practice you would have otherwise done, you should fight for that time, because if you do not, then the time that you require for practice gets shorter and shorter and shorter. If you just let it go, see how the day goes, and so on, then you will naturally find more and more things to fill your day that take you away from practice, and as your commitment to doing a certain amount of practice is diminished, the amount you actually do will get shorter and shorter.

As far as working with your state of mind, if on a certain day you find that your mind is distracted or torpid and the meditation is not going well, the best way to alleviate this condition is to supplicate the guru and the Three Jewels with devotion. That may work and that is what you should try. Just hoping for the meditation to go better and just struggling with it will not help.

STUDENT: Practice seems easier sometimes than it does at other times. Are you just supposed to go with that flow or are you supposed to charge ahead through the difficult times and break through maybe to some kind of new way of being diligent?

RINPOCHE: If one of the factors involved is external circumstances preventing you from having time to practice, you may

not be able to control it and standardize it absolutely. As long as you have time, then you should force yourself to do as much practice as you can and push through any impediments. Although there is a certain amount of external activity that we have to do in order to sustain ourselves, beyond that it is important to remember that the only thing that is going to be of use to you in future lives is practice, therefore force yourself to do it.

STUDENT: I have a question about the power and ability of faith. We talked yesterday about the destruction of the monasteries in Tibet and the conditions that have been created in many of them because of this. I wonder what it means because I know there are an incredible number of Tibetans with profound faith in these places and when they go there to get blessings it is very obvious that they receive blessings. I wanted to understand more about that relationship as a way of healing.

RINPOCHE: It is quite possible that someone with great faith could overcome the impairment of the pilgrimage place or site. This is very much like what happens when thangkas or statues speak or give prophecy. Of course, this is primarily a function of the faith of the individual who receives the prophecy. If it were ability inherent in the **thangka** or statue, they would be speaking all the time and they do not. They definitely have spoken and do speak to people with great faith. In the same way,

if someone was to go on pilgrimage to a site, knew the ancient history, was confident that this place bore a great blessing, and had one-pointed faith and devotion, then that faith and devotion would cause the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas to enter this person.

STUDENT: For the first type of retreat that you mentioned, you talked about performing rituals, like making tormas and tsa tsas. I have never been taught to do this. Could I still do a retreat without doing all of this?

RINPOCHE: If you do not know how to make tormas, then you can just leave that out. What you would do instead is meditate on loving kindness and compassion, especially focusing on the beings, human and nonhuman, that are in your area. Visualize yourself as Chenrezik, think that they perceive you as Chenrezik, and meditate on love and compassion for them. That will be sufficient, then go on to do your principal practice.

STUDENT: Regarding going to the bathroom, since this is a natural process in our lives, can we use that process to make offerings to the pretas, and if we forget the mantras, is there a simpler mantra that we can use?

RINPOCHE: The most important thing is compassion, because even if you dedicate it to them with the mantras, if you do not have real compassion for them, then they will get into fights over it. They will all come and they will quarrel and wound one another in order to fight over your urine and excrement. Compassion is necessary. As far as the mantras are concerned, if you cannot remember these mantras, then you can also chant, OM MANI PADME HUNG while you are doing those activities and think that you are donating those things to the pretas. They will be able to receive it. Pretas are all around and they are always trying to get this kind of stuff. It is said that if you blow your nose on the ground, pretas will come and try to get the mucus, but unless it is dedicated to them, they cannot get it. If it is dedicated without compassion, then they will all be fighting over it.

STUDENT: Could you explain what you mean by having compassion for them so that they do not fight over it?

RINPOCHE: It simply means that when you dedicate it to them you should do so with great compassion for them, reflecting upon how miserable they are and also recollecting the fact that if there is no compassion in the dedication, although they can access the material, they will fight over it. Huge numbers of pretas will convene on any of the things that are dedicated to

them and they will fight and harm one another greatly. There is a story that during the lifetime of the Buddha a number of pretas came to the human realm to search for food and drink. For many days they found nothing. Finally a novice monk spat on the ground and dedicated it to the pretas, but he did not do so with much compassion. They were able to access it, but they were fighting over it and most of them did not get any of the spit and all they got was horribly wounded by other pretas.

STUDENT: How does compassion make it possible for the pretas not to fight?

RINPOCHE: It is the power of compassion. Compassion is the most powerful way to protect yourself and others. Simply through the power of compassion attending the dedication of the substances to the pretas, they become peaceful in their acceptance. For the same reason, compassion is the most powerful way to dispel impediments by obstructors or spirits, and compassion is the most powerful way to protect yourself from being killed or wounded in a war or any other disaster.

STUDENT: You were talking about alternating elaborate practices with simple practices and said that if you force yourself in one practice, your mind will become lazy and dull and your enthusiasm

will vanish. It is my understanding that to be diligent in our daily practice we have to force ourselves a lot. Is that correct?

RINPOCHE: It does not really apply to daily practice because in daily practice you are always doing simple practice. What is meant here is really elaborate with all kinds of setups including a mandala, which you do not do in daily practice.

In daily practice you have to be consistent. The idea here is not whether the retreat practice is particularly elaborate, but that you should start by committing yourself only to a relatively short period of practice. Once you have done that, you can commit yourself to a longer one and gradually lengthen it in that way. The approach to gradually increasing your effort is something that can be employed in daily practice as well. Sometimes when people are starting to hear about the ngondro, the preliminaries practices, they hear about having to do 100,000 prostrations and think, “Well, there is no way that I could do that. I can hardly even imagine such a number, much less actually do it.” In some cases I have said to people, “Can you do twenty-five?” They say, “Sure.” So then I say, “All right, then do twenty-five a day, and then move it up to twenty-six, and then increase every day, adding one prostration to the number you are doing.” Many people have found that by approaching it that way they have managed to get through without a problem.

STUDENT: I am wondering about keeping my daily practice fresh. I seem to have concepts about my practice, which seem like obstacles, like scaling a rock wall. Can you comment on that?

RINPOCHE: The problem is not believing in karma. When we have trouble practicing or we find that practice becomes stale and we are unmotivated, the fundamental problem is that we do not really buy karma. If we really bought it, we would have no trouble whatsoever. The other problem that goes along with this is that we do not really believe we are going to die. We believe on some level that we are immortal and we forget that we are heading moment by moment irrevocably toward death. The key to the type of enthusiasm for practice and diligence that has been displayed by all the great masters of the Kagyu tradition is their constant recollection of their own mortality. That alone is sufficient to bring about that type of diligence.

STUDENT: Should retreats always be done inside or are there circumstances where out of doors is good for a retreat?

RINPOCHE: Jetsun Milarepa never owned a house and he practiced wherever he was, which sometimes was a cave. Caves are not necessarily what we would completely regard as indoors. They are, to some extent, out of doors. What is important is that it be a place where people do not go during the day and where

there are neither spirits nor animals during the night. In India people often practiced in the shade of a tree in isolated places in forests. Practitioners just practiced wherever they were. They did not necessarily have any kind of a dwelling. In any case, it is important that wherever you do retreat practice that you do you not see anyone who is not in the retreat and that no one sees you. You need some kind of enclosure, like a fence, to prevent anyone seeing you or you seeing anyone. If the retreatant sees other people, then their siddhi, their attainment, is lost outward and if other people see you, obstacles come in.

STUDENT: You spoke about someone who breaks the seal and how it is bad for you to see someone and it is bad for them to see you. What do you do in a situation like that? Do you tell them to go away? Do you turn around and run? Do you go try to make peace with them? What is the best thing to do?

RINPOCHE: If it happens that accidentally you see someone outside the retreat or someone sees you, then you should immediately formally renew your promise not to have contact for the duration of the retreat and then recite the hundred-syllable mantra combined with the mantra of your yidam.

STUDENT: Do the dharmapalas help with the external maras? Is that part of their protection duties?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said there are both outer and inner dōns. The outer ones can be others, who can either be in bodies or not in bodies, and can harm you. The important thing is that there are inner dōns, which are the five kleshas. You said that unless there are internal, meaning klesha, dōns there could not be external dōns. I am wondering how this relates to the second mara which is klesha.

RINPOCHE: The dōns are essentially the same as the klesha mara because it is the kleshas that propel us repeatedly into rebirth, especially into the lower states. Whether dōns, demons, *geks*, obstructors, or maras exist externally or whether they are merely the projections of a deluded mind, the response to them has to be the same. If you respond to what appears to be the attack of an external demonic force with love and compassion for that demon or spirit, it will at least weaken their power because whether they exist as external beings or not, their capacity to affect you comes through the power of your kleshas. The nature of the attack is the nature of the kleshas; if you respond to them with anger, you demonize them, and they become stronger. If you respond to them with love and compassion, they cannot harm you. There are many accounts of their actually becoming benefactors through the love and compassion of a practitioner.

STUDENT: What is meant by Vajrapani's ability to overcome demonic obstacles?

RINPOCHE: While all buddhas are fundamentally the same in nature, Vajrapani is the embodiment or representation of the power and strength of all buddhas, so when you wish to defeat an impediment you supplicate the guru in the form of Vajrapani.

STUDENT: He is to be used for impediments, but also for demonic forces. How do you know when you are being attacked by demonic forces?

RINPOCHE: Well, what are called dōns, you could say demons, are of two types: external and internal. External demons are when you are harmed by another being, which may be someone you can see or it may be something you cannot see. In any case, that is an external dōn. The internal dōns are your kleshas, your mental afflictions. In dealing with the kleshas, the reason why you would want to appeal to Vajrapani is that when we are fighting kleshas we feel powerless. We feel that the kleshas are much stronger than we are. We need to appeal to someone who is very, very powerful and stronger than the kleshas.

STUDENT: We could use Vajrapani practice for powerful kleshas?

RINPOCHE: Yes, you could. It is also important to remember that unless there are internal demons of kleshas, there cannot be the appearance of external demons.

STUDENT: They have to correspond to some weakness in oneself.

RINPOCHE: It depends on how you define weakness. Weakness could mean something you did in a previous life that could be the cause of something in this life. It is not necessarily a present weakness.

STUDENT: Is the practice made stronger if the guru is considered to be an emanation of Vajrapani or if Vajrapani is considered to be an emanation of the guru?

RINPOCHE: Either way. Because in either case they are the same in nature. You know, it is said in some liturgies that all realms are complete within his body, and his body is found in all realms. You can either think of the guru as an emanation of Vajrapani, in which case the nature of the guru is Vajrapani; or you can think of Vajrapani as an emanation or manifestation of the guru, in which case Vajrapani's nature is the guru.

STUDENT: Can these practices be overdone? Vajrapani, for instance, if you do it for reasons that might not be appropriate?

RINPOCHE: There is no danger as long as you view Vajrapani as not other than the guru, as not separate from the guru. If you think of Vajrapani as some kind of very powerful and very angry being, then it is uncertain what the results will be. It is not that Vajrapani is going to harm you; you might harm yourself with your projection of anger.

STUDENT: You said we could harm ourselves through a projection of anger, but the anger that we visualize as coming from Vajrapani is something that we are using to dissolve some negativity. I did not understand what you said about the anger being negative.

RINPOCHE: It is a mistake to equate the iconographic depiction of the deity with the actual status of that deity's mind. In the case of wrathful deities, if the nature of these deities, what they actually embody or represent, is not understood, then there can be a problem because you could misunderstand them to be the glorification of anger. The appearance of wrathful deities has nothing whatsoever to do with anger in any form. When someone fails to understand this and meditates on a wrathful deity thinking that visualizing oneself in that form is justification for walking around in a grouchy mood with eyes wide open, staring and shouting, "HUM and PHAT" at everyone he or she does not like. Such people have a similar but even more drastic problem with deities that are displayed in sexual union. It is important

to recognize that the form of the deity is just a different way of displaying the same wisdom. It is not a glorification of anger.

STUDENT: But when you are doing the practice, there is an angry aspect to Vajrapani, which is not real anger but is the power of the buddhas, as you were saying.

RINPOCHE: If there is the appearance in your mind of a kind of power that is like the power of Vajrapani to conquer kleshas, that is fine. But it is not at all like anger.

STUDENT: But Vajrapani is also supposed to overcome dōns. Is that kind of power also the positive aspect of aggression?

RINPOCHE: If Vajrapani defeats beings immersed in negativity, in a sense because he is taming beings that cannot be tamed peacefully, you could say that what he does is forceful. You could go as far as saying it is forceful, but you cannot go any farther than that because there is no anger involved. There is no actual violence involved. From the point of view of an observer, you could say that it is forceful activity, which often gets mistranslated as wrathful or violent, but it means forceful. The problem with our observation of that is that we make certain incorrect assumptions about it. For example, if there are spirits that are being liberated by Vajrapani, they do not experience

any suffering, nor do they experience fear. It is not like they are being executed or something. All they experience is a sudden emergence into the bliss of liberation.

STUDENT: When I circumambulate and walk by the retreat cabins, it is very inspiring just to contemplate the fact that at one time someone like Ani Wangmo was in there for so many years. It is inspiring to hear about westerners doing this kind of practice; what types of long retreats are done there?

RINPOCHE: The Ani Wangmo story is that she would need many things in order to do Dorje Phakmo. A situation needed to be put together and we did not have any arrangements at that point as we were still in New York. I told her to do one hundred nyungnes. She had previously received the nyungne vow, so she could give it to herself, but she did not know how to make the tormas and things like that. She told me she was not going to make the tormas; I asked her if she could offer cookies instead. Apparently His Holiness Karmapa had told her that her yidam was Dorje Phakmo and that she should practice that. She had the empowerment from him. She came to me and asked me to teach her Dorje Phakmo. I told her that she first had to do ngondro and she told me that she had already done a Drukpa Kagyu ngondro. I told her to do another one. She came back, not more than three months later, and told me that she had done

another ngondro and again requested Dorje Phakmo. She then did one hundred nyungnes in a tree house, living on bread and water. She did them straight through, came out, and said she wanted to be taught Dorje Phakmo.

By that time we were here at KTD. There was this ruin of what had formerly been that cabin. I told her that first she would have to build a house to do retreat in. I told her to try to get the money to build it and said I would try to get the money to build it and together we would see what we could do. She worked helping an older woman in Woodstock and managed to raise a thousand dollars to redo the outside of it. The outside was finished but the inside was still a wreck. She said that she did not want to wait any longer; she wanted to go in, and she did not care what the inside was like. She went in. I made her do ngondro again and six months of guru yoga. For the next seven years she did the outer, inner, and secret practices of Vajrayogini. While she was doing that, probably during the inner practice, she had a strange experience, where she said she heard thunder come from the sky and along with that the words, “You are an incarnation of Dorje Phakmo, and you are the tenth incarnation in the line.” At the same time she saw the number ten appear in the palm of her hand. When she told me this I got a little bit nervous and I said that I did not know if she was Dorje Phakmo

or not, but I knew she was practicing Dorje Phakmo and that she must continue.

She continued and eventually she finished Dorje Phakmo and she finished the fire pujas; she then did the **six dharmas of Naropa** for three years and that was the end of the twelve years. After she came out I asked her to serve as the lama of a Dharma center and she said no. She said she did not want to do that, she did not have anything to say, and she did not know how to teach. She preferred to live on the beach and meditate alone. If people wanted to talk to her about practice that was fine, but she did not want to make a big deal about it. She is someone whom you cannot tell what to do. If she wants to do something, she will do it and if she does not, she will not. She is also someone who never fights. If you argue with her she will never get mad, no matter how many times you argue, but she will not do what you want unless she wants to do it.

She is indescribably diligent. She did one thousand prostrations every day for the whole retreat until she got to the physical exercises of the six dharmas, and then she cut down to five hundred a day. She never missed a day; she practiced eighteen hours a day of formal practice without missing at all, ever for any reason. She never stopped practicing and she never complained for any reason. It looks like she had some health problems. She

broke a tooth in retreat, which must have hurt tremendously, but she never mentioned it.

Lama Yeshe Losal, who was known before he was ordained as Jamdrak, is the same type of person. He was in there for four years, in the other cabin, and he practiced with the same diligence. Initially, when he first went into retreat he found it difficult, but after practicing tranquillity meditation for a long time his mind became more and more stable and he did very, very well. They practiced with the same diligence; the only difference is that Ani Wangmo was in there much longer. I am confident that those retreat facilities have great blessing because of all the excellent practice that was done there for so many years and because His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa visited them, Gyaltshap Rinpoche visited them, Situ Rinpoche visited them, and many other great teachers visited them.

The Ax That Cuts Through Fixation on the Self: The Manner of Gathering the Accumulations for a Kusali Before One Goes to Sleep

This part of Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma is concerned with the practice of chö, or severance, and begins with the invocation, NAMO PRAJNAPARAMITAYE, "Homage to Prajnaparamita."

The tradition of Chö comes from the great teacher Machik Lapkyi Drönma, who was considered an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal. The essence of her teachings is cutting through or eradicating all forms of conceptualization. Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins with homage to her, and then promises to explain the manner in which a kusali gathers the accumulations of merit and wisdom by giving away his or her body. Karma Chakme then requests the blessings of all the dakinis of the three places — the terrestrial, subterranean, and celestial realms — that he be free to explain this.

A kusali is a yogi or yogini who practices in a very simple way without a great deal of elaboration and without a great deal of

external support. Essentially, what is taught here is a way to gather the accumulations of merit and wisdom through visualization and a simple direct practice. The essence of the practice consists of visualizing that one gives away one's body.

Bodhisattvas who have attained the **bhumis** through their great compassion can actually give away their bodies. For example, in a previous life as the bodhisattva of Great Courage, the Buddha gave away his body. He actually fed his body to a starving tigress at a site in Nepal called Takmo Lujin, which means, “giving one's body to a tigress.” He did this because she was starving and was about to start eating her cubs. Bodhisattvas can actually do that; they are capable of it and there is nothing wrong with it. Doing it does not become an impediment to their path because they realize that all things are like magical illusions or dreams.

If you have not attained the bodhisattva levels you cannot actually physically give away your body. You will not be able to do it. If for some reason you are able to do so, it will become an impediment to your path. For example, the story is told that in a previous life **Shariputra** gave his right hand to Mara. When Mara was dissatisfied with this, Shariputra became discouraged, gave up the Mahayana, and became a practitioner of the Shravakayana. For that reason, it is inappropriate to give up

your body physically if you have not attained at least the first bodhisattva level.

What makes any action virtuous or unvirtuous is primarily one's intention. The result of an action does not depend on the action's appearance or image. A virtuous action performed with an unvirtuous motivation or an unvirtuous action performed with a virtuous motivation is called "a mere reflection of what it appears to be." Since intention is the most important thing, although as ordinary individuals we cannot physically give away our bodies, if we do so mentally we will accumulate a great deal of merit because of our intention.

Among all the types of generosity you might practice, this one is supreme and will accumulate the most merit simply because you are giving away that to which you are most attached. There is nothing that is more precious to us or more valuable to us than our bodies and our lives. When you contemplate giving away your body and giving up your life this is the greatest generosity that is possible.

For someone who makes his or her entire practice chö, and is practicing the visualizations of chö in order to give up fixation on a self, this practice alone is indeed sufficient to accomplish that goal. Chö has a sutra aspect, which is based on the Prajna-

paramita teachings, as well as a Vajrayana aspect. Someone who makes chö his or her main practice is probably emphasizing the sutra aspect. In that case there is still a basic idea that your body is something impure, that it is an aggregate of flesh and blood and not particularly valuable in itself.

What Karma Chakme presents here is for someone who is practicing Vajrayana, someone whose main practice consists of meditating on a deity or deities and reciting mantras. This is the type of chö practice that such a person would do at the end of the day before going to sleep. It is a concise chö practice and visualization that is done as a supplement to your main practice of deity and mantra.

In this context, the practitioner is someone whose body, whose aggregates and elements, have been pointed out by their teachers to be the mandala of deities. As Vajrayana practitioners, they have been taught that the five aggregates are the five fathers, the five elements are the five mothers, and the senses and sense objects are the male and female bodhisattvas. Because in their Vajrayana practice they are both cultivating this understanding by visualizing themselves as a deity, and reinforcing it by summoning and dissolving the actual wisdom deity into themselves, you might think there is some conflict between them consecrating their body with this understanding and then cutting it up and

giving it away. It would seem that they were actually violating the basic Vajrayana practice of viewing their body as sacred. In fact, because of the way this is done, they are not. The key to this is in the technique.

The Multicolored Feast

When you practice chö, you begin by visualizing yourself in your ordinary form. In the center of your body, you visualize the central channel. Inside the central channel, you visualize your mind, your awareness, as a sphere of white light. In some chö practices, you start by visualizing this at the level of the heart inside the central channel. In other chö practices, you start by visualizing it at the level of the navel. This text does not specify, so either is acceptable.

You think that included within this white sphere in your heart or navel are all of the deities within your body, that is, all of the indwelling deities you inherited from your family, all of wisdom aspects of the deities who have been dissolved into you through the process of empowerment, as well as all of your life force, all of your merit, and all of the blessings and power of speech that you have attained through practices such as the repetition

of mantras. You visualize that your mind, in the form of this sphere of white light, includes all of the wisdom aspects of all of the deities that have ever been dissolved into you. In short, you think of your mind as everything that is good and everything that is essential.

Having visualized this, imagine that your mind shoots out the top of your head via the central channel like a bullet being shot out of a gun. While visualizing this, make the sound or exclamation PHAT. As soon as your mind has shot out of your body, you think that it takes the form of Vajrayogini, and that you, as the transformation of that white sphere, really are Vajrayogini. Meanwhile, your corpse falls over and is lying on the ground.

Next you, as Vajrayogini, gesture with the **hooked knife** in your right hand at the head of your corpse. You do not have to go through a detailed surgical procedure to do this. You just gesture at it and that causes the top of the skull, from the eyebrows on up, to pop right off. It flies off, turns over, and lands upside down, as if it were a cup right side up. As it flies, it grows tremendously in size so that by the time it lands it is the size of a billion worlds or a galaxy. It is still in the shape of a skull, but it is huge.

The complete corpse is still there except for the top of the head. Vajrayogini, with the hook on the end of the hooked knife, picks up your corpse and puts it into the skull. Then you, in the form of Vajrayogini gesture with the hooked knife, causing the corpse in the skull to completely fall apart, and it becomes a huge mass of red blood and flesh like a stew, but not cooked. It is warm and fresh.

Above this skull cup filled with your body, you visualize a white OM, a red AH, and a blue HUM. You think that these are the essence of the body, speech, and mind of all buddhas. Saying OM AH HUM three times, you think that the white OM dissolves into the **kapala** and causes everything in it to become a uniform, completely pure mass of white wisdom ambrosia, in essence the wisdom body of all buddhas. Then the red AH dissolves into it and causes the previously white ambrosia to become inseparable white and red ambrosia, like when milk and tea are mixed together, although the color, which here is pink, is slightly different. Finally, when the blue HUM dissolves into the kapala, you think that the pink ambrosia develops a blue gleam to it. At this point, it is wisdom ambrosia that contains within it the essence of the body, speech, and mind of all buddhas.

It is actually an ideal food, not only in essence but also in form. It has all possible pleasant tastes, traditionally enumerated as one

hundred tastes since there are one hundred ways that something can taste good. It has all of them. Not only does it taste good; it has every possible nutritive quality. In other words, it has everything that any kind of being would ever want or need to eat. Traditionally it is described as one thousand nutritive elements, but it is actually much more than that.

At this point in most chö practices, you would summon the guests with a forceful summons, almost like a monk being summoned to an assembly, and then you would overpower them. Here you do not do that. In this practice of chö you simply bring the guests to mind and in that instant of recollection you think that all the guests to whom you are going to give your body are present in the sky before you.

Next you emanate, from the heart of yourself as Vajrayogini, innumerable dakinis who look just like Vajrayogini and who are holding regular-sized skull cups. With their skull cups, they ladle ambrosia from the huge skull cup and present it to the guests. The first set of guests, the root and lineage gurus are visualized in the highest part of the sky in front of you. These consist of the lineage, from the dharmakaya **Vajradhara** to your own root guru and everyone in between. It also includes the gurus of the other lineages and all those who have attained wisdom through Buddhadharma. As the ambrosia, which used to be your body, is

offered to all of these, you think that they bestow their blessings upon you and that you accumulate merit.

Below them are the yidams of all classes of tantra, who also receive the ambrosia offered by the emanated dakinis. It is probably primarily the yidams of the higher tantras because the yidams of the lower tantras are given a separate presentation later on. Below them, you visualize all of the dakas and dakinis. Below them, you visualize the wisdom Dharma protectors; below them the mundane protectors; and below them you visualize all of the demonic spirits who live on the ground, above the ground, or under the ground, and all that are harmful. Finally, below them you visualize all sentient beings of the six realms.

Although you are visualizing all of these in an assembly in front of you in the ranks that were mentioned, the idea is that the emanated dakinis are actually bringing the offerings to all of these deities and beings wherever they are. That is why you did not have to summon them. You visualized them because the offerings are being presented to them at their ultimate convenience without their even having to leave their natural places of residence. Think that all of the deities and beings, all of the recipients, are pleased and satisfied with the offerings.

This is the basic practice of the gathering of accumulations by a kusali, the simplest or most basic form of chö practice, which is in the tantra or Vajrayana style. It is also an offering of your body as a feast. In the higher tantras of Vajrayana the practice of feast is very important. This is the most essential or innermost practice of using your own body as a feast offering. In the specific terminology of chö as an independent Dharma tradition, this is called the multicolored feast. In general, there are many kinds of feast, but principally there are the white feast, the red feast, and the multicolored feast. This is neither a white feast nor a red feast, both of which will come soon, so it is thought of as a mixture of the two. It is both the most basic form of chö practice and the most basic form of offering your body as a feast.

There is a variation on this basic practice which was taught by Guru Rinpoche for the practice of the wisdom protector Maning Gönpö, in which he says that if you are doing dharmapala practice and you are not achieving the result of the practice, then you can do the visualization that was just described, but make the dharmapala you are practicing the principal figure in the assembly of recipients. By doing this chö visualization you will gain the allegiance of the protector. That is a variation. It is not the main practice. The main practice so far was the multicolored feast.

The Red Feast

The red feast is done after the multicolored feast. The transition between the two can be done in two ways. If you want to, you can start again from the beginning and do the ejection of consciousness once more, just as you did before the basic practice. That is good. If you do not wish to do that you can simply think that the leftover ambrosia in the bottom of the huge kapala, most of which has already been presented to the recipients, turns into huge mountains of flesh and meat from your body, oceans of blood, and piled bones like huge cliffs and rock faces.

It is shiny, steaming, warm, chunky, and delicious. It contains all of the parts of your body: the six general parts, your guts and organs, everything, all of which should be visualized for the red feast in detail, appearing more or less, as they actually do, and again hundreds and thousands and millions of them, all present in this huge kapala.

Think that all of the spirits that want to take and eat your body or your life force come and get it. They really get it. They get not only as much as they can eat at the time; they are allowed to take as much extra as they can carry away with them. The red feast is a party primarily for aggressive spirits who want flesh and blood to look like flesh and blood.

Finally, think that the leftovers, all the little bits of flesh, blood, and bone left in the bottom of the kapala, are received by the powerless spirits, those who would like to consume the flesh and blood of beings but are too weak to be able to do so. Thus, you even give to those who are unable to be aggressive and, through that, they become stronger and more able to take care of themselves, and they generate bodhichitta. That is the second chö practice, which is called the red feast. From the two traditions of sutra and tantra, this is most closely allied with the tradition of sutra.

The White Feast

Next, we come to the third practice, which is called the white feast. Again, if you wish you can start from the beginning and eject your consciousness. Otherwise, you can simply think that the slight remnants of the red feast change into a huge mass of the three white things and the three sweet things, become ambrosia, and fill the entire world. The three white things are milk, butter, and yogurt, and the three sweet things are sugar, molasses, and honey. You think that the entire world is filled with this, and is presented to those spirits who dislike flesh and

blood and will only consume these pure and sweet substances. You think that they receive this and are satisfied by it.

You offer the first portion of the white feast to all buddhas and bodhisattvas and especially to the yidams of the kriya and **charya tantras** because this is what their offerings are conventionally made of. After that, with the ambrosia that is left over, you think that all obstructive spirits and all other spirits are satisfied, then all beings in the six realms, and then especially all beings in the bardo. That is the concise and root visualization of the white feast.

These are the three main aspects of the chö practice. During this entire practice all you are doing is visualizing. You do not have anything to chant except for the mantra PHAT, which is used in connection with the ejection of consciousness, and can also be recited more gently periodically while continuing with the visualization.

The text next gives a specific variation on the chö practice, which comes from Karma Chakme. The ejection of consciousness and the visualization of yourself as Vajrayogini are exactly the same as previously presented. In addition, before offering the ambrosia you dissolve all obstructive spirits, embodiments of physical sickness, and other sources of harm into the ambrosia

in the kapala. The offering dakinis emanated from your heart as Vajrayogini are also different. This time the dakinis, although they have the same kind of a body as Vajrayogini, have the heads of eight different animals. There are innumerable dakinis, but they possess only eight different kinds of heads — vulture, garuda, crow, owl, pig, dog, wolf, and tiger.

Innumerable dakinis with these eight different types of heads ladle up the ambrosia with kapalas and present it to the recipients as follows. The highest rank of recipients, who were described in the other versions we have discussed as the gurus of the lineage, are instead, here, the siddhas of India and Tibet. Below, instead of deities in general, are the particular deities of the mandala of Chakrasamvara. There are other deities too, but the principal one is Chakrasamvara and his retinue. Below that are all the Dharma protectors, who are presided over by the four-armed wisdom protector, Gönpö Chakshipa. He is surrounded by the protectors of the five bodies, together with their consorts and retinues, then the traditional retinue of the protectors, which is called here the thousand black ones, the hundred thousand carnivores, the million matrikas, the ten thousand yakshas, and billions and billions of armed attendants. Finally, after presenting the ambrosia to these assembled guests in this order, the ambrosia is presented to all of your karmic creditors and all sentient beings of the six realms.

This specific variation on chö practice arose from Karma Chakme Rinpoche when he was creating a permanent torma for Mahakala. A permanent torma is a receptacle or support torma that will be used for the duration of one's life or possibly kept in the protector's shrine of a monastery generation after generation. He was consecrating the torma by doing the Mahakala mantra repetition for several months while in retreat. During the retreat he had a dream in which he saw this visualization and was informed that even if a practitioner were certain to die, doing this form of chö practice would lengthen his life by twelve years. He comments, saying, "Of course, dreams are bewilderment, so they are not to be relied upon. The visualization that I was given in the dream is essentially the same as was transmitted orally through my family lineage, coming down from the mahasiddha Khacho Wangpo in the context of a protector feast. It was also found in a protector feast with an unwritten instruction in connection with alleviating sickness, which is one of the applications of chö practice." Furthermore Chakme Rinpoche says, "By practicing it, I have myself experienced that it has benefited other people." Here he has given that additional visualization in a very concise form. This variation is one that you can do if you are ill or if there is a special reason for it, but it does not have to be done as a daily form of chö practice.

The basic chö practice has three forms: the multicolored, the red, and the white feasts. Conventionally, chö practitioners go on pilgrimages to haunted or dangerous places. They intentionally go, and they try to go to one hundred places with dangerous or aggressive spirits and practice chö in those places. If you simply do the practice of chö every day wherever you are, then you do not have to go intentionally to dangerous or haunted places. The opportunity to benefit from the practice will take care of itself.

In the form of chö practice we have been discussing, because you are not trying to overpower and forcibly summon the spirits and other recipients, you do not need to be concerned with or wait for the coming together of what are called the arising and overcoming aspects of chö practice. This is where there are signs of things happening, called “arising,” and then you deal with those signs and events, which is called “overcoming.” Since you are not challenging the spirits to a show of force to begin with, you do not need to worry about this.

In addition, because you are not trying to exert force on the spirits, you do not need to conclude this form of chö practice with an elaborate concluding ritual during which you bind the spirits to the place so that they do not follow you around and create problems for you. You do not have to do that because you are not trying to force them to do anything to begin with. You

can just leave and go somewhere else. That is why lamas learned in the practice of chö named this “befriending the nyen.” *Nyen* are a kind of spirit that inhabits certain localities in the world, such as the sides of mountains and valleys. Normally, nyen can be quite dangerous, but here you are taking an attitude that is entirely accommodating and friendly toward them. Consequently, this type of chö practice does not require a lot of additional ritual. Gradually and without your having to worry about it, the arising and overcoming will occur automatically at an uncertain time and in an uncertain order. For this reason, this type of chö practice is the best way to dispel obstacles and the best way to increase experience and realization.

In addition, if you suddenly become ill and you cannot do a lot of elaborate practice involving liturgy and various preparations, simply do these visualizations again and again, a hundred times every day. You do not need to chant anything other than an occasional PHAT. Chakme Rinpoche comments, “I have seen in my experience many times that people doing this even for one day will get well, to a point that is astonishing to physicians.”

Chö Practice to Benefit Someone Who Is Ill

The next section of the text is concerned with applications of chö practice to benefit someone who is ill, that is to say, someone other than the person who is practicing chö. In general, this has been taught in three different ways.

One tradition is that from the beginning of the practice, in your mind, you mix your body and the body of the sick person you are trying to help. You think of the two of you as one person, one body, and then you eject the consciousness and perform the visualizations as before. This is very beneficial to the person you are trying to help, but it is dangerous for the practitioner. Chakme Rinpoche says that he has found in his own experience that it can make you physically uncomfortable or physically ill.

A less dangerous way to do this practice is to visualize your body and the body of the person you are trying to help as separate. You eject your consciousness and the consciousness of the other person simultaneously, but separately. Then, having ejected the consciousnesses, you combine them together as one person who is visualized as Vajrayogini. Then you make the offerings and so on as before. This is somewhat less dangerous, but it is still not the least dangerous way to do it.

The best way to do the practice for most practitioners is to keep yourself and the ill person for whom you are doing the practice entirely separate. You visualize your body and the person's body as separate; you eject the consciousnesses simultaneously but separately; and you keep all the processes separate, so that you are offering your body and the other person is offering his body simultaneously, but in two separate visualizations. This will not cause the practitioner to be at risk. Karma Chakme Rinpoche says that in his own experience this is the safest way to do it.

One must choose from among these methods based on one's degree of realization. If someone has an especially high realization, it might be appropriate to do it the most dangerous way. Generally speaking, you need to combine the instructions you are practicing with your own ability. No matter how profound the instructions may be, if you do not have the necessary strength or insight to apply them properly they will not work. For example, someone who is very strong can carry trees around; someone who is not simply cannot do it. You have to be realistic; therefore it may be appropriate to choose the least dangerous form of this practice.

The Practice of Chö to Effect Changes in the Weather

The first application is the practice of chö in order to prevent hailstorms. Some time ago when Tenga Rinpoche was doing the practice of chö in preparation for giving an empowerment, a storm suddenly came up. In this way, the effective practice of chö is sometimes considered to be connected with changes in the weather. It sometimes happens, especially in particular places in Tibet, that the weather can change dramatically. Apparently, out of nowhere, you can have severe hailstorms. This is dangerous because it can destroy crops and property. If you need to stop or prevent a hailstorm, this is how it is done.

Visualize the place — the earth, the ground, the stones, the mountains, the rocks, and so on — in the form of Vajrayogini who is brilliant red in color. You think that from her body comes a lot of fire that burns up all the hail and all the clouds that are the source of the hail. You visualize that the entire area is completely filled with the fire coming from her body.

If that is not enough to overcome the hailstorm, visualize that the earth and the sky are reversed; that the sky is on the bottom and the earth is on the top in the sky like an umbrella sheltering you, with all the mountains pointing down. You imagine that

all the things that you would otherwise be seeing in the sky are coming up from the ground instead, like being on the shore of a clear lake where one can see everything reflected upside down. You think that the sun, the moon, and the stars are shining up from below you. It says in the text that if you can visualize this clearly, there is no way that you will not be able to stop the hailstorm.

The next topic is protection from lightning. This has three sections because in Tibet it was believed that there were three types of lightning. When we think of lightning, we normally think of it as coming from the sky and hitting us from above, but there is another kind of lightning that comes up from the ground, and sometimes lightning can come at you from the side as well. There are separate methods for each of these three situations.

For lightning that comes down from the sky, you visualize in the sky above your head a huge golden wheel with one thousand spokes. In the center of that wheel, you visualize Buddha Shakyamuni and on each one of the spokes, you visualize one of the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon. That is the best way of protecting yourself and others from the lightning that comes down from the sky. To protect yourself from the lightning that comes up from the ground, visualize yourself as a yidam, which would normally be Vajrayogini. Visualize below you a turquoise

colored bag, almost like a leather bag, as though made out of turquoise but not hard like that. It is flexible and soft, so that if you step on it, it goes down and if you release your foot, it pops back up again. That will stop the lightning coming up from below the ground. In order to protect yourself from lightning that is coming from the side, you would visualize a vajra fence filled with wrathful deities and surrounded by mountains of fire. That will protect from lightning that comes from the side.

In all of these three cases, the mantra to be used is NI NAGA JAMUNTI AH. This tradition of protection from lightning comes from Guru Rinpoche and from the Third Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. It is said that reciting the mantra seven times in coordination with the particular visualization required by the particular type of lightning is sufficient to deal with it. It is also recommended that one write the mantra with golden ink on blue paper and then consecrate it by reciting the mantra and breathing on the paper. If you keep that mantra scroll in your home or if you carry it on your person, you will not be hit by lightning.

There are various practices that may be done when the normal rainfall required for the health of the environment — for crops, flowers, and grass — is not falling. One practice involves consecrating some naga medicine — and there are rituals for doing

so — then casting it into some water source in the area like a lake or a spring. One must also dedicate a white tormo to the nagas and local deities, invoke the truth and power of the Three Jewels, and request the nagas and the local deities to send rain.

The main practice for getting rain is an application of chö. You do the practice as previously explained, with the ejection of consciousness and so on. Here, instead of using your inverted skull as the container, you think that the skin of your former body is removed and is spread out on top of the ground. It becomes so huge that it covers the entire world. Summoned by the light from you in the form of Vajrayogini, you think that the nagas, local deities, and all who have power over whether or not it rains, are assembled; then you do both the white and red feasts many times.

You think that overpowered by Vajrayogini, all these nagas and local spirits are exhorted to send rain. As a result, imagine that rain starts to pour out from all of the apertures in the bodies of these nagas and local deities, from their eyes, their noses, and so on. The rain fills the entire world with water. If you do this, it is said that it will definitely rain within three days. Karma Chakme Rinpoche comments, “I have proven the effectiveness of this in my own experience. There are a lot of visualizations for making it rain, but this is the most effective.”

The next visualization in the text describes how to stop the rain. This is similar to the preceding one. Again, you do the practice as it was just described, and in the same way you overpower the nagas and local spirits. This time you exhort them to stop the rain, and instead of imagining that rain pours out from their orifices, you visualize that fire shoots out. The fire fills the sky, the earth, and the horizon, burning up all the rain and all the rain clouds.

In connection with all of these visualizations, you are simply imagining or visualizing the recipients of the various offerings. You are not actually summoning them; therefore they have not traveled anywhere. They have not left their normal places of residence so it is not necessary to dismiss them at the end. This is mentioned because at the end of elaborate chö practices where the recipients are forcefully summoned it is necessary to give them permission to depart. Here you do not have to do this. You simply stop visualizing them and rest without thinking of them.

The Practice of Mixing: A Special Way to Bless or Benefit Someone Who Is Sick

First, you mix yourself, the person who is ill and the spirit or spirits that are causing the illness. You think of your body, the body of the person who is ill, and the body or being of the afflicting spirit as one. The second part is that you mix that combined person with space. This means you recognize the insubstantiality of yourself, the person who is ill, and the spirit. That is the second mixing. You then mix space with mind by reflecting that wherever there is space there is mind. Finally, you mix mind with dharmakaya by reflecting upon the fact that wherever there is mind, its nature is always dharmakaya. Bringing that view to mind, you simply rest in the confidence of the view.

This is the “practice of mixing” according to the Kagyu tradition, which used to be well known as a way of benefiting someone or blessing someone. In former times people would go to Kagyu masters and say, “Would you please perform mixing for my benefit.” This is what they were referring to, this meditative way of blessing a person. Nowadays, this is not as well known, so people seldom request it.

Another application of chö is for domestic animals. If an animal such as your horse becomes ill and you are concerned that the illness is going to spread among the herd or to other animals. Imagine the sick animal as a skeleton and think that fire shoots out from the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears of the skeleton and surrounding the skeleton consumes it reducing it to ashes. That will bring to an end the illness and protect the animals for the rest of their lives from being harmed by spirits.

Finally, Karma Chakme Rinpoche gives the traditional way of blessing someone, especially a sick person, by a chö practitioner. When asked to bless someone, visualize yourself instantaneously as Padampa Sangye, the Indian yogi who brought the teachings of pacification to Tibet. Visualize that wisdom fire is shooting out from your body in general and especially from your hands since this is probably a situation where you are blessing a person with you hands. Think that it burns away the body of the person who is ill, especially their sicknesses, and whatever spirits are causing the sicknesses. Imagine that it burns them up so completely that there is nothing left. They are just emptiness. Then direct your awareness to them. Mix your mind with theirs and rest in a state of meditation. That is the traditional form of blessing associated with the practice of chö.

Conclusion

This method of practice, the gathering of the accumulations by a kusali, is an extremely profound way of gathering vast amounts of merit. Its profundity is that it requires nothing other than meditation. It is also necessary for anyone who is going to wander around and do retreat in various uncertain places, because even though it is not particularly your intention go to dangerous or haunted places, eventually you are going to bump into one. If you do not practice some form of chö and you are practicing in a haunted place, the spirits who inhabit that environment will chase you out, make you sick, or make you go crazy. It is important to have some kind of practice for dealing with them and befriending them.

In general, many beings wander around to test the meditation of practitioners. If you pass their test, they will befriend you and help you; if you fail, they play nasty tricks on you. If you do even this simple form of chö practice, this basic form presented at the beginning of this section, then you will be able to stay put without any problem in whatever place you choose to practice and live. In fact, any spirits that happen to be there, far from harming you, will actually befriend you and assist you because you are doing this practice. Whatever arises, if you become ill

or if the spirits become mischievous, will actually help your practice; it will not interfere with your practice. Chö instructions are absolutely necessary for someone who is going to wander around and do retreat in various places. Attempting to wander around and do retreat practice without chö instructions would be like attempting to wander without wearing shoes. The reason chö instructions are given immediately after the instructions on retreat in general is that they are very much connected.

The final remarks in this chapter concern this word, kusali. You will find that more often than not in Tibetan texts it is written as “kusulu,” with three U’s. Karma Chakme Rinpoche says this is a corruption. It is an incorrect spelling or pronunciation. The actual Sanskrit word is *kusali*. Karma Rinpoche says if you translate it, kusali means someone with only three concerns. The three concerns are the three things you must do other than meditating. They are eating and drinking, going to the bathroom in the equivalent two ways, and sleeping. Aside from that, a kusali does nothing else but meditate, nothing whatsoever. That is the meaning of the word *kusali*. This completes the chapter on the practice of chö, or severance.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said that the essence of this practice is cutting through conceptualization. Is this really that much different from any other Vajrayana practice that uses visualization and mantra?

RINPOCHE: In essence it is no different from any other Vajrayana practice. What is different is the method. Chö directly attacks fixation on the self and the cherishing of the self that maintains the fixation. The method used is to meditate on giving up your body and your life, which are the two objects of fixation that we use to maintain the fixation on a self. When you no longer have any fear about giving these up, you have transcended a great deal of fixation on the self.

STUDENT: When I first heard about this practice, I got the impression that it was a guru yoga practice. Is that true?

RINPOCHE: It is not classified as a guru yoga practice because that is not the format of the practice; however, it includes all elements of the guru yoga, the visualization of the guru, supplication, receiving the blessings, and presentation of offerings. It includes guru yoga.

STUDENT: Among the various Tibetan traditions, most of them do some kind of chö. Is this one very different from the others?

RINPOCHE: The particular cycle of chö visualizations given in this chapter is a little uncommon, so it is not necessarily exactly the same as the ones performed by other traditions. In general, as you said, some kind of chö practice is done in all the schools because they all uphold the lineage of Shije, or Pacification, which is the source of the lineage of Chö. This particular one is special to the Karma Kagyu tradition. An indication of this is that in the three-year retreats of both the Tsurphu and Palpung traditions the daily chö practice is a liturgy composed by Karma Chakme Rinpoche that uses the visualizations given in this chapter. It is called “the dream prediction” because it is the same visualization that he received in a dream.

STUDENT: Is it okay to jump right in to this practice or do you need some additional background?

RINPOCHE: In general, there is no problem with doing it, but it may be very difficult for someone who does not have a lot of experience. Normally, chö practice is begun after one has begun the preliminary practices, or ngondro. This is because you gain the necessary skills for this type of practice through doing ngondro. In the context of a threeyear retreat, chö practice is

normally begun during the mandala offering, the third of the preliminary practices. One reason for this is that they have the same intention. The function of the mandala offering is to accumulate vast amounts of merit. This is also done through the practice of chö.

STUDENT: Is that done in all retreats, or just in three-year retreats?

RINPOCHE: It is always done in three-year retreats; you start the practice of chö when you get to the mandala offering in the ngondro, and you continue it for the duration of the retreat, and in most cases for the rest of your life. It can be done in individual retreats as well.

STUDENT: Can you go into more detail about the lineage of Chö for Karma Kagyu?

RINPOCHE: In general, the Karma Kagyu lineage of chö practice begins with the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, who received all of the lineages of chö practice that existed at that time. It has been transmitted down from his time to the present through the Karma Kagyu tradition. This particular lineage of chö practice, in this text, begins in its written form with Karma Chakme

Rinpoche, because before his time these visualizations were not written down.

STUDENT: When I first heard chö practice explained it was said that one aspect was welcoming the unpleasant or undesirable. I did not quite understand that part of it. Also, would you please talk a little bit more about bringing chö practice into your everyday life? What is the function of PHAT and when should it be used?

RINPOCHE: What you said is correct regarding the intention of chö being the welcoming of the unpleasant. Essentially chö is like **tonglen**; it is a form of taking and sending. The basic attitude you take, especially in postmeditation, is the same. Of course, the intention of chö practice is the same as the intention of all Dharma practice, which is relieving the suffering and the causes of suffering of others. Here, you are actually taking onto yourself that which would otherwise cause you fear, and in that way removing the causes of the sufferings of others.

Using the exclamation PHAT to cut through conceptualization is a technique that is taught in connection with chö practice. Essentially, as Jetsun Milarepa has said, PHAT has many functions. The nature of this sound externally serves to collect the mind when it is scattered or spaced out; it brings the mind into

focus. On a more profound or inward level, it refreshes your mind when it is torpid, when you are depressed, sleepy, or lazy. Finally, the function of PHAT is to bring a direct encounter between your mind as a recognizing faculty and your mind's nature as the object of recognition. In that sense, whenever a practitioner who is resting in the mind's nature wavers from or strays from that recognition, they can make the sound PHAT forcefully. This will cause their mind to revert to a state of clear, open nonconceptuality, and this allows them to return to and maintain the recognition of mind's nature.

STUDENT: You were just talking about sending and receiving. When you are doing the visualization, I wonder if sentient beings actually benefit from the practice.

RINPOCHE: If the practitioner has great compassion and some degree of realization, other sentient beings can receive direct benefit, even if not, such as when tonglen is practiced by a beginner, because you are cultivating a state of altruism, it has several indirect benefits for others. First, it causes you to accumulate a great deal of merit and to weaken your fixation on a self. As a result, you are more likely to and more committed to benefiting others. In this sense it indirectly benefits others in the case of a beginner and directly benefits others in the case of a realized practitioner.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am trying to understand the connection between Vajrasattva practice and chö practice. For example, in Vajrasattva as I understand it, that purification is purifying one's fixation on a self. Could you say anything about the connection between chö and Vajrasattva? Also, during chö practice does one employ the **four powers** in a similar way?

RINPOCHE: In some more elaborate forms of chö practice there is a similar practice to Vajrasattva called the "Purification Through the Descent of Ambrosia." That type of chö practice involves the visualization of **Machik Lapdrön** in the sky in front of you and ambrosia descending from the mantra in her heart, purifying all of your wrongdoings, obscurations, sickness, and demons, as in Vajrasattva practice, with the additional element that it expels any kind of demons that cause sickness and demons that cause disaster.

In the long practices of chö that involve liturgies, there are confession liturgies that occur throughout it that naturally incorporate the four powers. For example, the chö feast practice composed by the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje is two hundred pages long. In the chö practice presented here the four powers are not particularly present. Here you are not so much concerned with the purification of your being as you are with giving it away, just giving it to others. The real parallel would

be the dedication of the merit to the awakening of all beings at the end of Vajrasattva practice. That dedication, which is an act of generosity, most closely resembles the chö.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, regarding the red and white feasts, you mentioned that the white feasts were for the spirits that are not attracted to body parts and the red feasts were for spirits that were. Is that true in all the different forms of chö practice?

RINPOCHE: Basically yes, but nevertheless the visualizations can vary. There is an almost innumerable variety of specific forms of the white and red feasts. In all of them, though, the purpose is to conform to the desires and expectations of different spirits. For example, in terms of people, I like the red feast. If you were going to feed me, I want meat. On the other hand, many people in this country are vegetarian, so therefore they would need the equivalent of the white feast. Spirits are like that too. Some spirits, generally the more benevolent ones, are like vegetarians. The more nasty ones are like me, and like meat.

STUDENT: The invitation is not forceful in this practice. In the Surmang tradition, is it more forceful?

RINPOCHE: In the basic practice of chö in the Surmang tradition, like the daily generosity of the body, or lujin, it is not a

forceful summons or an overpowering procedure. There is a kind of procedure for attracting the recipients, but it is not forceful. Where you get the more forceful ones is in some of the specific rituals that are applications of chö but not part of the basic practice.

STUDENT: In the visualization where you are of offering your body or illnesses or whatever, how do you visualize offering your ego? Looking at that or maybe at your attachment as a type of disease, how can you offer that?

RINPOCHE: You are not offering your fixation on a self. You are offering what it is you fixate on as the basis for the imputation of a self. The bases for imputation are your body and your life. You offer those two, leaving yourself with no basis for imputation of a self. Therefore the fixation on a self collapses.

STUDENT: Does the word PHAT have a meaning, and what is it?

RINPOCHE: It is a syllable of mantra and is not normally explained etymologically, so it is never translated into Tibetan. It consists simply of two Sanskrit letters: PA, and the backwards letter TA. It is pronounced in several different ways depending on where one is from. Most Tibetans would pronounce it PHET. Essentially, it is given symbolic but not literal meaning.

STUDENT: I am concerned that in doing this practice I would fool myself by just visualizing my body like a movie that could turn it into just another form of conceptualization. Can you help with that?

RINPOCHE: Although you could view the attitude and visualization as merely thought and therefore not dangerous or threatening, since the fixation on a self is also just a thought, they are on the same level. The reason it works is that the objects on which we fixate to give rise to the fixation on a self are our bodies and our lives. In the practice of chö, you are meditating on giving these up. That which fixates on these and therefore generates the fixation on a self is your mind. It is your mind fixating on your body and your life. In the practice of chö, you are training that same mind that fixates on the body and the life to give these up. It works because one's mental attitude is what produces the fixation on a self. Therefore the attitude of being willing to relinquish the basis for that fixation is sufficient to weaken and finally eradicate that fixation itself. Of course, this depends entirely upon sincerity. You have to actually think, "I am giving these away." That thought is sufficient because the fixation is also a matter of thought and of mind.

STUDENT: Is this instruction considered to be the complete instruction for chö, or do we also need to use the drum and bell and hear about all of the details?

RINPOCHE: The practice of chö presented in this section does not have any liturgy and does not have any instruments. That is why it is called a “kusali gathering of accumulations.” A kusali would not even have a drum and bell; if you have a lot of stuff, you are not a kusali.

STUDENT: Is this chö practice recommended when one is close to death.

RINPOCHE: Yes, it is, especially where you train in ejecting your consciousness out of your body. In some forms of chö practice, where you are visualizing Machik Lapdrön in front of you, you could dissolve your consciousness into her heart, or you could think that when preparing for death, you dissolve it into the heart of your guru. That is the most effective form of **phowa** practice.

STUDENT: In trying to make it stop raining, where we become Vajrayogini and take control, it says that Vajrayogini “exhorts.” What does that actually mean? Do we say, “Do not do this!” or “Please do not do this!”

RINPOCHE: Essentially, it means that you ask them to stop the rain. You start by doing the practice as usual, the regular mixed, red, and white feasts. Then you further imagine that your skin is spread over the whole world and you invite all of those beings, the nagas, local spirits, and so forth who have control over the weather. Having invited them, you again do many white and red feasts especially for them. That is the part where they befriend you because you are giving them what they want and need. Having done that, you ask them, depending on what you want, either to make it rain or to stop the rain. Then you do the visualization. If you are asking them to make it rain, you visualize that from all their eyes, ears, and noses, rain shoots out and fills the whole world. If you want it to stop raining, you visualize that fire shoots out and dries up the world.

All of these applications, in this case the applications of the chö practice, depend upon having a stable and accomplished level of that practice in order to be effective. There is no guarantee that when you are just starting to work with the practice of chö, for example, that you can immediately and successfully apply these applications. One of the ideas behind putting people into long retreats like the threeyear retreat is that after they have done a lot of different yidam practices with the requisite number of mantras, they will be capable of performing these applications

because they are used to the basic techniques of which these are branches.

In traditional Tibetan society this was one of the common meanings of the word lama. It referred to someone who had been trained in this way because their job in the society was to provide these kinds of services for other people. Many of the services they provided involved praying for people in certain ways and performing ceremonies of certain types that are applications of the practices in which they were trained. Therefore to be able to use one of these applications you need to practice as much as possible the basic technique of which it is a variety or an application. After that, it will be effective.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I have a question with two parts. I was wondering how practices in the lineages of Padampa Sangye and Machik are different, and how the lineage of Padampa Sangye relates to the lineage of Guru Rinpoche.

RINPOCHE: Basically, the practice of pacification or shije, which was brought to Tibet by Padampa Sangye, and the practice of severance or chö, which was started as a lineage by Machik Lapdrön, are almost inseparable because Machik Lapdrön was Padampa Sangye's foremost disciple. Most of the instructions, even those that come from Padampa Sangye that did not originate

with Machik Lapdrön, we have through Machik Lapdrön. It is very hard to separate the two. Sometimes they are referred to as two separate disciplines or practices, but often they are thought of as one lineage, one system, which is called Pacification and Severance.

The instructions in this chapter that come from Guru Rinpoche are not actually instructions of chö or pacification. They are particular instructions for protection from lightning. They are included in this chapter because of the general context, although they themselves are not normally classified as instructions of chö.

STUDENT: Did the Nyingma lineages of Chö come from other lineages of Chö, possibly from the Kagyu lineage?

RINPOCHE: No, even the Nyingma **terma** tradition of Chö comes from Machik Lapdrön.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, what are nagas and local spirits, and what are their activities? Do they become other things eventually? Can other things become them? Are they sentient beings?

RINPOCHE: Most but not all nagas are considered to be part of the animal realm. They are a particularly intelligent and resourceful type of animal. They are associated with wealth.

There are different types of nagas; some of them are primarily malicious and some of them are generally very benevolent. In both cases, many of these nagas were bound to samaya by the Buddha or by other teachers since the Buddha, and have become protectors of the Dharma.

What are called local spirits or local deities are of various types. Some of them are what are called yakshas. Yakshas are one of four species that make up the lowest level of the desire god realms, “the realm of the four great kings.” The Tibetan translation of the word yakshas is “those who bring harm.” As their name indicates, they can be mischievous, but they are not necessarily malevolent. Then again, some local spirits are in the asura realm and are usually fairly aggressive. Some of them are pretas. In all cases, local spirits can be either benevolent or malevolent, depending on the individual situation. As in the case of nagas, many of them have been bound to samaya by the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, or other great teachers. Those that are bound by samaya will assist the practitioner provided that he is practicing properly; they may also punish the practitioner if he gets off track.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, normally when we say that a being is an animal that would mean that we could see it. If a naga were here, could we see it or is it in some other environment or some other way of being?

RINPOCHE: You are making an assumption based on seeing some animals that all the animals you see are all the animals there are. There are animals we can see and there are animals that generally we cannot see. Nagas are animals that we do not see; nevertheless, there are people that do see them. Those people that see gods, spirits, ghosts, and things like that will often see nagas. In Tibet, people like that were often described as someone with a hole in his or her eye. This did not literally mean that they had a hole in their eye; it meant that they could see things that other people could not.

The nagas are tricky. Even when you do see them, you might not necessarily see them in their normal form. They are normally thought of as something like a serpent. If you see them more or less as they are, you will see some kind of serpent, but you might not perceive them as such. This is the reason for a peculiar question that is asked at the beginning of any ceremony of monastic ordination.

During the Buddha's lifetime — the preceptor in this case was not the Buddha, because Buddha would have known — but anyway, during the Buddha's lifetime a naga decided that he wanted to take monk's vows. He took up the appearance of a regular looking male human being, was accepted, and received ordination. There is a rule that animals may not be ordained

as a monk or a nun. This naga received ordination, but no one thought to ask him, “Are you human?” That night he went to sleep with the other monks in the monks’ quarters and of course when he went to sleep, whatever it was that made him appear human wore off.

One of the other monks woke up in the middle of the night hearing this horrible snoring sound and looked over and there was this huge snake sleeping in one of the monk’s beds. He started screaming, “There is an animal in here, there is an animal in here! Everyone get up!” It caused such a ruckus that a rule was made that they had to be careful not to mistakenly ordain nagas. Therefore when you request ordination one of the questions that the questioner, who is one of the five monks involved in ordination, asks you is, “Are you sure you are not an animal?” If people have not had this explained to them, when they get to that part in the ordination they often feel a little insulted.

The Combination of Longevity and Prosperity Practice: White Tara and Tseringma

This chapter of *Mountain Dharma* is concerned with how to increase and protect the longevity and prosperity not only of oneself, but also of one's teachers, friends, patrons, and others under one's protection. There are many ways of doing this, but the most effective are those that are based on the practice of two different deities. One is the wisdom deity, White Tara; the other is a wisdom deity manifesting as a mundane protector, Tseringma, the deity of long life.

The Practice of White Tara, The Wish-Fulfilling Wheel

NAMO ARYA TAREYE. These words of invocation addressed to Tara indicate that we will be concerned with the applications of Tara practice, specifically *The Wish Fulfilling Wheel*, a practice for the achievement of longevity and protection. There are three ways to do this. If you want to do the practice in the most elaborate

way, you would do the full White Tara practice, which is quite long. If not, you can do the concise daily practice, for which you have two choices. One is by the Eighth Situ Rinpoche and the other one is by the First Jamgon Rinpoche. You can use either of these to do the visualizations and practices that follow. You do the whole practice including offering the tormas and requesting the fulfillment of your aims.

The shortest way, which is without any liturgy, is to simply visualize yourself as White Tara and recite the mantras that are going to be indicated here. Even if you do the White Tara in the briefest manner, you will still need to recite the praises to White Tara and the request for the fulfillment of your wishes. As you visualize yourself as White Tara, in your heart visualize a wheel with eight spokes and a rim. This does not turn; it is stationary and it is lying flat within your heart. The syllables that you visualize on the wheel are standing up; they are not lying flat. In the center of the wheel, you visualize a white syllable TAM, which is the seed syllable of Tara. If you are doing this in order to lengthen someone's life, then surrounding the syllable TAM you visualize the mantra GURU VAJRA DHARMADHATU JNANA GARBHA MAMA AYU JNANA PUSHTIM KURU, and in the middle of this, after MAMA and before AYU, you insert the name of whomever you are trying to benefit. Ideally this would be the Sanskrit form of the name of your guru, if

you are doing this for your guru. If you do not know his or her name in Sanskrit, you can use the name in another language. If you were doing it in order to pacify obstacles, instead of AYU JNANA PUSHTIM KURU, it would be SARVA PAPAM SHANTIM KURU and so on.

The TAM is surrounded by the application mantra connected with whichever activity — the lengthening of life, the pacification of obstacles — you are concerned. Outside of that, to the right of the TAM is an OM and to the left of the TAM is HA. On the eight spokes of the wheel are the other eight letters of Tara's main mantra: TA RE TUT TA RE TU RE SVA. To review, you have the root mantra on the outside, the application mantra on the inside, and in the center TAM.

Outside of that, there are five circles concentric to the rim of the wheel itself. The first one has the sixteen vowels. These are written counterclockwise and they are facing inward. Next you have the consonants, written clockwise and facing outward. The third one has the essence of **interdependence mantra** that is also written clockwise. Outside of that you have a perimeter of little white vajras that are not standing up, but laying on their sides each connected to the next. Finally, outside that you have a perimeter of white fire that is about the thickness of one of your fingers. All of this is stationary and brilliant like white pearls.

Visualizing this in your heart, you keep your body very, very straight. This helps keep the visualization straight and in proper position. Keeping you body straight and doing this visualization is also a profound instruction for purifying discipline. You will do the invitation of the wisdom deity, the dissolution, the bestowal of empowerment, and the arising of Amitabha, lord of the family, above your head, just as is done in any White Tara practice. Although the instructions are not described here, they can be found in the basic instruction in any White Tara text. This is the basic visualization for both the longevity and protection applications.

Protection Circle of White Tara

For the visualization of the protection circle of White Tara you think that outside yourself, arisen from the light emanating from your body as White Tara, is another wheel. This wheel is different in several ways from the previous one that was inside your heart, which was flat and had a rim. This one has eight spokes pointing in the eight directions, and the hub of the wheel, instead of being a flat disk, is actually a ball that is hollow. You are inside that hollow ball shape, like what is made by two rolmo cymbals when they are put together. That is what

the wheel looks like. In addition, there is another spoke pointing straight up, and one pointing down. All ten spokes are coming out of the central hub. The spokes are sharp like sword blades; the point is sharp and both sides are sharp. Outside of that you imagine another sphere, or circle of protection, made like a tent of white vajras, all of them densely arranged so there are no spaces between them. This tent of white vajras is surrounded by mountains of white flame.

The inside of the hub of the wheel is very large. It is like a palace, and you visualize yourself as White Tara in the center. If you are doing the practice of protection for the benefit of any of your teachers, you would visualize them above your head inside this protected area. Anyone else you want to protect you would visualize around you, in front, behind, to the right, or to the left.

Inside the eight spokes that point along the horizon in the eight directions are the eight syllables of Tara's mantra other than OM and HA — TA RE TUT TA RE TU RE SVA. In the upper spoke is the OM and in the lower spoke is the HA. All of these syllables are very large because the wheel is large, and they are blazing with fire.

This wheel turns making it a weapon; whatever and whoever are harming those you are trying to protect, are sliced up by these

spokes. It is recommended to do this White Tara protection circle briefly in both the morning and the evening. In the morning when you do this visualization, visualize it turning clockwise; the purpose is protection. In the evening visualize the wheel turning counterclockwise; the purpose is to turn away disaster. It has been said that those who do it will not be overcome even if they meet Mara. It is considered a very powerful practice; however, for it to be powerful you first must do the White Tara practice accumulating the requisite number of the basic mantra. Then the protection circle is done as an application of that.

Within that protection circle you think that rays of white light are emanated from the wheel in your heart. These dispel all sickness and demons like moonlight dispels the darkness. This light summons the blessings and attainment of longevity from all buddhas and bodhisattvas, which dissolves back into yourself and into whomever you are trying to protect.

Visualizing this, recite the basic application mantra that is found in the White Tara practice in that section of the liturgy. Again, it says that if you want to be specific, you can insert the name after MAMA and before AYU PUNYE. Otherwise, you can just chant it as it is found in the liturgy. You recite the mantra for the bulk of the session and at the end you rest without conceptualization. Finally, you chant the vowels and consonants

of the Sanskrit alphabet and the “essence of interdependence” mantra at least three, or if possible seven times to stabilize and consecrate the visualization and practice. If you are doing it for the longevity and protection of your teachers, for example, you would conclude with the stanza of dedication, “Pal den lama zhap pe ten pa dang,” that we often recite.

At times you can visualize the protection circle in the following way. Thinking that in an instant you become White Tara, visualize that rays of light emanate from your heart. These rays of light are, first of all, white ones, then yellow ones, red ones, sky blue ones, green ones, and then dark blue. Surrounding the circle of protection that was described last time, these lights form six spheres of protection made of the light of those respective colors: white, yellow, red, sky blue, green, and dark blue, which are extremely tough and have no fissures in them. They are completely solid spheres of light, so that nothing, not even a breeze, can get through them. In between each of these six spheres of light, the space is filled with blue utpalas, or blue lotus flowers. Outside the sixth sphere, the dark blue one, you visualize a vajra ground, fence, tent, and canopy surrounded by flames as usual. In contrast to the previous circle of protection in which you need to recite the mantra, when you are doing this form of the circle of protection visualization, you do not need to recite the mantra as you are doing it.

This circle of protection can be done to protect yourself if you feel that you are in some kind of danger. It can be done to protect your teachers if you wish to prolong their longevity and protect them from impediments. It can also be done for anyone else you wish to protect. It is extremely profound and is found in the original tantras teaching the White Tara practice and in the instructions of the Indian commentaries upon them. This instruction for the protection circle of White Tara is a particular feature of the Karma Kamtsang or Karma Kagyu lineage and is regarded as one of our most profound instructions. The fact that this protection circle can protect you from all danger is clearly stated in various tantras, such as the *Tantra of the Four Indestructible Seats*, and also in the *Eight Main Indian Commentaries on the White Tara Practice*. You can be completely certain of the efficacy of this instruction. You do not need to worry about whether it is going to work or not. At the same time, it presupposes that you have a good deal of experience with the White Tara practice so that your visualization is clear and distinct and also that you have previously recited the requisite number of White Tara mantras.

Next is given a particular instruction that can be used if you or someone else is threatened by illness, by enemies, by warfare, or any kind of problem, and especially if you are trying to protect a large number of people. Visualize the circle of protection as it was described last time and visualize it so that the center,

where you visualize yourself as White Tara, is huge. It is so big that it seems to fill the horizon and the whole sky. On top of the ground, in the center of that, visualize a huge moon disk, and on top of that all of those you wish to protect, which could be hundreds, thousands, or millions of beings. In their midst you visualize yourself as White Tara and you think that rays of light from your heart summon all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions who, taking the form of White Tara, are invited into the sky in front of you within the circle of protection. All of them, in their right hands, are holding white vases from which a stream of ambrosia descends washing and purifying all those to be protected. Visualize that all of their sickness, demons, and other problems are purified and that they become like clear, crystal vases in terms of being completely pure. Visualize, once again, rays of light emanating from the wheel in your heart. These rays of light are brilliant white like moonlight and they dispel all of the danger to all of those you wish to protect from enemies, warfare, sickness, and demons, just as the moonlight dispels darkness or the rays of the sun melt the dew. In this case, you would recite the mantra while you are doing this visualization. The mantra begins OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA, then you insert whatever it is you are dealing with, for example, you could say, “danger from sickness, demons, and enemies.” Whatever danger it is, you would just name it. Then conclude

with the mantra SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA, which means “May it be pacified.”

You can do that once, or if it is very important to protect yourself or others, you could do it in retreat for a week. You conclude each session the way you end a usual White Tara practice with the dedication of the tormas, the request for the fulfillment of your aims, the praise “Khorwa Le Drol Tare Ma,” and so on. That is how you do it. If you do this practice, there will definitely be indications of success, either prophecies or predictions from the deity herself — at best in person, if not then at least in dreams. You will receive some kind of definite sign in your dreams that the danger to yourself or others has been averted. At this point Karma Chakme Rinpoche says, “I, myself, based on doing this successfully six or seven times, can bear full responsibility for guaranteeing to you that this works.”

The next application is if you are going to a place where you will face danger on a journey, such as water, an abyss of some kind that you might fall into, or the possibility of thieves or robbers. When you go to such a place, visualize White Tara in the sky in the direction you are going to. Visualize her as huge and think that she is making the gesture of the bestowal of protection and that you are walking under her, literally under her. The exception to this is if it is a danger of drowning in water or falling into an

abyss, then visualize that she is actually holding you up. Use the same mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA, and then insert whatever danger it is, such as danger from water, abysses, or thieves; end it with SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA, or “may it be pacified.” If you do this, you will reach your destination without danger. Karma Chakme Rinpoche said that he had proven it to himself through experience many times when the danger was considerable.

To create a protection cord or protection knot connected with White Tara, use wool or yarn that is clean and if possible spun by a maiden; if not it should at least be clean. It is then purified with the mantras OM VAJRA AMRITA KUNDALI HANA HANA HUM PHAT, or OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHONG HAM. Next, tie twenty-one protection knots in the cord and imagine them to be the twenty-one forms of White Tara. Consecrate the cord by reciting the mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE; then insert, “protect from the dangers of thieves and predators, the bearer of this,” RAKSHA KURUYE SVAHA. *Raksha* means “protect” and *kuru* means “to do, may you do that.” You bless the cord by saying this mantra a hundred or a thousand times; you then summon the deities, dissolve them into the knot, and consecrate it with the “essence of interdependence” mantra. You would then place it around the neck of whomever you wish to protect,

which could be a human, a horse, a cow, or whatever. This is actually taught in the *Dakini Vajra Punjara Tantra, the Tantra of the Indestructible Tent of the Dakinis*. Karma Chakme Rinpoche says here that he has proven the effectiveness of this also many times in his own experience.

The Practice of the Dakini and Protectress Tseringma

The second part of the chapter is concerned with the increase of longevity using a second deity initially referred to as Pandaravāsini, White Raiment, and who is the consort of Amitābha. The practice, however, is concerned essentially with the dakini and protectress Tseringma. This is an extremely profound instruction for lengthening the life of yourself or anyone else and you do it as follows.

First of all, you visualize yourself as Dorje Phakmo complete in an instant of recollection. Visualizing your body in that form as the unity of emptiness and lucidity, you visualize five thrones in your five places, the head, throat, heart, level of the navel, and lower abdomen. Starting from the top and going down, the precious thrones are upheld by lions, peacocks, elephants, horses,

and celestial musicians. On top of these thrones, you visualize the five families of Amitayus. The head on the lion throne is white, the one on the peacock throne is red, the one on the elephant throne is blue, the one on the horse throne is yellow, and the one on the celestial musician throne is green. It is like the usual throne with a lotus and moon. You have been visualizing yourself as Vajrayogini with the five forms of Amitayus in your five places. Then above your head, seated on a lotus and moon disk seat, you visualize in essence, your root guru inseparable from the fathers and sons of this lineage, in the form of Jetsun Milarepa. Milarepa is light blue in color, wearing a single white cotton robe. His right hand is behind his right ear and his legs are loosely crossed. In his left hand, instead of a **skullcup**, he has a horn filled with ambrosia. It is a horn of an animal like a buffalo; it is not very long and it is hollow. Above his head, as usual, you visualize the Buddha Amitabha with his hands in the gesture of meditation, holding the begging bowl filled with the ambrosia of wisdom. That completes the self-visualization.

For the front-visualization, you visualize the five dakinis of long life, **Tsering Che Nga**, the Five Long Life Sisters, exactly as they are described in the text. They each have their own particular color, are holding different things, are riding different things, and so on. In between the self and the front-visualization you place your teachers and everyone you want to protect, gathered

like a crowd. As there is no chanting for this, you mentally invite the deities, both the deities of the self-visualization and those of the front-visualization, and you mentally dissolve the crowd into both visualizations. You use the longevity mantra OM VAJRA AYUSHE SARAHA to supplicate the deities. Then the visualization starts.

Rays of light emanate from the Buddha Amitabha above Milarepa's head (who is above your head). These light rays collect, in the form of light, all of the longevity and merit throughout all that appears and exists, all of samsara and nirvana. Everything collected dissolves into the begging bowl in Amitabha's hands. At the same time, you think that rays of light emanate from the *Five Sisters of Long Life* in front of you and collect all of the quintessence of the elements, in short, everything in the world that bestows the siddhi or attainment of longevity. This also dissolves into the begging bowl in Amitabha's hands. From the begging bowl, the ambrosia of longevity flows over the lip and it enters the top of Milarepa's head, fills his body and then comes out of the big toe on his right foot and enters the top of your head, filling your body. At the same time, from the five families of Amitayus in your five places, rays of light of their individual colors summon all of the siddhis of longevity associated with the five families, that is, they go to each of the buddha realms of that family and collect, in the form of light, the attainment

of longevity that is found in that realm. This also dissolves back into you. The mantras used for these visualizations are the usual Amitayus mantra and a particular longevity mantra of the five sisters, OM ANJIDHARI PANCHAKAKINI VAJRA AYU JNANA SIDDHI HUM SVAHA. *Anjidhari pancha dakini* refers to the five dakinis, *ayu* is “life,” *jnana* is “wisdom,” and *siddhi* is “attainment.” That is how to prolong your own longevity.

Next is how to do the practice in order to prolong the longevity of others. You think that from the Amitabha above your head rays of light emanate that are as bright and strong as sunlight. At the end of each ray of light is an Amitabha, each of whom ends up above the head of each of those you are trying to protect. Then by reciting the same mantras as before, you think that rays of light emanate from the bodies of the five sisters, summoning all the prosperity, good fortune, glory, longevity, and merit of the environment and its inhabitants, all of which dissolve into the begging bowls of the Amitabhas above each being’s head. These overflow and enter into the top of the head of those persons you are trying to protect, filling their bodies and causing them to attain the siddhi of immortality. It is good if you can do this briefly every day, if not, then on the eighth day, the fifteenth day, and so on. If you want to do it in a more elaborate way, you can do the whole practice of Tseringma, which would involve the whole visualization of the Five Sisters using the liturgy. If you

want to do it in a more concise way, you can just do the tormas offering ritual to Tseringma. If you want to do it in a really concise way, you can just do the tormas dedication to Tseringma, which is very brief. At the conclusion you request that she and her retinue increase the longevity, welfare, and prosperity of those you are trying to protect.

These instructions originate from the sadhanas of Tseringma composed in the vajra words of Jetsun Milarepa and his disciples Rechungpa, Shiwa Ö, and Ngen Dzong and also the sadhana composed by Tsang Nyön Heruka who wrote the standard biographies of Marpa and Milarepa. The essence of all of these is condensed into one easily understood and very profound practice.

We have discussed the practice using White Tara and the practice using the dakini Tseringma. Next we will discuss the attitude one needs to take in praying for your guru's longevity or doing a ritual for your guru's longevity. The reason why this needs to be explored is that enlightened beings such as the fathers and sons of the Kagyu lineage are nirmanakaya buddhas, which means that their existence is not karmically determined. They have control over their life span. Not only can they choose where to be born, but they can also choose how long to live.

The fundamental thing you need to do to keep your teachers alive is not to cause them sadness. Sadness here means the way enlightened teachers feel when their students are not benefiting from their instruction. If the students are not benefiting from their instruction there is no reason for them to remain in this world. As long as that does not happen, as long as a teacher still feels he or she is benefiting people, and has attained that state where he or she has control over life span, the teacher will remain alive. From the point of view of the sutras, because these teachers are nirmanakaya buddhas, they have control over their life span and their life span really depends entirely upon how much they are benefiting beings. Until they “exhaust all of those to be tamed,” which means until they have done whatever they were born to do, even if they were poisoned, attacked with weapons, and cursed with magic, nothing would happen. They would remain alive. Once their work is completed they will not remain alive because they have work elsewhere; they have other beings to benefit in other realms. They will disappear from one realm when their work in that realm is temporarily finished. In the sutras it says that anyone who has attained even the first bhumi, let alone perfect buddhahood, even if they are attacked by billions of soldiers of Mara, not one of their little body hairs will be bent in that attack.

An instance of this is an incident that occurred in the early life of the Sixth Gyalwang Karmapa, Tongwa Donden, who was quite playful when he was very young. He was spending his time playing and his attendants or tutors felt that he was being too distracted and that he should be spending his time doing practices to ensure his own longevity. They advised him not to be distracted in play, but to perform ceremonies for his own longevity. He replied that he and his attendants did not need to do the ceremonies for his own longevity because Guru Rinpoche was doing them in the Copper Colored Mountain and Maitreya was doing them in Tushita.

The point of this story is that, from the point of view of the sutras, the longevity of a teacher depends entirely upon how beneficial they are as teachers. Their benefit depends on how much use students make of their teaching. From this point of view, in our tradition we consider the foremost ceremony for the longevity of our teachers to be the longevity supplication, which can be very elaborate such as offering a mandala. The behavior of the students, however, is more important. If the students of a teacher keep their commitments and especially try their best to enact the teacher's vision for the benefit of beings and to assist in the teacher's activity, then naturally the teacher's health will be good and his life will be long. When students stop caring about their teacher, when they stop keeping their commitments, and

when they stop trying to bring about the achievement of their teacher's vision, their teacher's life becomes like a lamp from which the oil is exhausted. The flame will go out. On the other hand, every time you supplicate your teacher to remain, it is like renewing or refreshing the oil in the lamp. From the point of view of the sutras, because enlightened teachers have control over their life span, their life span depends upon supplicating them to remain. Even if for whatever reason they need to pass away, your supplication for their longevity will create, as a karmic consequence, your own longevity because of the correspondence of cause and result. That is the sutra point of view.

The tantric point of view is slightly different. Here we get into what is tangentially connected with what is called "forceful mantra." Forceful mantra refers to practices, usually involving the repetition of mantra, that enact the fourth activity, which is force. The four activities are pacification, enrichment, attraction, and force. What is going to be said here is not only true about forceful mantra, it is true about the strength or efficacy of any of the four activities as a result of the full realization or achievement of a yidam practice. According to the sutras anyone who has attained some degree of enlightenment cannot be harmed by anyone else, no matter what. According to the tantras, they can be harmed.

The point of saying this is so you understand that even though your teacher is enlightened, you still need to pray for their longevity and still need to do things for their benefit. For example, in protector tantras such as those of the Four-Armed Mahakala, it says that forceful mantras accomplished with great exertion can terminate the life of even a tenth-level bodhisattva, or even a vajra holder, or even someone who has the life of Brahma. Forceful mantras refer to mantras that have such force that they are not recited aloud. If they are recited aloud, they will actually hurt or at least terrify spirits. That is why certain mantras are always said almost or actually silently.

The point here is that these mantras have great power. It is not only mantras that have power. The Buddha said that mantras, medicine, and substances all have inconceivable power, which is to say that the limits of the power of medicine, the limits of the power of physical substances, and the limits of the power of mantra are beyond our estimation.

There are other stories about this, for example, a Hindu magician who once stuck his magical dagger into the head of a statue of the Four-Armed Mahakala. This statue, which had previously displayed many miracles, after being stabbed with the dagger no longer displayed miracles. This is not to say that the magician was able to affect the state of the Four-Armed Mahakala, who

is a wisdom protector. It simply means that the power of the magician's practice of mantra was enough to actually impair the consecration of the statue.

Another illustration of this is that the great master Ra Lotsawa, through his accomplishment of the mandala of Vajravarahi, terminated the life of thirty-two bodhisattvas. When you hear this, you think that is terrible. In fact, you should not assume that he did this out of anger or hatred. In most cases he did this for the greater benefit of beings.

An example of this is the son of Marpa the translator, named Tarma Dode. The actual cause of Tarma Dode's apparently accidental death was Ra Lotsawa's response to a challenge of magic by Tarma Dode. Tarma Dode died because Ra Lotsawa was stronger. After he died Tarma Dode, in the body of a pigeon, transferred his consciousness to the Brahmin boy in India, who grew up to be Tiphupa. Because of Tiphupa, the Formless Dakini Teachings, that shape the most secret kernel of the Kagyu teachings to this day, were brought to Tibet by Rechungpa who received them from Tiphupa. Had Tarma Dode not passed away, these teachings would have ceased to exist. It is believed that this is the reason why Ra Lotsawa did what he did.

There are more stories. There were two great teachers of the Sakya tradition that were friends, and who had a contest of magic in which both died. Ra Lotsawa and Nyen Lotsawa practiced the same deity. To see who had practiced it better they challenged each other to a contest of magic, which was a stalemate since neither was able to overcome the other.

Closer to home, when the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, was ill he told his retinue that someone was cursing them. He told them that he and they needed to do an “averting ceremony.” An averting ceremony is one in which you turn away or set up a shield against a curse. His disciple, Thugden Drakpa Sengye, did such a ceremony based on the deity Yamantaka. The whole village in which the people who were cursing them resided was struck by an illness in which all affected defecated blood. The people who were doing the cursing were nine magicians doing this together in a cave. The cave in which they were doing the cursing ritual caved in, killing them all. After that the Third Karmapa got better. This need not have been evidence of magic from our viewpoint because if you attempt to curse bodhisattvas like the Karmapa, it might be dangerous.

The point of all of this is simply that even a teacher of high realization might be threatened by some sort of negativity coming from elsewhere. To do ceremonies of protection for

your teacher is worthwhile. You should not think that because your teacher is enlightened that he does not need your help. He might need your help.

The two means that were taught here, using the White Tara protection circle and using the longevity visualization connected with Tseringma, do not involve any morally questionable things like forceful mantra. It is a wisdom deity and an emanation of that wisdom deity. White Tara is a wisdom deity and her emanation is the dakini Tseringma. In her wisdom form as White Tara, she has tremendous blessing and compassion, and in her worldly form as the dakini Tseringma she is powerful and very, very quick to bring results. To use these two means of protecting your teachers, your Dharma friends, yourself, your students, your patrons, and so on, for increasing longevity, merit, prosperity, and so on, is an excellent act of service. It harms no one. Unlike the practice of forceful mantra, this does not involve anyone being harmed; therefore there is no negative karmic repercussion to it. It is beneficial all around. It is beneficial to the person who does the practice and to those for whom the practice is done.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche says that he did not make this up. These visualizations are found in the tantras themselves. He also tells us that this is not theoretical; this is something that you can actually put into practice. It is not that difficult to do.

He goes on to say that he is not teaching this just on the basis of having read these instructions somewhere but, as he mentions again and again, he has actually experienced the efficacy of these instructions himself. He goes on to say, “These profound methods which I have continually practiced myself I give to you, Lama Tsondru Gyamtso, the person who requested this whole book, the child of my heart. Do not hide them and do not let them be lost. Use them to benefit beings as greatly as possible.” In other words, these instructions, the White Tara circle of protection and the practice of dakini Tseringma, should not be kept hidden nor should they be allowed to die out, because they are so beneficial. Then the chapter concludes,

“In that way the yogi Raga Asya, Karma Chakme, on the twenty-eighth day of the Trum month in the Horse Year, in a morning session on the day of the feast of the guru, taught this and it was written down by the person who requested it, Lama Tsondru Gyamtso. If I have revealed anything that should be concealed, I confess it to the dakinis of the world. By the virtue of this, may the lives of the holders and upholders of the teachings be long, may all obstacles be pacified, and may their activity flourish.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche, please go over the application mantra for the White Tara practice slowly. Also, where should we insert the name of the person we want to benefit?

RINPOCHE: The one that is given in this chapter of the text is slightly different from the one that is in the White Tara practice. It is sufficient to use the one that is in the White Tara liturgy that has been translated, and which is available from KTD. You will notice that there are two mantras in that practice. One is the essence mantra of Tara, which has ten syllables. The other one is the application mantra, which is primarily concerned with the achievement of longevity and wisdom. The basic application mantra of White Tara is in the liturgy itself. In this chapter it says to insert names in the middle of it, but practically speaking, what people do is they use the one that is in the liturgy.

STUDENT: And just think of the person? You do not need to actually name the person?

RINPOCHE: When you say the syllables MAMA in the middle of that mantra, then you think of that person, whoever it is. The only substitution that is normally done is that if you are doing the practice for the benefit of one of your teachers, then you

would change the word MAMA to GURU. Aside from that, it is basically what is in the liturgy.

STUDENT: Then you recite the White Tara mantra?

RINPOCHE: Actually, when you are visualizing the circle of protection itself, you one-pointedly focus on the visualization of it. You do not need to recite the mantra, but it must be preceded by the whole selfvisualization and mantra repetition of White Tara.

STUDENT: How many times do you recite the root mantra before you do the longer White Tara mantra?

RINPOCHE: The basic proportion is ten to one, so the mantra requirement is one million of the short, ten-syllable mantra and one hundred thousand of the application.

STUDENT: You mentioned that if you were going to protect somebody, you would visualize the tent around him or her. Exactly what do you recite, the root Tara mantra and then a request for protection? What is the rest?

RINPOCHE: Actually people only use the mantras that are in the White Tara practice itself. This text gives you some varia-

tions on the application mantra where you could put different things in, but in practice they use the application mantra that is in the liturgy.

STUDENT: I wonder if there is a less elaborate version of the invocation to White Tara evoking her protection. The visualization is rather elaborate and I do not have all the requisite empowerments. I often think, especially in dealing with a fourteen-year-old son and with difficulties in my life, that perhaps if there was a shorter and less elaborate version, I might be able to do the practice.

RINPOCHE: By visualizing White Tara and reciting her mantra you can pacify obstacles; that is sufficient. In particular, if you want to protect yourself and others and you do not wish to do the whole circle of protection visualization, you can simply visualize above yourself White Tara and those others you wish to protect, and think that she extends the gesture of the bestowal of protection over you and that you are all protected. That will do it. In fact, it is the same as you would do with Green Tara. It is the same mudra that she is always making with her left hand.

The Melody of Brahma: The Difference Between Sutra and Tantra and the Practice of Tantra in General

The invocation at the beginning of the chapter says, NAMO GURU VAJRAPANIYE, meaning it is dedicated to Vajrapani. Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins, “Lama Tsondru Gyamtso, listen carefully, in order to remain in retreat and practice, you must know the difference between sutra and tantra.”

Remaining in retreat is not simply living in the wilderness or being in isolation. It is making use of that situation to practice. In order to practice, you need to know at least a little bit about what you are practicing; you must know the basic difference between sutra and tantra.

Tantra is superior to sutra in three ways. Although we could say tantra is superior to sutra in countless ways, they can be summarized into three aspects: tantra has many methods, it does not require the time and difficulty of the sutra path, and it is directed for those of the highest faculties. The first, that tantra has many methods, refers to the fundamental purpose of

Dharma practice, which is to tame the mind, to tame the mental afflictions. In the tradition of the sutras, the only way to tame the mental afflictions of attachment, aversion, and apathy is to abandon them. According to the sutras there is no other way to deal with them, therefore there is no way to attain awakening without completely abandoning, and in that way eradicating, the mental afflictions.

In tantra, there are several different ways of dealing with, or eradicating, the mental afflictions. The first and primary method is the same, abandoning the mental afflictions. In addition, there are means for purifying them, means for transforming them into wisdom, means for taking them on the path, and means for recognizing their basic nature as wisdom. Thus, tantra is superior because it employs many methods through which awakening can be attained.

The second superiority of tantra is the length of the path. The path of the sutras takes, at the very least, three periods of enumerable aeons — enumerable meaning ten to the power of sixty — and for that period the path is very, very difficult. In the path of the sutras, which consists of the practice of the six perfections, one must engage in the most perfect and intense practice of each of these. When practicing the perfection of generosity, a bodhisattva training in the path of the sutras must repeatedly give away

such things as his own head as well as most everything of value to him including his family. This needs to be done thousands and thousands of times throughout these aeons.

Bodhisattvas have to cultivate such patience that even if an enemy cuts up their body into tiny pieces of meat and weighs each of these on a scale, they do not become the least bit irritated or impatient. A bodhisattva has to cultivate a degree of samadhi or meditative absorption so profound and unwavering that he can remain in this state for ten thousand years without one thought arising. This process of gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom must continue for these three periods of enumerable aeons. According to the sutras, there is simply no way of attaining buddhahood without that long period of the path. Comparatively, according to the tantras, buddhahood can be accomplished in a much briefer period because the path does not have to be that long and does not have to involve such dramatic austerity.

The reason for this is that the path of sutra is for those of ordinary faculties and without a long period of innumerable aeons devoted simply to gathering the accumulation of merit and purifying obscurations, those of ordinary faculties cannot realize emptiness. Until emptiness is directly realized one does not attain the first bodhisattva level, therefore in the path of the

sutras, because it is directed to ordinary individuals, the first period of enumerable aeons is devoted entirely to the gathering of the accumulations so an individual can recognize emptiness directly and attain the first bodhisattva level.

By comparison through employing the methods of tantra this same realization can be accomplished in one lifetime. This depends upon great diligence and pure samaya. One would have to practice like Jetsun Milarepa. We know by his example that it can be done; in fact, he attained not merely the first bodhisattva level, but full awakening in one lifetime. According to tantra, depending upon one's faculties, it can be done in twelve years, in three years and three months, or in extremely rare and fortunate cases in one period of instruction, in which the student is of the highest capacity and the teacher is of the highest skill and realization. In such a case, emptiness can be realized in one session. In that way, tantra is superior because it employs many methods, does not involve a long and arduous path, and is directed at those of the highest capacity.

Tantra, or secret mantra, in its scriptural basis consists of texts that are called tantras. There is no limit to these, so there is no number that we can point to as the upper limit and then say there are no more tantras, however, they can be subdivided. In the Sarma or new tradition, they are generally divided into four

— the **kriya tantra** or action tantra, **charya tantra** or behavior tantra, **yoga tantra**, and **anuttara yoga tantra** or highest yoga tantra. In the Nyingma tradition, they are generally divided into six: **kriya yoga**, **upa yoga**, **yoga**, **maha yoga**, **anu yoga**, and **ati yoga**. In either case, the fourfold division is the primary one.

The reason for all tantras being classifiable into one of four categories is that each category has a correspondence to the human world. The first is that since tantra is concerned with the skillful and powerful way to eradicate mental affliction, the classification of tantras is based upon how forcefully it eradicates mental affliction and what degree of mental affliction its practice can eradicate. If we use desire as an example, **kriya tantra** makes use of and eradicates the desire of gazing, **charya tantra** of smiling and laughing, **yoga tantra** of holding hands, and **anuttara yoga tantra** of sexual embrace.

The four tantras correspond to the four castes, which arise in one form or another in most human societies. **Kriya tantra** corresponds to the needs, social outlook, and psychology of Brahmins; **charya tantra** to those of the lesser nobility or commoners; **yoga tantra** corresponds to those of the royalty; and **anuttara yoga tantra** to those of the lowest caste and outcasts. You could say that the tantras were presented in four types to

deal with four levels of attachment and to deal with the four dispositions based on social position and outlook.

The four tantras correspond to four periods in human history. Kriya tantra corresponds to and is ideal for practice in the golden age or perfect age, charya tantra for the second or lesser age, yoga tantra for the third age, which is not a very good time, and anuttara yoga for the age of decadence or degeneration, which is the present age. In short, each of the four tantras is more profound and more powerful than that which precedes it.

The four levels of tantra can be divided into two, in which case the kriya, charya, and yoga tantras are called the outer or external tantras, and the anuttara yoga is called the internal or inner tantra.

The characteristic of the **outer tantras**, and the reason why they are called this, is that the wisdom deities are conceived of as fundamentally external to the practitioner and as abiding or living in a pure realm that is somewhere else, in some specific quadrant of space. It is of primary importance in the practice of all the outer tantras to invite the deity from somewhere else, venerate the deity, and request the bestowal of siddhi. The inner tantra, the anuttara yoga tantra, is divided into three levels in both the Sarma tradition and in the Nyingma tradition. In the

Sarma tradition, it is called **father tantra**, **mother tantra**, and **nondual tantra**. In the Nyingma tradition the higher tantras are called maha yoga, which means great yoga; anu yoga, which means subsequent or ensuing yoga; and ati yoga, which means ultimate yoga. According to Karma Chakme Rinpoche's teacher, the great master Chokyi Wangchuk, the terms used in these two respective traditions are synonymous. Father tantra and maha yoga refer to the same thing. Mother tantra and anu yoga refer to the same thing. Nondual tantra and ati yoga refer to the same thing. The basic point of these three levels is the same even though they have distinct lineages and distinct liturgical styles.

The characteristic feature of the **inner tantras**, the anuttara yoga tantra with its three subdivisions, is that the yidam, the wisdom deity, is not seen as external to the practitioner. It is seen as the embodiment of the practitioner's own mind itself; therefore these three levels of tantra are called the inner tantras because the deity is understood as internal.

There are four thousand kriya tantras, six thousand charya tantras, eight thousand yoga tantras, and innumerable anuttara yoga tantras. All the Buddha's teachings on which tantra is based, the tantras themselves, are called the *Vidyadhara Pitaka*, the "basket of the bearers of awareness," or fourth basket. From the point of view of Vajrayana, the teachings of the **Tripitaka** — the vinaya,

sutras, and **abhidharma** — are merely a preparation to bring you up to the level where you can practice tantra. From the scriptural classification of Vajrayana, the Tripitaka is considered the retinue of the vidyadhara pitaka, which is the principal scripture.

You may have heard it said that the teachings of tantra or secret mantra are only present in the teaching of this particular buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni, the fourth of the thousand teachers of this fortunate kalpa, and that the teachings of secret mantra will not arise during the teachings of the buddhas of the future and have not arisen during the teachings of the buddhas of the past. This does not literally mean that there was no Vajrayana in the past or that there will be no Vajrayana in the future; it means that it will not be widespread. During the teaching periods of future buddhas, the fortunate will receive Vajrayana teachings as a secret, oral transmission. It will not be publicly known, consequentially, there will not be the phenomenon that we have in our world today where many people have heard of secret mantra and where Vajrayana is a recognized and publicly known tradition within Buddhism. That will not happen again.

The teachings of the sutras and the teachings of the Tripitaka were taught by Buddha Shakyamuni, the nirmanakaya Buddha Shakyamuni. We will now discuss the three types of teachers. This does not mean three different buddhas. It means how the

Buddha manifested in order to teach the different vehicles or stages of the doctrine.

The teachings of sutra are called the nirmanakaya teachings because they were taught by the Buddha in his nirmanakaya form as Buddha Shakyamuni. It is taught that the teachings of sutra will last for a period of five thousand years from the time that the Buddha taught them. Within these five thousand years, there are predicted ten distinct periods in the degradation of the doctrine.

These are as follows. For the *first five hundred years* after the Buddha's parinirvana, while not everybody who entered the gate of Dharma did so, it was very common for people to expeditiously attain the state of an arhat, or foe destroyer. For the *second five hundred years* after the Buddha's parinirvana, it was less common for people to attain this state expeditiously, but it was very common for them to attain the state of an arhat stream-enterer. In this context, stream-enterer means someone who will eventually, attain the state of an arhat.

For the *third five-hundred period* after the Buddha's passing, it was very common for practitioners to attain the result of a nonreturner. A nonreturner is someone who will not attain arhatship in that life but will attain it in the bardo. For the *fourth*

five-hundred year period after the Buddha's parinirvana, it was very common for people to attain the state of stream-enterer nonreturner, which means that they will at some point in their life attain such a state that at some point in the bardo they will attain the state of an arhat.

During the *fifth five-hundred year period* after the Buddha's parinirvana, it was common for people to attain the state of a once-returner. A once-returner is someone who, in his or her immediate next life will attain the state of an arhat. In the *sixth period* after the Buddha's parinirvana, it was common for beings to attain the state of a streamenterer once-returner, which means that in that life they will probably attain the state of a once-returner, therefore in the next life that of an arhat. In each of the six five-hundred year periods immediately following the parinirvana of the Buddha, the majority of practitioners attained those states. All six periods are called the "period of the fruition and the period of accomplishment."

The next fifteen hundred years — three five-hundred year periods — are called the "period of tradition." The emphasis is on the study and maintenance of the tradition as there is not much accomplishment of the fruition, although it is not unknown for people to attain arhatship. The first five hundred years, which is the *seventh five-hundred year period* after the Buddha's parinirvana,

is the period of the flourishing of abhidharma as the tradition. The sutras are the tradition of the next five-hundred year period, which is *the eighth*, and the vinaya is the tradition of the *ninth five-hundred year period*. During these last three periods, while there will still be extensive and proper explanation of the Buddha's teaching, very few people will attain arhatship. That is why it is called the period of tradition, rather than the period of fruition.

The time of a mere sign of the doctrine is the *last five-hundred year period* at the end of the five thousand years. During this time people will wear the dress of monastics and bear the appearance of practitioners, but there will be very little authentic explanation or practice, let alone fruition. Although the Buddha's teachings will have passed away the images of the doctrine — the stupas, statues, and books — will remain until the present downward swing of human life span starts an upward swing back up to six hundred years.

The five-hundred year periods may not last exactly five hundred years because circumstances can lengthen or shorten them. There is some misunderstanding about this. For example, it has been said by certain persons that the Buddha said that the creation of an order of nuns would shorten the duration of the Buddha's doctrine. What the Buddha meant was, that with both men and women practicing, there are more people practicing. More people

practicing will cause more people to attain the result that was karmically certain for them already, which would shorten the period. It is not that fewer people will be benefited. It would just cause it all to happen more quickly, therefore in spite of the predictions, there are many reasons why we cannot be certain that each of these periods is a strict five-hundred year period of history.

There is some disagreement among scholars about the division of the ten periods of five hundred years. Karma Chakme Rinpoche says, “If you put together the predictions of Guru Rinpoche that come from his wisdom, those of King Songtsen Gampo, and the writings within the Sakya tradition, and you try to figure it out, I think that right now we are in the middle of the ninth five-hundred year period.” This means that three hundred years ago we were in the middle of the second to last five-hundred year period, during which there was primarily propagation of the vinaya.

The teachings will disappear after the five thousand years has past. Even before that, when we have reached the ninth period — which according to Chakme Rinpoche we reached by the mid-seventeenth century — the fruition period is gone with the consequence that even though people practice Dharma, very few actually attain the result, which in this context of the

sutras is arhatship. You might say, “Well, why then should we bother to practice? What is the point if we are not going to attain the results?”

In a simpler way, we can divide the remaining period of the teaching of any buddha into two periods — the fruition period and the causal period. The fruition or resultant period is when those involved in the current buddha’s teaching initially enter the gate of Dharma during the teaching of the previous buddha. They are ripe for awakening. For example, those who attained enlightenment so expeditiously during and soon after the Buddha’s life, had begun to practice under the previous Buddha Maha Kashyapa, therefore under the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, they attained enlightenment quickly. The second half of the duration of any buddha’s teaching is called the causal period because most of those who involve with the teaching at that point are newly entering the gate of Dharma, which they enter under that particular buddha’s teaching. Those who are practicing now are, for the most part, just starting out under the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni. We will attain awakening during the period of the teachings of the Buddha Maitreya.

The predictions in the tantras regarding the duration of the doctrine tend to be that the doctrine will last much longer. For example, in the tantra called *Piled Hooked Knives* it says that

there will be several five-hundred year periods of the doctrine of body, speech, mind, and qualities making a total of nine, then four more corresponding to the four activities connected with the practice of dharmapalas. The *Kalachakra Tantra* in particular states that the duration of the doctrine will last many thousands of years. In the tantras of the Great Perfection or Dzokchen, it indicates that at least the Dzokchen doctrine will last even longer. It says that the period when span has diminished from one hundred years at the time of the Buddha to sixty years, and then continues down until it gets to the shortest average life span, which is ten years, that it will be the time of the doctrine of the mind of *Samantabhadra* or the dharmakaya. Therefore it says that practicing Dzokchen during that period will bring liberation easily. The duration of the teachings of terma or treasure is said to be extremely long because for each treasure cycle that disappears or is no longer practiced a new one arises to replace it. A teaching of a new terton will arise as the teachings of the previous terton subside. According to terma it is predicted that even though Buddhadharma in general becomes unknown in this world, and even if the term *Buddhism* is no longer known, there will still be isolated practice in various places of the terma teachings of Guru Rinpoche, until Maitreya appears. In other words, there will be no period before the coming of Maitreya when these teachings will have disappeared.

The teachings of the sutras are the nirmanakaya teachings. In the same way, the teachings of the first three tantras, the outer or lower tantras: the kriya, charya, and yoga tantras, are the teachings of the sambhogakaya because they were taught by the Buddha in the form of Maha Vairochana, the great sambhogakaya buddha. In the same way, the teachings of the inner tantras or higher tantras, the maha, anu, and ati yoga or father, mother and nondual tantras, are the teachings of the dharmakaya Samantabhadra. Each of these three teachings, the nirmanakaya Dharma, the sambhogakaya Dharma, and the dharmakaya Dharma will last a different length of time, with the dharmakaya Dharma outlasting the other two.

At this point, Karma Chakme Rinpoche says, “Although this may be hard for most people to hear — meaning that people are fixated on the prediction in the sutras of five thousand years — if you study extensively the new and old tantras and the authoritative commentaries on them, you will understand them clearly. This completes the first part of this section, which is a brief explanation of the difference between sutra and tantra. Chakme Rinpoche ends the section saying, “This was spoken by Raga Asya just as it occurred to him.”

Karma Chakme now gives instruction in the practice of the kriya and charya tantras, which is a general instruction not specific to

any particular practice. The practice with which you are familiar that most closely corresponds to what is explained here is the nyungne practice of the thousand-armed form of Chenrezik.

Little Song on How To Practice Kriya Tantra

The first of the tantras, kriya tantra or action tantra, is named so because the practice includes physical actions — such as prostration, circumambulation, cleanliness, and the taking of vows of physical abstinence such as in nyungne — that are of primary importance. As the motivation for the practice is bodhichitta, the practitioner must generate bodhichitta. Aside from this, either a monastic or a householder can practice kriya tantra. To do a specific kriya tantra practice, you must have received the empowerment of that specific practice, which normally consists of the water empowerment involving a vase and the placing of a crown with a silk ribbon, or sometimes the scepter of the deity on top of your head. In that way, you receive the empowerment and the transmission for whichever yidam of kriya tantra you are going to practice; for example if you were going to do the nyungne, you would receive the nyungne empowerment.

The first support for the practice that is to be created is a painting of the deity. If you know how to paint the deity, it is best if you do it yourself. If not, the actual painter should take the nyinye vows every day during the time of painting the deity. Because it is for kriya tantra, the materials used in the painting must be unmixed with animal products, specifically leather or things drawn from animals that have been killed. For example, as it is sometimes the case that leather is used in the preparation of ink, the ink used for the painting cannot contain leather. The brush, canvas, and all materials must be free of such animal products. On completion of the thangka, as soon as the eyes have been painted into the thangka, it must be immediately consecrated. It can invite obstacles if you leave a period in between the completion of the painting and the consecration.

For kriya tantra practice, if you have a painting of the deity, you do not need to set up an image of the deity's mandala. If you do not have a painting, or if you wish to set up the mandala, then for general kriya tantra practice you can set up an eight-petaled lotus with a rim. You can draw that as the mandala. If that is not possible, then you can set up piles of grain with the number and arrangement corresponding to the number and configuration of deities. In front of the painting and mandala you set up the offerings, which must be unmixed with meat, alcohol, garlic, onions, and beans. These include the conventional outer offerings

of flowers, incense, lamp, perfume, and a tormas that is made entirely of the three whites and the three sweets unmixed with meat and alcohol.

The attendant for kriya tantra practice should be devoted and very clean. When you do this practice you need to put on fresh clean clothing and you need to change the clothing regularly. You need to have enough incense and flowers to refresh or replenish the flower and incense offerings. When you are doing the kriya tantra practice, you take the nyungne vows every day, and every morning you do the ablution of the five limbs. This is what is done in the nyungne practice where you wash your mouth, then use the water to bless your head, arms, and legs. Wearing fresh, clean clothing, you approach the mandala, prostrate to it, and sit down on, ideally, a white cushion with kusha grass underneath it. Initially, of course, you do not sit cross-legged. You sit in the kneeling posture for taking vows and you take the vows. After that and after going for refuge and generating bodhichitta, you view the place in which the practice is being performed as the buddha realm, whichever buddha realm is connected with the family of that practice. You view the offering materials as an inconceivably vast and splendid cloud of offerings and you consecrate them with the offering cloud dharani.

If it is a practice where the front-visualization has a palace, as it does in the nyungne practice, then you visualize the palace. If it is a kriya tantra practice where there is no palace, you visualize a vast lotus flower that is so big it fills the sky. In the center of the lotus, visualize another lotus flower with a hundred thousand petals that are made of precious materials, and on top of the calyx or center of the lotus, which is also made of precious materials, you visualize a moon disc seat that would be the cushion or seat for the deity. Then, with appropriate, elegant, and clean attire, holding incense in your hand, you face the direction of the realm in which that deity abides. If it is Chenrezik, it is to the south, because the Potala is in the south. You invite the deity, using the standard invitation, “In order to serve as the protector of all sentient beings, and so forth,” and you think that the deity through his wisdom is aware of your invitation, and in an instant, as quick as a flash of lightening, he comes and takes his place on that seat.

This is pure kriya tantra, which means that there is no self-visualization. It is different from the nyungne practice that has a selfvisualization, and which incorporates features of charya tantra. Having invited the deities and visualizing that they have taken their place on their seat, you pay homage to them, prostrate to them, make offerings to them, praise them, and offer mandalas to them in accordance with the particular ritual. This

is like the kriya tantra practices of the Medicine Buddha, or the practice that is called the “Veneration of the Sixteen Elders,” and some of the liturgy that is used in the common consecration of the ground, which is a liturgy that is used in many situations.

The practice of kriya tantra begins with the offerings and consecration of the place, the visualization of the palace and seat of the deity, the invitation to the deity, the presentation of offerings, homage, praise, mandalas, and then the repetition of the mantra. Continuing to visualize the deity in front of you, think that in the heart of the deity is the mind of the deity in the form of a wisdom being, which is to say a small image of the same deity. Within the heart of that wisdom being, that is in the heart of the deity visualized in front, is a moon disc. Standing upright on top of the moon disc is the seed syllable for that particular deity. Surrounding the seed syllable is the deity’s mantra or dharani, which is clear like a reflection in a mirror. The mantra faces outward because it is to be read from the outside and is resonating with its own sound. In kriya tantra the mantra does not turn.

A special feature of the actual practice of kriya tantra is the holding of the samaya vajra. The samaya vajra is an actual vajra. For example, when doing a vase generation, normally you hold in your hand a small vajra that is connected by a five-colored

thread to the vase. Here there is no vase visualization, but in the same way, you hold in your right hand a vajra that, at best should be made of some precious material, and if that is not possible it can even be made of wood. It is four finger widths in length and is wrapped with the fivecolored thread. You hold this at your heart with your right hand and use your left hand to hold your mala. It is essential for kriya tantra practice that the cord of the mala is not made of leather. The best material is wool or some other substance that is not the skin of an animal. Strictly speaking, in kriya tantra you are not supposed to touch the mala with your bare skin, either you wear a glove or you hold the mala with your robe over your fingers, as was done in Tibet during the nyungne practice and during strict kriya tantra practices.

The visualization that accompanies the repetition of the mantra is coordinated with the breathing. When you are breathing out, you direct your attention to the mantra in the heart of the deity in front of you. When you breathe in, all the while saying the mantra, you think that the moon disk together with the seed syllable and mantra leave the heart of the deity and dissolve into your heart. You do that repeatedly. Do not recite the mantra too loudly or too quietly. There are many rules about the repetition of mantra in kriya tantra; for example, you may not drink tea, water, or any liquids during a kriya tantra session.

Kriya tantra practice is commonly done as a succession of nyungnes, although not necessarily the Chenrezik nyungne. Nyungne, a kriya tantra practice with the same vows, has two days in alternation — the one-meal or one-seat day and the silent day. On the one-seat day you eat once at noon and it must be vegetarian food. You may eat until you arise from the seat, but once you get up, you may not eat again until two days later. It is therefore called one seat. On the day of silence, you do not eat or drink anything, and of course, you do not speak.

On the one-seat day, because you are recovering from the day of silence and total fasting, you can speak between sessions and when you wake up you can drink a very thin gruel. The gruel has to be thin enough so that you can see your face reflected in it, which means that it has to be mostly water. You can only drink one bowl of gruel. The purpose of this is to dispel the suffering of hunger of the bacteria that live in your stomach and intestines, because they are sentient beings and you do not want them to die. On the one-seat days, you chant the ritual aloud and you do prostrations and circumambulations. On the silent days, you chant the ceremony mentally, not verbally, and you do not do prostrations or circumambulations. This is different from the nyungne. In strict kriya tantra, you do not do the physical things on the silent day, which is also the day of no eating and no drinking.

When you are reciting the mantra, there are certain actions that are not allowed. If you sneeze, pass wind, or giggle, you must put the mala down and perform a ritual ablution, including drinking water that has been consecrated, and strictly speaking, rubbing your hands with white earth; then you must start again from the beginning of that mala, no matter where you were. If you did any of the above actions and you were most of the way through the mala, those mantras do not count. When you are doing kriya tantra practice, you may not urinate during the session; you must wait until the end of the session. After doing so, you must perform a ritual ablution.

Vajrayana is effective because it has different ways to subdue the mental afflictions or kleshas. In kriya tantra there is a very particular way. If you were having an interview with a great monarch like Songtsen Gampo, who not only had complete power over you but also had tremendous extra sensory perception, you would be very, very careful what you were thinking. You would be so intimidated that you actually would not be able to think anything negative because you would be too afraid of him knowing it and of the embarrassment that would result. In the same way, when you have an interview with a very great teacher whom you know can read your mind, naturally you are very, very careful with your thoughts. This is the attitude taken in kriya tantra toward thoughts.

You know this wisdom deity is omniscient and although you cannot literally see the deity with your physical eyes, the deity has been invited to you and has actually taken his place in front of you, so that you are actually in the presence of an omniscient being who will know everything that you think, therefore you are unable to think negatively.

As you become used to this attitude of it being so special to be in the presence of the deity, you get out of the habit of mental afflictions. They naturally stop. The way this works is that any time you focus your mind one-pointedly on something, nothing else can arise in your mind. You cannot actually have two thoughts at the same time, therefore whenever we have strong mental afflictions arising in practice, it means we have become distracted. If you do not become distracted from the one-pointed focus on the visualization, kleshas, which are thoughts, cannot arise. Their place is taken by the onepointed focus on the visualization.

In kriya tantra practice, the reason for vegetarianism and fasting is to reduce several things that make practice problematic. The first of these is sleep. If you overeat you sleep more, and if you eat very little you sleep less. Second, since your body has no energy to spare, desire and anger will naturally be weak and will not often arise. Because of the minimal amount you are eating

and drinking, you will have less urine, excrement, and intestinal gas; therefore it is easy to be clean. These are the reasons for vegetarianism and fasting.

At the end of the session, having completed the repetition of the mantra for that session, you coil your mala up in your hand, and blowing on it, you touch it to your three places, the forehead, throat, and heart, thinking that the blessing of the mantra flows into you. After receiving this blessing, you place the mala on top of a precious vessel that is filled with grain. You then place that either in front of the mandala, or if there is no room, on some high shelf. You do not put it in a low place. You again pay homage to the deity, rise from your seat, and do whatever needs to be done, such as eating. You do not eat in front of the mandala; you should eat in another room.

At night before you go to sleep, when you conclude the final session of the day, if you have a support for the practice that is a painting of the deity, you dissolve the deity into that painting and you think that it resides there. If you do not have a support and you are relying on a simple pile of rice, then you request the deity to depart and return to his particular pure realm. In either case, after that you

dedicate the merit and recite verses of aspiration and auspiciousness. Then you get undressed and go to sleep.

The next morning you arise before dawn, get dressed, and perform the ablution of the five limbs that was mentioned before. Then you begin. It says you should change your clothes often. This may seem funny in the West because we change our clothes every day and we are not even practicing kriya tantra. The text says, because this is kriya tantra, you should change your clothes often, at best, every three days, if not, five days, or at least once a week. You are supposed to be as clean as possible. The text says the old clothes, cleaned by hanging them in the wind and then fumigating them with incense, count as clean clothes.

In the kriya tantra practice you do not eat the offerings that are made to the deities, because from the kriya tantra point of view that is misappropriation and will obscure you so that you will not have a vision of the deity. The offerings should not be given to animals such as dogs, cattle, and donkeys, but should be put in a high place. You might think that if you put the grain and other offerings in a high place the birds will surely eat them. That is considered acceptable because birds fly in the sky and from the point of view of kriya tantra, they are considered to be in the class of dakinis or sky dwellers, therefore it is not bad if they eat the offerings.

At the end of the practice of a kriya tantra deity, you must do a fire puja to repair omissions in the repetition of the mantra. This is different from the fire pujas that are done at the conclusion of an anuttara yoga practice. With the fire puja at the end of kriya tantra practice, you do not have to first visualize the mundane god of fire, Agni, and then visualize the mandala inside him as you normally would. Here you simply invite the deity into the midst of the fire and that is sufficient. At the conclusion of the fire puja, you dissolve the deity as you normally would.

You dissolve the deity into the painting; if you do not have a painting then you request the deity to return to the mandala that was the support for your visualization. If at the conclusion you are going to take empowerment from the deity, you simply visualize white, red, and blue light emanating from the deity's forehead, throat, and heart respectively, and visualize these lights dissolving into you in your three places, granting the blessings of the deity's body, speech, and mind.

At the conclusion of the whole practice, you receive siddhi by filling a monastic begging bowl with appropriate foods: the three white substances and the three sweet substances. What you do is make little balls of a mixture of the three whites, the three sweets, and flour. You fill the begging bowl with the balls of dough and dairy, cover it with a five-colored silk cloth, and on

top of that place the samaya vajra, which you have been holding at your heart during the practice. Visualize that five-colored light emanating from the heart of the deity in front of you, which is of the nature of the siddhi, dissolves into the food in the begging bowl. Then you do the practice for twenty-four hours without going to sleep and without eating. During that time, you hold the begging bowl in your left hand and you cover it with your right hand. You actually recite the deity's mantra for that whole twenty-four hours. When the sun rises the next day, you stop. The signs that arise from the successful performance of a kriya tantra sadhana are that light and smoke come from the begging bowl with the sound of a drum that you are not beating and the scent of incense that you are not burning, or that steam and warmth come. All of these are signs that you have attained, or will attain, siddhi. Even if these signs do not come, you still eat the food that is in the begging bowl. It will cause a lengthened life span, better health, and less severe degeneration as you age.

The dreams that will accompany the successful practice of kriya tantra are similar to good dreams in any practice, for example, seeing the sun or the moon rising. Understand that the significance of a dream depends upon the context. A dream that you have in ordinary life may not mean anything, whereas if you have the same dream while doing practice in retreat, it might have a specific meaning.

After you complete the kriya tantra practice or retreat, you should keep the painting used as a support for your visualization and the samaya vajra used as an implement in the practice. Keep them for the rest of your life; consider them to be the actual deity and view them with faith and devotion. From time to time, you can set them up as supports for deity practice and make offerings to them. If you use the painting and samaya vajra as supports for doing a fire puja and supplicate them, then everything you wish for will be accomplished. The samaya vajra should not ever be shown to anyone for any reason. It is kept hidden. The painting of the deity, however, may be exhibited to disciples or to those with great faith in the deity so that they can prostrate and present offerings. Since the painting was consecrated by your practice, they will be able to purify obscurations through doing so.

This is the practice of kriya tantra, and if you practice in this way, you will be accepted by the deity. As a result of this, you will continually be reborn human for sixty lifetimes; you will not be reborn in the lower realms. You will continue to practice kriya tantra and after sixty lifetimes of human birth and kriya tantra practice, you will accomplish direct perception, miraculous abilities, and become equal to the deity that you have been practicing. This means that after sixty lifetimes you will be reborn in the realm of the deity, for example, if it is Chenrezik you will

be reborn in the realm of the Potala. And you will be reborn as a vidyadhara. The vidyadharas who are in the retinue of these deities can be male or female and they remain in the retinue of that deity continually serving him. They are accomplished vidyadharas or those who have become vidyadharas through the practice of kriya tantra. There are said to be millions and millions of such male and female vidyadharas in the retinues of deities like Chenrezik and Tara. The wisdom of such a vidyadhara is the same as the deity, for example Chenrezik, Manjushri, or Vajrapani. From time to time, having attained that state, you will dispatch emanations into the world for a series of lifetimes, most of which will be reborn as Brahmins and their function will be to uphold the teachings of kriya tantra. These emanations will be very, very beneficial to beings, and like someone who has been born a Brahmin seven times in a row, he or she can lead anyone who sees, hears, recollects, or touches them to a higher rebirth or liberation.

This completes “This Little Song on How to Practice Kriya Tantra,” which was written in the practice break in the evening on the eleventh day of the month Gyal in the Year of the Horse, after completing a fire puja, as it occurred to me, the *rishi* of the degenerate age, Raga Asya, and was written down by Virya Sagara, Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso.

Little Song on How To Practice Charya Tantra

Karma Chakme Rinpoche gives instruction on the practice of charya tantra, the second level of tantra. He begins with the invocation addressed to Vajrapani, NAMO GURU VAJRAPANIYE. Charya tantra or conduct tantra is sometimes called upa tantra or upa yoga. *Upa* means “both.” The reason it is called upa tantra is that it is a combination of the conduct of kriya tantra and the meditative absorption or samadhi characteristic of yoga tantra.

The empowerment for charya tantra is more extensive than that for kriya tantra. We saw that the kriya tantra empowerment consisted primarily of the water, and the crown and silk ribbon empowerment. In addition to these there are the vajra, bell, and name empowerments, together with the permission blessing of the mantra and the transmission for the liturgy. If you wish to do a charya tantra practice and have received all that is necessary, the creation of the support, the paintings, and the setting up of the offerings is the same as in kriya tantra. In kriya tantra there are the five offerings of flowers, incense, lamps, perfume, and food. Charya tantra includes the two water offerings that normally precede these. The charya, or conduct tantra, is less stringent than kriya tantra. You do not need to do nyungne, in which one day you eat one meal and the next day you eat nothing and you

do not need to observe silence. You do take the eight vows every day as you do in kriya tantra, called the eightbranch renewal and purification, but you do not have to keep the one-seat rule. This means that, while you still have to be vegetarian, you can eat in the morning as well as in the middle of the day, however, you cannot eat after noon or in the evening. Regarding this, it says in the *Great Commentary on the Mahamaya Tantra*, “Fasting, you abstain from food in the evening.”

A distinction has to be made between the eight vows for an **upasaka** found in the vinaya and the practice of the eight-branch renewal and purification. The reason why the distinction has to be made is that they may seem to be the same thing because the vows you take when you do a nyungne or a kriya or charya tantra are the same vows that could be taken by an eight-vow upasaka. They are different. The eight vows that are presented in the vinaya must be received from a preceptor. You cannot take them in front of an image or a statue. In the case of the **sojong**, the renewal and purification vows, it is best if they are taken from a preceptor, but they may be taken in front of a support, such as a statue.

The eight vows of an upasaka taught in the vinaya can only be taken by a layperson. They cannot be taken by a monastic because a monastic already has more vows than that. It is said that for

a monastic to take these vows would actually be diluting their ordination. The eight vows in the sojong, such as for a nyungne, can be taken by monastics, therefore they are different. The reason for the difference is that these vows are taken for one day or renewed each day, perennially, as a way of renewing and purifying your moral discipline, therefore regardless of what vows you already have, these can be taken. Their source is not the vinaya. Their source is the Mahayana in general, and the kriya and charya tantras in particular.

If a fully ordained celibate upasaka takes them, then by taking these vows for that one day, or whatever period of time it is, they purify any infractions of their permanent vows. It is, in fact, a ceremony of renewal and purification of upasaka ordination. That is why we call it *sojong* or “renewal and purification.” Sojong is a procedure that renews or refreshes your virtue and purifies any infractions or wrongdoings. For that reason, the sojong vows can also be taken by novices and fully ordained monastics. If they do a sojong practice, keeping silence and fasting, they purify any violations of their own vows. It is taught in the tantras that their moral discipline will become pure. Understand the difference between the eight vows found in the vinaya, which are only for householders, and the eight vows taught in the context of these practices, such as the nyungne. Understand the difference to be the difference between sutra and tantra,

whereas the upasaka vows are only for lay people, these can be undertaken by monastics and lay people alike.

The actual practice of charya tantra begins by sitting in front of the mandala, taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, and consecrating the offerings, just as in kriya tantra. After these preliminaries, the charya tantra differs from the kriya tantra.

The practice liturgy will always begin with the mantra OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM, which means, “all things are in their nature perfectly pure and that is my nature as well.” In that way, through recollecting the emptiness of all things, you recollect their natural purity. This was not done in the kriya tantra practice. Think that from that state of emptiness there arises beneath you the seat of the deity, which is a lotus and sun if it is a wrathful deity, or a lotus and moon if it is a peaceful deity. On top of this arises the seed syllable of the deity — HUM, HRI, or TAM, — which is identified with your mind. Rays of light emanate outward from that seed syllable performing the two benefits. You benefit yourself by making offerings to yourself and all buddhas and bodhisattvas and causing their blessings to be collected back into the syllable. You benefit other beings by removing all of their suffering and the causes for their suffering. Finally the rays of light are withdrawn back into the seed syllable, which

is transformed into the scepter of that deity. In the case of Akshobhya, for example, the scepter would be a vajra. At that point, you bind the mudra associated with that particular deity and recite the mantra of the deity once causing the scepter that is marked with the syllable to melt into light and to become yourself, your body, in the form of that deity, that yidam. In charya tantra liturgy, which is more extensive than kriya tantra liturgy, there is a detailed description of the deity, describing the particular costume, ornamentation, and so forth of that deity, which could be peaceful or wrathful.

Having visualized yourself as the deity, you visualize OM AH HUM in the three places, consecrating your body, speech, and mind as the body, speech, and mind of the deity. In charya tantra there is no invitation of the wisdom deity to dissolve into yourself, no bestowal of empowerment by the buddhas of the five families, no arising of the lord of the family above your head, and so forth. You remain as the *samayasattva*, the visualized deity, but not the wisdom being itself.

In kriya tantra there was only the front-visualization. In charya tantra there are both the front-visualization and the self-visualization. You have visualized yourself as the deity; now you visualize the deity in front: the front-visualization. If the liturgy indicates the presence of a mandala in the sense of a residence

for the deity, then in the midst of a pure buddha realm, you imagine the palace of the deity made of precious materials. It is a mansion with four sides, four gates, four arches, and so on. Surrounding it, outside the realm, is a perimeter of lotus petals, a perimeter of vajras, and a perimeter of garlands of light like fences. In charya tantra there is no protection circle in the sense of a tent. In other words, you do not have a ground of vajras, a tent of vajras, and a canopy of vajras. There is simply a fence, literally a fence of vajras.

As was the case with kriya tantra, if there is no mandala, if there is no palace to be visualized, then you simply think that in the sky in front of you, on top of a massive one thousand-petalled lotus flower is the seat of the deity. Wrathful deities have suns for their seats and peaceful deities have moons. Burning incense, ringing the bell, and gesturing with the vajra in your right hand to invite the deity, you recite the words of invitation thinking that the deity comes to rest in front of you. You have visualized yourself as the deity and now you have invited the actual deity to come in front of you.

Immediately after the deity has arrived, you offer the two waters, **argham** and **padyam**, drinking water and water for washing the feet. You then prostrate to or pay homage to the deity. After that you make the five usual offerings of flowers, incense, lamps,

perfume, and food; then recite praises to the deity. In kriya tantra, strictly speaking, you must kneel for the whole practice, the way you kneel when you take vows. In charya tantra, you do not have to do that. You need a clean seat and you are allowed to sit with your legs half crossed in the **bodhisattva posture**, which is the posture for the practice of charya tantra. With a one-pointed mind, you do the following visualization in connection with the repetition of the mantra.

In the heart of both yourself and the front-visualized deity, you visualize a moon disk. On top of the moon disc is the deity's seed syllable standing upright and surrounded by the deity's dharani or mantra, which is facing outward. Then directing your mind one-pointedly to the moon disk and the mantra garland in the heart of the front-visualization, you recite the mantra. Eventually you think that the moon, the seed syllable, and the mantra emerge from the heart of the front-visualization and dissolve into the moon, seed syllable, and mantra in your heart. You continue to recite the mantra, directing your mind one-pointedly to these things in your own heart. It is best if this can be coordinated with the breathing, with the out breath and the in breath, as it was in the practice of kriya tantra. If not, do it for however long it takes to get a clear visualization. Focus on the front deity's mantra until that is clear and then dissolve it into yourself until that is clear.

At the end of each session, you dedicate torma to the front-visualized deity. The torma is made of the three whites and the three sweets, and is vegetarian. You then request the deity to remain in the support and you dissolve the self-visualized deity into emptiness. In the practice of charya tantra, in postmeditation you regard yourself in your ordinary form, not as the deity. Since charya tantra is a little less strict than kriya tantra, you can drink tea and water during the session, but the style of ablution and the fact that you have to take your shoes off when you go into the shrine room, is the same as in kriya tantra.

The approach taken to mental afflictions, the three poisons, in charya tantra is as follows. You are visualizing yourself as the deity, but you think that the deity in front is the actual deity, which is called the wisdom being. Your deity is simply called the samayasattva or the pledge being. The attitude to take toward the relationship between these two is that the wisdom being in front of you is like a monarch, and the samayasattva, the deity you are visualizing yourself as, is like a minister of that monarch. You are trying to attain siddhi from that deity in the way a minister is petitioning a monarch. The attitude you take toward this monarch is similar to the way, in kriya tantra, you thought that the deity, being omniscient, knows what you are thinking. It is as though you are in the presence of a chakravartin, who is not only completely powerful in this world and very strict, but

is also omniscient and knows everything you think. If a minister were to approach such a powerful world emperor, he

would respectfully gaze upon the king or queen, listen to their commands, and be obedient. He would not have time to think about meaningless things. In the same way, since you are in the presence of the actual wisdom deity, you direct your mind one-pointedly to the visualization and the repetition of the mantra. As was the case in kriya tantra, because your mind is one-pointed, there is no room for distractions. If you do not become distracted, no kleshas will arise.

When you are doing the practice of charya tantra, as was the case with kriya tantra, you hold the scepter of that deity to your heart with your right hand, which might be a vajra or it might be something else. You use the mala with the left hand. The degree of concentration that is appropriate to charya tantra is like someone who, like myself, has poor eyesight and is trying to thread a needle. Just as I would not be able to think of anything else while I was doing that, because I would have to concentrate so fiercely, if you concentrate to that extent on the visualization, kleshas will not arise. That is how they are dealt with in charya tantra. When you go to sleep at night, if you have a painting of the deity, you dissolve the front-visualization into that. If not,

request the deity to return to his or her pure realm, then dedicate the merit, express the auspiciousness and so on.

The next morning when you get up, you again take the sojong vows as you do every day. You do the practice and do not eat after the noon hour for the duration of the practice. This practice, which emphasizes the repetition of the mantra, could take six months, three months, or one month, however long you care to devote to it, and is called “approach.” You are approaching and petitioning the deity. The signs of success in this practice are the same as usual. At the end of a period of approach, or at some other time if necessary, you can do the second part of the practice, which is called “accomplishment.” Accomplishment is accompanied by the receiving of siddhi.

In order to practice accomplishment, you would set up the basis for the practice, which includes the painting of the deity or the mandala, elegant offerings that are vegetarian, and a fire puja offering. For two weeks, from the first day of the lunar month until the fourteenth day, you repeat the approach as before, emphasizing repetition of the mantra. On the fifteenth day, the full moon day, you keep the repetition of the mantra unbroken all day and all night so that even when you are eating and drinking you continue to recite it mentally. It is best if you can choose a month for this where there is an eclipse on the full moon day.

From sunset that night until dawn the next day, keeping your body straight and making sure you do not fall asleep, you hold the scepter of that deity to your heart with both hands, and not using a mala you continue to recite the mantra in that posture. It may happen as a result that at dawn, the scepter of the deity that you are holding will radiate light, blaze with fire, or shoot out sparks. Another sign is that the painted image of the deity may smile or laugh. Those are signs of accomplishment. If accomplishment has been attained, you can enact any applications and activities you wish that are connected with that particular deity. Even if such signs do not arise, having completed the approach and accomplishment for a charya tantra deity, you are authorized to perform consecration, fire pujas, and all the activities of the charya tantra acharya.

The result is pretty much the same as with the kriya tantra — the sixty lifetimes, the rebirth in the realm of the deity, and so on. Not many charya tantras were translated into Tibetan and propagated in Tibet. There are a few that are certainly charya tantras; there are some that some people say are charya tantra, and others say are kriya tantra or yoga tantra. Although the practice of kriya and charya tantra is difficult, if someone has the discernment to appreciate the practice, can repay the kindness of his or her teachers in receiving kriya and charya tantra transmissions, and establish a connection with these practices for even a few

months, they will make their human life meaningful, therefore they are very fortunate. Karma Chakme Rinpoche concludes, “Hold this in mind, Lama Tsondru Gyamtso.”

Karma Chakme Rinpoche says that his basis for explaining the practice of charya tantra is a Drukpa Kagyu practice of the six-syllable mantra of Chenrezik, representative of charya tantra. He says that he has not seen many other charya tantra sadhanas. The chapter concludes, “This ‘Little Song of How to Practice Charya Tantra’ was composed in the evening of the twelfth day of the month Gyal in the Year of the Horse, as it occurred to me, Raga Asya, and it was written down by Lama Tsondru Gyamtso.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: One way the tantras were classified corresponded to the four castes of society, which was to deal with the different lifestyles of social positions. I did not quite understand.

RINPOCHE: The Buddha’s teaching is characterized by the fact that, since he taught out of an impartial compassion for all beings, he taught in a variety of ways to correspond to the variety of mindsets or attitudes that beings can exhibit. Had he only

taught in one way, that one teaching or one style of teaching would not have suited various individuals that must be trained. In the context of the tantras, the different characteristics of the practice of these four tantras make them appropriate for the lifestyles of these four social classes.

The kriya tantra involves a great deal of purification practice, such as ritual ablution, which is acceptable to a Brahmin because it is what they are used to. It would not be acceptable to an outcast because they do not have the facilities to do it. On the other hand, the anuttara yoga tantra, which is the most profound, is more appropriate for an outcast than kriya tantra because it does not insist on ritual ablution and so on, not because it is less complete, but because it is more profound. It is concerned with that which is internal, rather than that which is external. Since traditionally in Indian society outcasts were considered the most strongly emotional people, they would need the strongest remedy, the strongest and most profound form of practice, just like when a very ill person is given the strongest medicine.

STUDENT: Could you elaborate on the subject that the age we live in is the age of decadence? I have seen with technology and medical breakthroughs that maybe it would not be that way, but perhaps that is independent of people's wrongdoings increasing.

RINPOCHE: The present age is called the “age of decadence” because our mental afflictions are so much coarser and we are so much more distracted and mindless. It is, therefore much harder to engage in spiritual practice.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said the kriya tantra corresponds to the golden age and the anuttara tantra corresponds to our age of decadence. Does this mean that it is most appropriate for us to practice the anuttara in this age and that the other types of tantra were more appropriate for previous ages?

RINPOCHE: Yes, very much so. It is taught that, given the degree of decadence and degeneration that is common in this age, we need the strongest or most profound remedy in order to succeed on the spiritual path. The times in human history where the practice of kriya tantra or charya tantra were appropriate were times when life was simple, people were very content, they were not avaricious, and they were not particularly aggressive. At such times, the milder remedies were appropriate.

STUDENT: The first three tantras are connected with sambhogakaya, and the anuttara with the dharmakaya. I did not quite understand what is connected with the nirmanakaya.

RINPOCHE: The doctrine or Dharma of the nirmanakaya is the path of the sutras, the Tripitaka: the vinaya, sutras, and abhidharma. In general the correlation of the three sets of three vehicles to the trikaya does not mean that they were taught by three different individuals or three different buddhas. The nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya are all the trikaya of the Buddha. Nevertheless the teacher is viewed differently in these levels according to the nature of the doctrine being presented. In the path of sutras, that is to say in the Tripitaka, there is no presentation of deities with different colors, scepters, postures, and so on. There is attention paid to the Buddha as the Buddha, but he is normally understood pretty much as the nirmanakaya, therefore the teacher of that doctrine is seen as the nirmanakaya as well.

In the three lower tantras, the kriya, charya, and yoga, there is gradually more and more of the profound presentation of sambhogakaya, which is to say the buddhas and other deities of the five families, with their scepters, their appearances, and so forth. Because in the practice of those tantras you are concerned with encountering and working with the iconography of the sambhogakaya, the teacher, the buddha, is seen as the sambhogakaya.

In the case of the three inner tantras, you are principally concerned with buddha nature itself, not simply buddha nature as is commonly understood, but the fact that buddhas, the **kayas**, and realms of all buddhas such as the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities and so on, are complete within the buddha nature of any individual. The recognition of this, and therefore the experience of the essential purity of all things, is based upon the understanding of the innateness of buddha nature. It is working with the dharmakaya and the teacher is seen as the dharmakaya.

STUDENT: I have one question regarding the practice of sacred view. I understand that in sacred view we visualize all beings as the Buddha although we do not ordinarily perceive things in this way. I have come to realize that, in some way, this is literally true, that the true nature of all beings right now is the Buddha. I have a problem with how to conceptualize that versus dealing with beings in the everyday samsaric world. On the one hand, when I visualize all beings as Chenrezik, I feel the blessing from all beings. On the other hand, if I really were to act that way in all situations, it would be a little bit insane. It would appear a little bit crazy to people and one could not function this way. How does one think about that? Are both views true simultaneously or do you switch back and forth from one to another?

RINPOCHE: You need to preserve recognition of the difference between what beings are potentially and what they are at present. The ground of existence and the ground of any sentient being in particular is buddha nature. The basic nature of every being is perfect and complete in all qualities, and primordially empty of all stains. Through ignorance, the absence of the recognition of this nature, sentient beings do not manifest these qualities, but manifest defects that are not innate to their nature. You need to be able to see both things at once. From the point of view of what any being is fundamentally, which is a buddha, then any being is worthy of devotion in sacred view. From the point of view of what beings actually are right now, especially in the context of how we behave, speak, and so on, you have to be careful. You cannot be simpleminded and say that beings are buddhas because then you will be in the position of being abused by buddhas, which is impossible.

STUDENT: I am also wondering about the issue from a practical standpoint. It seems that you are saying that, at the same time, both are true from different points of view, depending on how you look at it. If I am not dealing with beings, do I try to be aware of the Chenrezik nature of beings, and when I am dealing with them, be aware of the ordinary nature of beings?

RINPOCHE: Theoretically you need to have three aspects in your attitude toward beings. I say theoretically because this is ideal. Whether you would be able to do this or not is another question, for reasons that will become clear. Your basic understanding of beings is that in their fundamental nature they are Chenrezik, which is to say that their nature is the same as the nature of Chenrezik. They inherently possess all those qualities. That is the first part of the attitude. At the same time, because they have not recognized that nature, they are afflicted, and therefore not only do not manifest those qualities, but they manifest defects and behave inappropriately.

The second part of the attitude is the recognition that you have to be careful not to excite their kleshas. No matter how careful you are, because all sentient beings have kleshas, eventually one or another of their kleshas will pop up. They will become jealous, they will become arrogant, and they will become angry or spiteful. At that point, rather than becoming angry yourself, you have to recognize that, although they are in their basic nature perfect, through their failure to recognize this they unnecessarily are afflicted and manifest mental affliction. The third part of the attitude is to have compassion for sentient beings, who through lack of recognition of their real nature suffer so much. All of this presupposes your being without kleshas yourself because if you have kleshas just like other sentient beings, then when

their kleshas become excited it is quite possible that yours will too, and sacred outlook will fly out the window.

STUDENT: Sometimes in the highest yoga tantras we will offer tsok feasts and offer things, like alcohol and meat, that would cause our vows to be broken if they were consumed at other times. There is obviously a line between drinking and keeping the vow. Does that line lie in the blessing of the vajra master or does it lie in the attitude of the practitioner? If it does lie in the attitude of the practitioner, how would we approach that? What is it that makes it acceptable?

RINPOCHE: It is because of the blessing and the attitude. If you do a tsok, a feast practice, and in the context of doing the feast you drink liquor, whether or not it has been consecrated, with the attitude, “Oh, I am at a feast, now I can drink this and it is really good and I really want to drink it, I have not had any in a while,” then you are breaking your vow, even though it is at a feast. The only way that you are not breaking your vow if you have liquor at a feast is if your only motivation in drinking it is that you wish to present it as an offering to the deities that dwell within your body. It is not for you. It is for the deities that are inside your body. Therefore when substances that are otherwise either forbidden or looked down upon, such as liquor

and meat, are offered in a feast, when they are consumed by the practitioners they are offered to the deities within their bodies.

STUDENT: This is my first time here. I was in another practice for about thirty years. I noticed that I got lost in the practices did not get to the essence.. I find myself here this weekend hearing about the practices. I would like to hear what your basic teaching is or the essence of all of this so I am not lost in all of it.

RINPOCHE: The essence is to remove defects and problems and to allow your innate qualities to grow.

STUDENT: You spoke about the distinction between external and internal deities and you said that in the external tantras, deities are considered to abide in pure lands, which are normally connected with a certain area of external space. Is that opposed to the deities that reside within? Also, at the point of absorption of the external deities, when they merge do they then become the same?

RINPOCHE: What needs to be understood is that deities are actually both external and internal. The notion presented in the outer tantras that deities are external to the practitioner and live or reside in pure lands that are out there is actually correct. The notion presented in the internal tantras that deities exist

nowhere but in the mind of the practitioner is also correct. In practice, whatever the level of practice, you are always working with both. In terms of emphasis, a practice will be classified as more or less external or more or less internal. As often happens in our practices, while they may be classified one way or the other, it is very hard to restrict them to that classification. As you mentioned in your question, often you will initially relate to a deity as external and then it dissolves into you and you are relating to it as internal.

It is important to understand the meaning of the dissolution of the deity into yourself. If you think that it means that a deity that is actually external comes into you and abides within you separate from yourself, as though for example you were carrying a child, then that is not correct. It is simply through the blessing of the external deity that you recognize the internal deity.

STUDENT: This morning you mentioned Dzokchen and the prophecy of when it ends. It was not Mahamudra but Dzokchen. I assume that the end is the same because the fruition has to be the same.

RINPOCHE: The reason why the text specifies Dzokchen in that prediction is that the origin of that prophecy is in the Dzokchen tantras. It says in the Dzokchen tantras that it is about Dzokchen,

so to be strict in repeating the source they say Dzokchen here. By implication, since we consider Dzokchen and Mahamudra to be the same, to be the teaching of nondual tantra or ati yoga, we would extend that statement to Mahamudra. To be literal, it refers in the quote to Dzokchen, especially when it goes into the power of the termas of Guru Rinpoche and the fact that as each one passes out of the world a new cycle will be found. We can infer from this that it refers to both the Mahamudra and Dzokchen traditions as both of these are represented in terma.

STUDENT: Karma Chakme talks about these progressive five hundred-year cycles of gradual deterioration of Buddhism and in one of them, I think you said that in the period after the deterioration there were still books, statues, and stupas. Could you say something about that period?

RINPOCHE: The point of that statement was that the artifacts of Buddhism would remain even after Buddhism has disappeared. It says until the life span has risen back up to six hundred years. This is actually a controversial statement from a Buddhist point of view because you will find other sources that will say that by the time that Maitreya comes, the teaching will have died out so much that there will not even be one patch of cloth from a robe or one piece of a statue. We can discern that this is probably not true and that what is in this text is more reliable. The reason that

I say this is because we have relics of previous buddhas. There are some relics of the third buddha, Kashyapa, and also in China there is a stupa that is believed to be a reliquary containing relics of an even earlier buddha called Namzik. If we have relics from previous buddhas during the teaching period of Shakyamuni, we can infer that during the time of Maitreya there will still be artifacts from the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, even though the teaching itself will have died out. The external signs show that this is the present state. The fruition time is long gone. The time of genuine propagation of the teachings is gone. Now mostly we have just the shell, just the appearance of it. That is according to the sutras.

According to tantra the Buddhadharma will continue in a progressively less obvious or public form, until the coming of Maitreya. Those with a karmic connection will still find Dharma, especially the teachings of Vajrayana, in much smaller groups or sometimes just one to one. This will continue until Maitreya appears in the world, but Buddhism as we know it will not be around for that much longer.

STUDENT: What does Rinpoche make of the fact that Buddhism has spread greatly in the West, especially since 1959, when the Tibetans had to flee their country? Is this just a temporary success or does this mean anything?

RINPOCHE: From the point of view of the sutras, the spread of Buddhism throughout the world, and especially the way in which it has spread, is part of the empty shell, just the signs of the doctrine. That is from the point of view of the sutras. From the point of view of the tantras, now is the time when tantra is really going to flourish, especially the teachings of anuttara yoga, the higher tantra. The lower tantras are not going to flourish so much now, but the higher tantras will.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, are all the descriptions we are hearing about in relation to this world system, the earth? Situ Rinpoche has often talked about vast, innumerable, world systems.

RINPOCHE: Everything presented today was about this planet, this world. In other worlds things are going at a different pace or in a different phase. Some of them are in a golden age in an earlier period of an aeon. Some of them are halfway through it. There are many, many different possibilities. Everything heard today, such as about the five hundred-year periods, the coming of Maitreya, and the information about Vajrayana, is all about this planet.

The relationship between the different planets or worlds where Buddhism exists is like the relationship between different people in this country. Some people in this country are old, some people

are young, and some people are in between. It is like that. In some places Dharma has been there for a long time and it is starting to die out. In some places it is fresh, and so on.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, why is it that the kriya tantra, which is the most elaborate, is the least powerful, and why is the anuttara tantra the most powerful and the most simple?

RINPOCHE: Kriya tantra is not really the most elaborate. It is the most externalized form of tantra, so it pays the most attention to actions of body and speech, such as being tranquil and well behaved. In that sense, because it is the most externally oriented, it is the least profound. The kriya tantra is very powerful because of its attention to the external conduct of body and speech, so it is more profound than the sutra techniques, but it is considered less profound than the anuttara yoga tantras because in the higher tantras there is a much clearer presentation of the nature of mind being the dharmadhatu, which is pervaded by wisdom.

STUDENT: Should one start with the kriya tantra and work along?

RINPOCHE: In a sense we do, because in a sense we could say that preliminary practices are in accordance with kriya tantra. So there is a way that you are starting that is similar to kriya tantra. Every practice begins with refuge, generation of bodhichitta, and

the seven branches that are done in the same way as they are in kriya tantra, however, the main practice will differ.

STUDENT: How does one know where to begin to practice?

RINPOCHE: You start with ngondro. When you do the preliminary practices, you are actually doing a practice that integrates all of these different vehicles. The common preliminaries, the four thoughts that turn the mind, are in accordance with the sutras. Then among the uncommon preliminaries, the practices of going for refuge and generating bodhichitta, gathering the accumulations and dispelling obscurations are associated with the kriya and charya tantras. Guru yoga, especially receiving the profound empowerments at the culmination of guru yoga, is connected with the higher tantras.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you spoke about the three whites and the three sweets. I do not know what they are.

RINPOCHE: The three whites are milk, yogurt, and butter and the three sweets are sugar, molasses, and honey.

STUDENT: I am uncertain of what all eight sojong vows are. Could you list them?

RINPOCHE: The eight vows are divided into the four branches of morality, the single branch of mindfulness, and the three branches of discipline. The first four are the four root vows, and since they are taken temporarily they are in a semi-monastic framework. The first is not to kill. The second is not to steal. The third is not to have sex. The fourth is not to tell lies about spiritual attainment. Then the single branch of mindfulness is not to consume intoxicants. Of the three remaining, the first is to abstain from seductive behavior in general, which is divided into the two categories of performances and ornaments. The category of performances includes singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. The category of ornaments includes makeup, scents like perfume, and jewelry. Jewelry, of course, also includes flower garlands. That is the first of the three. The second is to abstain from a high or fine seat or bed. The last one is to abstain from food at improper times.

STUDENT: Thank you. When we are requesting siddhis, should we just do it in general or should we have a specific intention?

RINPOCHE: In general, when you perform a ceremony for receiving siddhi, you are trying to acquire all supreme and common siddhis or attainments. When you are doing a request for the fulfillment of your wishes or aims, which will vary from

practice to practice, then you are praying for a specific thing, such as the pacification of sickness.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, could you tell us how the Tara sadhana and the Chenrezik sadhana are classified.

RINPOCHE: The Tara practice that we do, as it says in the text itself, is in accordance with kriya and charya tantra. What that means is that your external conduct when you do that practice, such as abstinence from meat and alcohol and so on, is based on kriya and charya tantra. The practice itself is at a higher level than kriya and charya tantra, but it obeys the rules of kriya and charya tantra anyway. The situation with Chenrezik would be very similar.

STUDENT: In India they give food offerings. Was the style of tormas used in Tibet taught by the Indian masters to Tibetans or was it developed in Tibet?

RINPOCHE: In India the food offering probably did not have any shape. It was just an offering of food. The notion of tormas having specific shapes is a Tibetan innovation.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am interested in knowing the difference between the eight vows that one takes for nyungne and what you might take for just a day when you are not doing that practice.

RINPOCHE: If you do it for one day, then you have to be vegetarian, you have to eat only once, one seat, but you do not have to observe silence and so forth. You do it like the first day of a nyungne and then the next day it expires. During that one day, you can do the nyungne practice, the Chenrezik practice from the nyungne, or you can do another practice, such as Medicine Buddha or Tara. You can combine the taking of the vows with other practices as well.

STUDENT: In a small sangha, if we wanted to do this as a group practice, would we do the vows during the beginning of the nyungne sadhana?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: I have done the nyungne practice twice and I do not understand the practice at all. I understand that one takes the vows and that one prostrates. Could Rinpoche say something about it?

RINPOCHE: First, there are books about the nyungne practice in English that will help. Second, although the empowerment text says the nyungne is kriya tantra, as you might have figured out from comparing it to what was taught here as kriya tantra, it is not purely kriya tantra. For example, there is a self-visualization at the beginning including the summoning of a wisdom being; therefore it is even higher than the charya tantra. At the end, there is a gradual dissolution of the self-visualization in the manner of anuttara yoga tantra, so it is somewhat a mixture, but it is definitely not just kriya tantra.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, since it is not possible to have two thoughts at the same time, what is actually happening in our minds when we feel that we are having a hundred thoughts?

RINPOCHE: It is a swift oscillation from one thought to another.

STUDENT: In that case, what constitutes a thought? Is it a span of time? Is it something that is a similarity, such as shifting from thinking of red to blue?

RINPOCHE: It is when the mind remains focused on a single object of perception or consideration.

STUDENT: Does that include an idea? **RINPOCHE:** Yes.

STUDENT: Is it so that if one is considering a concept, that one could have several thoughts to make up that concept?

RINPOCHE: Actually, a complex concept is going to be made up of several different thoughts and your mind is oscillating back and forth among them to create the conceptual image or abstraction that makes up that concept.

STUDENT: We talked this morning about the idea that you are watching your mind, for example, if you were having a meeting with a monarch you would have no time for meaningless thoughts, therefore you would replace possible kleshas with some wholesome thoughts. How would that work in an everyday situation? How could we use that?

RINPOCHE: Basically anything that you do can be done in that way. For example, if you are working on a computer, by directing your mind one-pointedly to the work you are doing on the computer, because you are concentrated on that kleshas will not arise. That is not to say that working on a computer is exactly equivalent to a kriya tantra practice; it is similar in the manner in which it blocks out, or prevents, the arising of kleshas.

STUDENT: Is it so that the more we can avoid the arising of kleshas, the better it is for our practice on the cushion?

RINPOCHE: Yes, but you have to beware of the conscious attempt to suppress kleshas, which is not what we are talking about here. This may sound a bit like suppression, but it is actually more a relaxation and an enthusiastic replacement of what would otherwise be negativity with a mind that is wholeheartedly involved in something because of its enthusiasm, whether it is for work or for practice. That does not involve the conscious attempt to suppress the kleshas.

STUDENT: You talked about eating and sleeping less. If these kinds of things lessen the strength of kleshas, why don't they lessen the strength of the focus, since kleshas are stronger?

RINPOCHE: Kleshas are strengthened by being overnourished. Your mind is weakened by being overnourished. Kleshas are weakened by being undernourished and your mind is strengthened.

STUDENT: We have access to the text because you have been good enough to bring it to us. In Karma Chakme's time, who would have had access to the text and how would they have used it?

RINPOCHE: When the text was composed there were only two people involved, Karma Chakme Rinpoche and his student who wrote it down, but it gradually spread very widely through

both the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions, especially the Kagyu tradition. It was very widely taught and practiced.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, the tantras that we practice, such as Chenrezik and ngondro and some practices that are common in the United States, what class do these fall under?

RINPOCHE: It varies. Although Chenrezik includes all practices you cannot really assign it to one tantra or another, but you can say that it is basically practiced as kriya tantra. Tara is more complicated. The Tara praises are considered anuttara yoga tantra because they come from an anuttara yoga tantra. The Tara practice is considered charya tantra. Then Amitabha has elements of kriya tantra but basically it is considered anuttara yoga tantra. The reason why Amitabha may be practiced from the beginning is that, because of Amitabha's compassion, it is always beneficial, like water. Water is always beneficial. It is either something you can drink or something you can wash with, and so on. Ngondro is basically a preliminary to Vajrayana practice. The four common preliminaries are common to all vehicles, especially to the shravakayana and pratyekabuddhayana. Then the four uncommon preliminaries basically are concerned with the purification of obscurations and gathering the accumulations, so they are somewhat in accordance with kriya tantra and so forth, although they are not actually the practice of kriya tantra

and, therefore do not involve the same requirements, such as ablution and so forth.

STUDENT: Are they based on the supplications to wisdom deities and are the visualizations self-generation or front-generation? Is that what classifies them?

RINPOCHE: That is one consideration but it is not the only one. For example, in the practice of complete kriya tantra, kriya tantra without any content from other tantras, there will be no self-generation, only the invocation of the deity in front, however, a great deal of kriya tantra practice is mixed with charya tantra, in which case there will be self-generation and one in front. So it is not that simple.

STUDENT: Last weekend when we were doing the nyungne, I woke myself up from sleep talking on the day that we were not supposed to talk, so I went through the whole next morning thinking to myself, “What is the point? You just trashed everything.” When I woke up and realized that I was talking to myself, I stopped.

RINPOCHE: You did not violate the vows of the nyungne because you were asleep. You cannot break vows in your sleep. There are

people who talk all night long in their sleep and they cannot control it, so they do not lose the vow.

One thing that I want to say is that sometimes we look at ourselves, we compare ourselves to others, and we think that we are not fortunate. We look at ourselves and we think that other people have clearer minds or other people have more calm emotional states or whatever, but the first thing about this is that you should never think you are unfortunate if you are in this situation, where you have this much contact with this many teachers, and the opportunity to receive this much instruction. You must have a great deal of merit to be in this position. You must have accumulated a tremendous amount of merit in the past and you are using it wisely now.

On the other hand, there is no point in simply becoming miserable about it because that is not going to do anything. It is not going to make you feel better and it is not going to help you in the long run. The best thing we can do when we feel depressed or sad is to practice tonglen and to take the depression, the sadness and the particular circumstances that are afflicting us, as they appear in the lives of others, onto ourselves so that we think, “May all others who experience this type of unpleasant feeling or this type of unpleasant situation or this view of oneself and so on, may they all be free of this and may only I have to

experience this.” By doing that you will actually relieve yourself. Because you are not concerned with your own depression, you will relieve yourself of the depression and pain and the sadness. This has many benefits. The immediate benefit is that through not being concerned with yourself but being concerned with others, you will be free of a great deal of suffering. For example, if when something goes wrong, such as you become ill or something else goes wrong, you rejoice in it because you think that you are successfully taking on the sufferings of others, then you will not be as disturbed by fluctuations in events. If you think, “Through this sickness of mine, may all others be free from sickness,” this could actually make you feel better physically as well. Even if it does not heal the sickness, it will certainly heal the mental pain that otherwise comes along with sickness because you will not be fixating on it; you will be thinking about others. In that way, if you take anything in your life or your experience that is a source of pain or sadness for you and you use it as a basis for the practice of tonglen, you will be able to benefit yourself and others.

Closing the Door to the Lower Realms: The Practice of Yoga Tantra for Those Skilled in Ritual and Mudras

NAMO GURU VAIROCHANAYE. The Sanskrit invocation that begins the chapter is addressed to the guru inseparable from the Buddha Vairochana. “Virya Sagara, Tsonдру Gyamtso, who is requesting this teaching, please listen. There is wondrous and pleasing speech to be found in what follows.”

In contrast to the kriya and charya tantras, in the practice of yoga tantra, external actions, and especially ritual cleanliness, are not of primary importance. What is of the greatest importance in yoga tantra is the cultivation of samadhi, and because it is samadhi that is cultivated as an internal practice or internal yoga, this tantra is given its name. This does not mean that there is no mention of avoiding certain actions or avoiding certain foods in yoga tantra. For example, it is taught in yoga tantra that meat and liquor should be avoided, not because they are impure but because they are unvirtuous. It is not as important as it is in kriya and charya tantra, where you must completely abandon meat, liquor, and other impure foods. Compared to

the first two levels of tantra, yoga tantra is more convenient to practice and is a method for the acquisition of siddhi without great inconvenience or difficulty.

For these and other reasons, the king of Tibet, Trisong Deutsen, from among the countless tantras and levels of tantra that were translated under his patronage, had a particular interest in and particular affection for yoga tantra. In a temple that he had built in the center of Samye, the second floor and, to some extent, the third floor, were decorated with the mandala of Vajradhatu, one of the principal yoga tantra mandalas.

The original source for the Sarma tradition of secret mantra in Tibet was the great pandita and lotsawa Lochen Rinchen Zangpo who is considered an emanation of Manjushri. He was a great pandita, and although learned in all the Buddha's teachings, all the tantras and all the sciences, he was especially a master of yoga tantra in general, and within yoga tantra, of the particular tantra that is called the *Purification of Lower States*. As a result, in the early spreading of the teachings during the time of King Trisong Deutsen, yoga tantra was greatly emphasized and during the subsequent spreading of the teachings, which began with the time of Rinchen Zangpo, it was very much emphasized as well.

In particular, the great teacher Lord Atisha said, “In Tibet, because there is little cleanliness and because people’s conduct is coarse, there is no hope of practicing the kriya and charya tantras.” You remember that kriya and charya tantras depend upon extreme cleanliness and also very, very finely governed conduct. Atisha felt that the situation in Tibet when he went there was not such that these tantras could be conveniently practiced. He went on to say, “As well, you have a great deal of doubt and your thoughts are very coarse, therefore anuttara yoga tantra, the fourth and highest tantra, will not work with you either because it will not fit in your minds. It will not work with your thoughts. Therefore what will benefit Tibet most is yoga tantra.”

In general, regardless what level of tantra the practice is, the deities are all wisdom deities; there is no higher or lower. The deities themselves do not partake of, and are not limited by the designation of the tantra to which their practice belongs. At the same time, the various tantras were taught in accordance with the minds and attitudes of those to whom they were taught. Since the Buddha taught kriya tantra first, we consider kriya tantra to be the root of all four tantras. Because of this, there are several ways that kriya tantra can be practiced. Kriya tantra can be practiced simply as it is set forth in the kriya tantras, or it can be practiced in the style of charya tantra, in which case the deity of the practice is from kriya tantra but the way that it

is done is like charya tantra. Various great masters of India have taught that kriya tantra can also be practiced like yoga tantra. An example of this is the common practice of the nine-deity mandala of Amitayus, which is kriya tantra in its scriptural origin, but yoga tantra in its style of practice. You should not think that these two cannot be mixed or that a practice need be exclusively classified as only one of the four tantras.

Lord Atisha taught many practices that were a combination of the various levels of tantra. For example, the Green Mewatsek, and also the practice of Akshobhya are examples of kriya tantra being practiced in the style of yoga tantra. The great pandita Vajrasanapada taught ways of practicing kriya tantra as anuttara yoga, in which the techniques of anuttara yoga are employed in a practice that has its origin in kriya tantra, for example, the white form of Vajravidarana that was taught by the pandita *Vimalamitra*. The earlier and subsequent Vajrasanapada had two lists of one hundred sadhanas that included kriya tantra practices being practiced as yoga tantra or even as anuttara yoga tantra.

This initial presentation is leading up to the discussion of the affiliation, as far as levels of tantra are concerned, of the series of empowerments called *Chik She Kun Drol*, “knowing one liberates all.” This series of empowerments was collected and composed by the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje. Although

the empowerments are the same, they vary only in the details of the deity and mantra, therefore the way the empowerment is prepared for by the master, as well as the self, front, and vase generation, is essentially done according to yoga tantra.

The structure of the empowerment itself consists of the empowerments of body, speech, mind, qualities, activity, and the concluding torma empowerment. The first three of these, the empowerments or permission blessings of body, speech, and mind are essentially in accordance with the Indian texts for empowerments of the yoga tantra. The full empowerment also includes the qualities empowerment and the activity empowerment, which involve the presentation of the costume of the deity and scepters of the deity — peaceful costumes and ornaments in the case of a peaceful deity, wrathful ones in the case of a wrathful deity. The qualities and activity empowerments, together with the torma empowerment include the special features of the empowerment ceremonies of the Nyingma tradition. The empowerments of the *Chik She Kun Drol* cycle are extraordinary because they include not only many levels of tantra but also the different traditions of the Sarma and Nyingma. The scriptural sources of these styles of empowerment are found in the *Tantra of Great Monarchical Empowerment* and the *Tantra of the Tormas of the Protectors*. These empowerments include the essence of all the particular standard features of both the Sarma and Nyingma traditions. Since they

are in accordance with all traditions, you could consider them superior because they are not limited.

This collection was newly composed by the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, and at that time, Karma Chakme writes, “Some were irritated by it, and in their irritation said, ‘Well, what tantra is this all based on anyway?’ They made a great deal of noise that has come to my ears.” This was the Karmapa’s response. “Well, the *Vajra Mala* — which is a collection of tantras, sadhanas, and mandalas sacred to the lineage that objected to Wangchuk Dorje’s composition — and the hundred sadhanas, and so forth, do not come from one tantra either, do they? They were put together by great learned panditas, were they not? Well, it is the same.”

In the same way, Wangchuk Dorje brought together into one all of the tantras of the Sarma and Nyingma traditions — those coming from the oral tradition, from the treasure tradition, from the tradition of special instruction, and so on. It is extremely inclusive, extremely profound, and very vast in that it encompasses deities from all these different traditions of tantra. It is something that was never known before. Until the Ninth Karmapa composed it, in no lineage was there a single collection that included all of these various deities. Chakme Rinpoche writes, “Abandon your doubt and, recognizing its preciousness, hold this collection in your heart.”

This introduction to the chapter on yoga tantra has a concluding stanza that is humorous in intent. “This little song of devotion for yoga tantra was written in the evening session on the twelfth day of the month Gyal in the Horse Year, by Raga Asya who is an old village ceremonialist.” Of course, this is not true. Village ceremonialists are those who go through villages performing little ceremonies to get offerings and often they will do yoga tantra ceremonies. That is why he is making this amusing remark. He continues, “Remembering how much I have accumulated through these ceremonies, I, of course, praise the tantras that are the source of them.” Of course, this is not his reason at all; he is making fun of himself. “This was written down while laughing by Virya Sagara.”

The Actual Practice of Yoga Tantra

As this section deals with the actual practice of yoga tantra, the invocation is addressed to the particular form of Vairochana called **Kunrik**, NAMO GURU SARVA VIDAYE. Someone who is living in retreat, or is practicing intensively, should form a connection with yoga tantra.

Yoga tantra in its original sources consists of a root tantra, an explanatory tantra, and the subsequent tantras. The root tantra is called the *Denyi Dupa*, or the *Condensed Suchness*. In that tantra the mandala that is presented is the Vajradhatu mandala. The explanatory tantra, which explains the *Denyi Dupa*, is called the *Vajra Peak*. In the Vajra Peak tantra, the mandala that is presented is Kamsung Namgyal, the One Who Is Victorious over All Three Realms. The practices for these two mandalas, Vajradhatu and Kamsung Namgyal, are found in collections such as the *Vajra Mala*. Essentially the body of the practice is similar to the practice of Kunrik or Vairochana, which is the principal yoga tantra practice from our point of view. “Because these practices of the Vajradhatu mandala and the Kamsung Namgyal are not that widespread,” Chakme Rinpoche writes, “I will not go into detail about them.”

The two other major tantras in the yoga tantra, the subsequent tantras, are the *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms*, in which the practice of Kunrik is presented, and the *Tantra of the Nine Peaks*. “Some people have doubts about the latter. The *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms* is undisputed and is the same as the sun and the moon. Therefore practically speaking, nowadays most yoga tantra consists of the practice of Kunrik based upon the *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms*.”

There are four great commentaries on this that were composed in India. The essence of all of these was collected into the *Great Door to Liberation* composed by Lochen Rinchen Zangpo. There are also different commentaries that came from India and from Tibet. One is called *Boundless Benefit for Others* and another one is called *Light Rays of Benefit for Others*. These were based upon the teachings of Atisha so there is nothing wrong with them, but fundamentally, in terms of the practice of Kunrik, we follow the tradition of Lochen Rinchen Zangpo. When he and Atisha met and discussed yoga tantra, Lochen Rinchen Zangpo was somewhat displeased with Atisha's views and interpretation of it, and actually made the remark, "Well, I know more about yoga tantra than he does." We therefore consider the *Great Door to Liberation*, which is the treatise on yoga tantra by Rinchen Zangpo, to be authoritative.

Why should someone practice yoga tantra? We are all trying to obtain buddhahood. To do that we practice in retreat, we undertake ordinations, vows, and we have all generated the intention to attain supreme awakening. In this situation, when we have undertaken the three vows — the pratimoksha vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the samaya vows through empowerment — minor violations occur constantly like rainfall. In fact, for someone who has not studied the sutras and tantras extensively, you will not even know about most of the minor violations that

are occurring. If you study extensively you might know about them, and knowing about them, you might be able to prevent at least some of them, but if you do not study, then there will be constant violation of the three vows that you are not even aware of. You may ask what a minor violation is. A minor violation is classified as a violation that in itself is not sufficient to bring about rebirth in lower realms. When seven minor violations of any of the three vows have occurred that becomes a downfall. A downfall is defined as a violation of any of the three vows that is sufficient to lead to rebirth in the lower realms. If a single downfall of any of the three vows occurs and is not confessed — and since you do not know these minor violations are occurring you are not confessing them — you must take rebirth in the lower realms, at least once. There is no other possibility, therefore for one's own benefit, practicing the method for preventing the rebirth in the lower realms is essential.

You may be in the position where people ask you to perform ceremonies for the deceased, and they will make offerings and give food to you for that purpose. These people are placing their trust in you that you can actually help or protect the person who has died. Since you have that responsibility for people who have passed away, there is no better ceremony you can do from any of the sutras or any of the tantras of the Sarma or Nyingma traditions than the practice of the *Tantra for the Purification of the*

Lower Realms. This practice of yoga tantra is also very important for the benefit of others.

The procedure of yoga tantra practice is clear in the liturgy so Karma Chakme does not go through it. In the first session of every day, you offer one preliminary tormas and in the other three sessions you do not. You can do either three or four sessions a day when you are doing yoga tantra practice and in each session you recite the self-generation, the self-visualization. You visualize yourself as the central figure of the mandala, who is the Buddha Vairochana. In your heart is a moon disc, on top of which is a five-pronged vajra marked with a HUM; if you do not wish to visualize that, you can simply visualize a white HUM standing upright on the moon disc. The vajra or the HUM is surrounded by the root mantra, the Vairochana dharani, which is standing upright. There are many other deities in this mandala, the other buddhas, the sixteen bodhisattvas, the sixteen shravakas, the twelve pratyekabuddhas, the four consorts, the offering goddesses, and so on. Each has a moon disc in their heart on top of which is their individual syllable, which varies for each deity, surrounded by their individual mantra.

The central deities, which are the wisdom deities, start from the central figure, Vairochana, all the way out to the eight wrathful deities at the perimeter of the wisdom mandala. Although they

are individual in appearance and although they are visualized as physically separate from one another, you identify with all of them. You think that you are all of those deities, just as you think that all the different parts of your body are part of your body. It is like that. When reciting the mantra, you think that from the mouths of the deities resounds the sound of their mantras. You can visualize that the rays of light that come from the mantra garlands in the hearts of the deities swirl around and spin. In the case of the male deities, this is clockwise and in the case of the female deities, counterclockwise. There is no mention in this yoga tantra of the mantra garlands themselves spinning, just the rays of light.

While reciting the mantra, you think that from the mantra in your heart, rays of five-colored light emanate. These rays of light emerge from between your eyebrows and pervade the three realms in general, but especially the bardo and the three lower realms. These rays of light illuminate all of these realms like the sun rising. As they illuminate these realms, they purify or remove all of the wrongdoing and obscurations of all beings that cause rebirth in the lower realms and also they remove the actual suffering of the lower realms that result from those causes. They remove or purify all these things just the way the hot rays of the sun burn off or dissolve the dew. Then the rays of light are withdrawn and dissolve back into your heart. Again rays of

light emanate as before and they become vast oceans of offerings to all buddhas. Then each of those individual rays of light becomes a buddha who, like Buddha Shakyamuni, demonstrates all twelve deeds of a supreme nirmanakaya and in that way, benefits beings as did Buddha Shakyamuni. Then again the rays of light are withdrawn and dissolve into your heart.

During the visualizations you recite the mantra as much as you can. At the end of the first three of four sessions of the day you think that your ordinary form is emanated from the heart of yourself as Vairochana and that your ordinary form, having been emanated in that way, goes about your business, whatever it is you have to do in between the sessions. When you begin the subsequent session, since there is a little bit of an ablution still in yoga tantra, you perform the ablution. Then you think that your ordinary form, having been cleansed, dissolves back into the heart of yourself as Vairochana. In postmeditation you think that the mandala is still there. You have just been projected or emanated out of it to do whatever ordinary things you have to do.

In yoga tantra there are a lot of mudras — dharma mudra, karma mudra, samaya mudra, and so on — which are used to seal the wisdom deity within your body for the duration of the practice. You do not completely loose those seals until the end of the day. In each session you recite the self-visualization to reclarify

it. You have not dissolved it but you reclarify it. At the end of the last session of the day, it is necessary to request the wisdom deities to depart. You release the mudras or seals that bound them and then you invite them to return to their natural places of residence. It is important to do so. It is said that if you go to sleep without having requested the wisdom deities to depart and without having released the mudras that bind them, you incur the wrongdoing of holding the deities prisoners. You do not want to do that. Do not think that if you dissolve the deities into a support, such as a painting or statue, that that is holding the deity prisoner; it is not. That is acceptable. This is for yoga tantra in particular. Then you conclude the practice with the dedication and aspiration liturgies and go to sleep.

The next days are done exactly the same way, in three or four sessions, like the one day of the practice just described. As for how long the practice is to be conducted, at best it should be done for six months, if not, then for three months or, at least for one month. The mantra requirements for this practice are, for the greatest amount, which would take six months — 400,000 of the root **awareness mantra** or dharani, 40,000 of each of the many retinue mantras, and 40,000 mantras during the fire puja or, if not, 10,000 mantras during the fire puja. This is the extensive approach for the mantra practice of Kunrik.

The intermediate approach, which would take three months, also involves 400,000 of the principal mantra, but the mantra is shortened. You recite the long mantra once and then for the rest of the mala you recite only the second half of the mantra. It is similar in length and similar in style to the mantras in the Nyungne. You would do 400,000 of the second half of the dharani, then 10,000 of each of the other four buddhas, 1,000 of each of the other four female buddhas, and only one hundred of each of the other retinue mantras. There are many of these retinue mantras. To seal the practice, you would do one session of an extensive fire puja devoted to purification of obscurations. That is the intermediate approach practice of Kunrik.

For the abbreviated approach, because you are visualizing all of the deities of the self-visualization as being extensions of yourself and because all of the mantras of the various deities and all of the deities themselves are, in a sense, included in the root dharani, you would recite only the root dharani 400,000 times. If you cannot do that, then you would recite it 300,000 or at least 100,000 times. At the end of that, if you can do a fire puja that is best but if you cannot, because you do not have the necessary resources or if you do not know how to do it, then you can do the brief fire puja that is included in the purification ritual, where all of your wrongdoings are summoned into

sesame seeds and those are offered to a fire with one hundred or one thousand mantras.

The signs of successful practice of Kunrik are found in texts that deal with signs of practice. Various signs of the purification of wrongdoing and obscurations will arise and some of these are explained in the tantra itself, the *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms*.

The tantra itself only presents the practice of self-visualization or self-generation. Where normally you divide the practice into approach, emphasizing the self-generation, and accomplishment, emphasizing the front-generation, there is not, strictly speaking, a separate accomplishment practice according to the tantras. Customarily one does do what is called a “practice offering,” *drupchö*, at the end that would involve all of the usual parts — the self-generation, the front-generation, and the vase generation, which would each be done in three or four sessions. The strictures of this form of practice would be binding and releasing of the deities and so on. You would practice the mantras, especially at the end of the session, for the vase and the front-visualization deities.

The visualizations are the same. You think that the deities visualized in the front and the deities in the vase are proclaiming their

individual mantras and the rays of light are emanating from their hearts in the same way as in the self-generation. The drupchö would be done for three, five, or seven days. At the end of that, if you are doing it for your own benefit, to purify your own obscuration, you would take the self-empowerment. If you are doing it for the benefit of another — and this often happens in Tibet where people would ask to receive the empowerment of Kunrik one hundred times to purify their obscurations — then you would do the self-empowerment at the end. Or you might be doing it in preparation for a ceremony for the deceased, which at best would involve the physical presence of the body or, if not, an inscription that has the person's name and so forth written on it, into which the person's consciousness is summoned. This is giving the empowerment much the way a living person would be given it.

If you do not wish to conclude the practice with either the selfempowerment or the empowerment for the dead, then you distribute the water from the vase used in the vase practice as widely as possible because it is beneficial for anyone to take. Also during the practice, either during the approach practice of the self-generation or the accomplishment of the front-generation, you have a container of sand that you regularly bless with the sound of the mantra carried on your breath. That sand, which has been blessed in that way, can be used to bless others, espe-

cially bodies of humans and animals, and even if the bodies are not available, then the bones or bits of bones of humans and animals. By striking them with this sand, you can purify their obscurations, and you can prevent epidemics in the region and so on. Even if you cannot get to a body or bones yourself, if you give the sand to someone else and they do it, it will still work. The sand blessed in this way is considered very beneficial.

This second part concludes with the stanza, “This short song of how to do the approach practice of the Purification Tantra was composed in the evening session of the thirteenth day of the month Gyal in the Year of the Horse by Raga Asya, exactly as I thought of it, and was written down by Virya Sagara.”

The Empowerment Ceremony for Yoga Tantra Practice

The empowerment ceremony for the yoga tantra practice of Vairochana begins with the invocation, NAMO GURU SARVA VIDAYE. “Listen Lama Virya Sagara, when you have performed the empowerment for the *Great Door of Liberation* — the name of the practice text of Vairochana composed by Lochen Rinchen Zangpo — and you do the self-empowerment, although in general

the visualizations are clear in the text itself, some of them are unclear therefore the following instruction is necessary.

When you do the empowerment for another, at the beginning of the empowerment process you think that from the heart of yourself as the central figure in the self-generation mandala, your ordinary form, looking just the way you normally look, is emanated. Your ordinary form or body takes its place in front of the eastern gate of the front generated mandala where you remain in your ordinary form kneeling with your palms joined as, for example, when you take vows. Then you receive the vows and samayas and the empowerments from the front-generated deity inseparable from your root guru. When you recite the words in the self-empowerment that are recited by the empowering master in an actual empowerment, you think that they are being said to you by the central figure in the front visualization who serves as the empowering master in the self empowerment, although of course it is you who is physically saying them. At the end of the self-empowerment, you take the form of Vajrasattva, in which form you reenter the heart, the body, of the self visualization Vairochana. Then you seal the wisdom deity into the visualized deity with the mantra that is used in this practice for doing so.

When you do the empowerment for someone else, you emanate from your heart the principal figure in the self-visualization in the

form of yourself in the form of the deity. It is just the principal deity Vairochana, alone without the retinue, that is visualized. He is seated on a lion throne in front of the eastern gate of the front-visualization mandala, in front of the disciple. In front of you, you visualize the entire world with all its realms, and in between you and the world, you visualize all the disciples who are receiving the empowerment. When giving the empowerment to someone else, the empowering master thinks that he is the liaison between the deities of the mandala and the disciples, that he is introducing the disciples to the mandala. Then the mandala, having been introduced to them, bestows the empowerment upon them.

In general the manner and sequence of empowerment is clear in the liturgy, however, it is very important to understand that one of the special features of yoga tantra is the extraordinary generation of bodhichitta. It is called “generation of vajra bodhichitta” and it is done by visualizing in your heart relative bodhichitta in the form of a moon disk and absolute bodhichitta in the form of a blue or white five-pronged vajra standing upright on that moon disk. Visualizing the two bodhichittas in that way, you generate them through reciting the mantra OM SARVA YOGA CHITTA UTPADAYA MI. This is of great significance because, according to yoga tantra, it was immediately upon saying that mantra that the Buddha entered into his final samadhi and

attained perfect awakening. Therefore this visualization of the moon and vajra should be done during the practice, not just during the empowerment, and it will bring great accomplishment of both tranquillity and insight. In a sense, you could consider that visualization to be the main meditation of yoga tantra.

Although the empowerment from there onward is clear in the liturgy, the various parts of the empowerment are as follows. Whether you are taking the empowerment as self-empowerment or it is being given to another, the empowerment of the mantra is given in the following way. You think that from the hearts of the deities in the front-generation emanate their individual mantras, of which the syllables are all golden in color. They enter the body of the person receiving the empowerment, you or the disciple, through the top of the head and fill the entire body. That is the visualization for the *mantra empowerment* of yoga tantra.

The main empowerments, which include the five empowerments of awareness connected with the five families and the empowerment of a vajra master, are conducted by the deities in the following way. Mentally you supplicate the principal figure of the front-generation and as a result empowerment is bestowed. This is mentioned because it is not the case that you have to actually verbally say to the deities, “Please give me the empowerment,” and then the deities agree to do so. That part

happens mentally. As a result, the principal figure directs his attention to the retinue deities and simply through his doing so, the empowerment takes place. First of all, the principal figure and the other four buddhas, that is to say the **five buddhas**, direct their attention to you as the disciple and bestow the empowerment through their intention that you receive it. Then the four consorts, since in this mandala there are not five consorts but four, emanate four consorts like themselves from their hearts and they physically bestow the empowerment upon you.

For example, during the first empowerment, the water *empowerment of Akshobhya*, they take up the Victorious Vase, which has been placed in the eastern gate of the mandala, raise it into space, and bestow the empowerment by pouring the water from that vase into your body through the top of your head. This purifies all obscurations and fills your body with ambrosia. At that time, the sixteen bodhisattvas of the mandala express the auspiciousness of the empowerment. The **eight offering goddesses** sing songs and play musical instruments and the eight wrathful deities, who guard the perimeter of the mandala and protect the empowerment process from obstacles and impediments. That is the first empowerment, the water empowerment. Visualizing that, you physically take the empowerment by the placing of the vase upon your head and so forth. That is called the water

empowerment of Akshobhya. In this mandala of yoga tantra King of Purification is simply another name for Akshobhya.

The second empowerment is the *crown empowerment of Ratnasambhava*. In this mandala, Ratnasambhava is called Precious Supreme Monarch. As in the previous empowerment you think that the four consorts in the mandala emanate, from their hearts, duplicates of themselves who take up the precious crown and secure it to your head. At the same time, garlands of five-colored flowers are placed on the five places on top of your head and silk ribbons are attached to the crown and go to the right and left on your head. You think that all of these things are actually placed on your head by the four emanated mothers.

The next empowerment is that from the hearts of the **five Victors** — the five male buddhas in the front-generation mandala — who emanate their scepters, which take their places in the five directions of the disciples' hands. This includes the *vajra empowerment of Amitabha* and the *bell empowerment of Amoghasiddhi*. Then you think that the master, here represented by the central figure of the frontgeneration holding his own vajra and bell, empowers you proclaiming the name, which is the *name empowerment of Vairochana*. This concludes the five empowerments of awareness of the five families. If you have received that much of the Vairochana empowerment, you are authorized to perform the meditation

and the mantra repetition. It is called “the empowerment of the disciples” for the first half of the empowerment because it ripens or matures the disciple who has not yet been ripened.

Having been ripened to bring about your own liberation and in order, subsequently, to be able to benefit and serve as the master of others, you need to receive the second part of the empowerment, which is called “the empowerment of the vajra master.” For this, the person receiving the empowerment is visualized as Vajrasattva, as is clear in the text, and then the master or the front-visualized deity places a *vishva vajra*, “double vajra,” which represents the consummation of the four activities, into the right hand of the disciple. Through that, you should think that you are able to accomplish the four activities.

Next a thousand-spoked golden wheel is placed between your feet, or in your left hand, and this empowers you to turn the dharmachakra. Then from the hearts of the five victors — the five buddhas in the front-generation mandala — the corresponding bodhisattvas of their individual families are emanated, and these dissolve into the disciples causing them to become the principal figure of each or all of the mandalas of yoga tantra. Then from the hearts of the four consorts, the four mothers in the mandala, emerge the scepters that represent them. Because the consort of the principal figure is not shown as a separate deity but is

present in a hidden form from the left side of the body of the principal figure Vairochana, a source of Dharma marked with an eye emerges. All of these, the four scepters and the source of Dharma, dissolve into the disciples, causing them to be able to realize the secret instructions of yoga tantra and to be able to explain them to others. In the same way, from each of the five buddhas their individual scepters radiate and dissolve into the disciples, causing them to receive the empowerments of body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity and to be able to quickly generate the five wisdoms.

The master, or in the case of self-empowerment the front-visualized deity, places the vajra and bell in the hands of the disciples. The significance of this is that the disciple realizes the meaning of *prajna* and *upaya*, “discernment” and “method.” Then the disciple holds this vajra and bell crossed in front of his heart to show that awakening cannot be attained through only discernment or only method, but must be attained through the unification of these two. When receiving that empowerment you think that you have realized the meaning of the unity of method and discernment. The empowerments of the yoga tantra are contained in the five empowerments of awareness that make up the empowerment of a vajra disciple and the empowerment of a vajra master. That completes the second part of the Vairochana empowerment,

which is the empowerment of a vajra master. This also completes the main body of the empowerment.

The *concluding empowerment* for yoga tantra is the bestowal of the *seven articles of royalty*. This is an expression of auspiciousness that is done in the form of an empowerment. In elaborate ceremonies of empowerment of any of the four levels of tantra, there will be something like this. In the case of the kriya and charya tantras, usually it is the bestowal of the eight auspicious substances. The reason for this is that in the kriya and charya tantras there is emphasis on following the example of the Buddha's life and at the time of the Buddha's awakening he was presented with the eight auspicious substances. Therefore they are often presented at the end of a kriya or charya tantra empowerment in the form of the presentation of auspiciousness. In yoga tantra, there is an emphasis on the deity being in the style of a monarch, therefore instead of the eight auspicious substances the seven articles of royalty are presented. In anuttara yoga tantra, because emphasis is on the actual accomplishment of the marks and signs of the buddhakaya, auspiciousness is presented as the eight auspicious signs that represent the eight features on the body of the Buddha. In extensive ceremonies of anuttara yoga tantra there may be all three: the eight substances, the seven articles of royalty, and the eight auspicious signs.

In the Vairochana empowerment in yoga tantra, the seven articles of royalty are presented. These should not be thought of as the ordinary things that they resemble. For example, they include the precious queen, the precious steed, the precious elephant; this is not the bestowal of a woman, a horse, and an elephant. They symbolize what are called the seven riches of the aryas or of the bodhisattvas, and they are represented symbolically by these seven articles of royalty. The visualization is that these things are emanated on rays of light from the heart of the principal figure in the front-generation mandala and they are given to the disciple as an award or as a present, symbolizing the disciple's having been raised or elevated to a certain position. This is analogous to when someone is chosen by their master to serve as a preceptor or khenpo, then he or she will be given the three Dharma robes, the begging bowl, the begging staff, and the meditation hat of the lineage.

In the visualization, and preferably in the actual physical bestowal of the empowerment, the first two, the wheel and the jewel, should be placed in the disciple's hands. The queen would be placed on the disciple's left, the minister on the disciple's right, the general behind the disciple, and the horse and the elephant both in front of the disciple. Whether this is physically done or not, you must meditate that it is done in that way. Nowadays — and usually when Chakme Rinpoche says nowadays it is going

to be a criticism — for convenience people tend to give this empowerment just by placing an image of the seven on top of the disciple's head. That may be all right as a physical way of bestowing the empowerment, but during the empowerment you must not meditate that these things are placed on your head. It is very inauspicious because that means that you are controlled and oppressed by the general, and trampled on by the elephant. This is especially so if your visualization is good. It is very, very unlucky.

Next is the bestowal of *samaya*. In general, in all Vajrayana, in all secret mantra, the command of the guru is considered even more important and of even greater consequence than the command of the Buddha himself. There is no point simply saying you must keep all samayas properly because most people who receive empowerments cannot keep all the samayas that are proclaimed in the tantras. How could they possibly? They will not even know about them. When you receive the samaya, you should emphasize that in accordance with the command of your guru, who gives you practical instructions in how you should approach samaya, you will, from now on, keep samaya as best as you can. Also emphasize that as you progress through the path and as your ability to maintain the various samayas increases, you will gradually expand that ability until you can keep all the samayas as expressed in the tantras. Therefore when

you take the samaya vow and you say, “I will do just as the leader has commanded,” you should do so with that understanding.

In conclusion the benefits, or final results, of the practice of yoga tantra are explained. Through practicing this yoga tantra you will not be reborn in the lower realms; you will be reborn for sixteen lifetimes as a human being. Not only will you be born as a human being, but also during each of those sixteen lifetimes you will again meet with teachers and practice the teachings of yoga tantra. At the end of the sixteenth lifetime of practicing yoga tantra, after you pass away you will be reborn in one of the realms of the five buddhas, such as the realm of Vairochana, or whichever one you have the most devotion for. Having been born in that realm, at the conclusion of sixteen successive lifetimes of yoga tantra practice, your state of realization will actually be equal to that of the principal figure in that realm, the buddha of that family. In fact, at the end of sixteen lifetimes, you will have, through yoga tantra, attained the state of perfect awakening. Nevertheless you will take the position, and bear the appearance, of a bodhisattva of the buddha family of that particular realm. You will remain in that realm, receiving teachings from the principal figure, the lord of the family of that buddha family but, because you are already awakened, although you take the form of a bodhisattva, you have the ability

of a buddha to lead beings to awakening through inexhaustible and unlimited emanations.

The chapter concludes, “This explanation of the empowerment, path, and result of yoga tantra was spoken as a song by Raga Asya in the evening session of the thirteenth day of the month Gyal in the Horse Year.

“Nowadays most lamas, great lamas and minor lamas, do many rituals using this tantra, the *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms*. For that reason, it is essential that they perform the practice of Vairochana with the requisite number of mantra repetitions.” If you have not done the requisite number of mantra repetitions of a deity and yet you give the empowerment or you do the funeral ceremony using that deity, it is considered a branch downfall of secret mantra. It is the branch downfall of engaging in activities without having done the approach practice. Among the eight branch downfalls, this one, called a “thick branch,” is a serious impairment. If you do the practice with the requisite number of mantras, then you can perform the various ceremonies for the purification of others’ obscurations. You can perform the five applications based on the five victors, the sixteen applications based on the sixteen bodhisattvas, the eight applications based on the eight wrathful deities, the

consecration of an image of the deities of this mandala, and so forth. You are authorized to do all that.

Tsondru Gyamtso concludes, “This was written with great difficulty by the faithful and diligent Virya Sagara, with the light of a butter lamp, so that in all future lifetimes the foolish like myself may be illuminated by the wisdom of this teaching.” That completes the twentieth chapter.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I think it was said that when one receives the empowerment for a vajra master then one can practice the four actions. Could you please tell us what the four actions are?

RINPOCHE: When you receive the empowerment of a vajra master, you are empowered to enact the four activities, which are pacification, enrichment, attraction, and force. These are to be applied as necessary in specific situations.

STUDENT: I have been reading namthars and I am amazed by the number of practices and teachings and different accomplishments of some of the great lamas such as Chungpo Naljor in the Shangpa biographies. I am wondering how the lamas practice. One

cannot do a thousand practices every day. Do they accomplish one practice and then go on to the next or how do they do it?

RINPOCHE: One finds the same situation with many biographies, such as those of Jamgon Lodro Thaye and Karma Chakme. In all of these cases, it seems impossible that any one individual could have done all of the things that those individuals certainly did. If you look at the composition and writings of teachers like Jamgon Lodro Thaye and Karma Chakme, you would think that they devoted their entire lives to writing and did nothing else. But if you look at the records of the practices they did and completed, you would think that they devoted their entire lives to practice and did nothing else. In some cases they did things sequentially, but mostly the way that they did it was to actually practice and compose simultaneously. It is inconceivable. For example, Karma Chakme said about himself there was not a single instruction that he had not received. Of those he received, there was not a single one that he had not practiced and of those he practiced, there was not a single one that he had not brought to its completion to where the signs of success were apparent. If you think about it in the normal situation, this would be impossible.

One thing that makes this possible is that because these individuals are bodhisattvas, they do not need to rely upon the measure of this practice, number and time, that ordinary people do, since

they do a practice until they meet the deities face to face and receive prophesy and instruction as is appropriate from that deity. Because their karma is so purified, that will happen very quickly.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, this retreat manual is getting into more complex, arcane, and foreign types of descriptions. I am wondering if you can bring it into the context of today, and what type of person — monk, nun, or layperson — would do a practice like Vairochana yoga tantra.

RINPOCHE: This is pretty well practiced by everyone. For example, at Thrangu Monastery there is a yearlong retreat, a particular retreat, just for this Vairochana practice. Ten monks are admitted every year and at the end of the year, they complete it with the fire puja and another ten are put in. That has been going on now for five years at Thrangu Monastery in Tibet. It was always a part of Thrangu Monastery's traditional retreat program. Most Tibetan monasteries have some kind of Vairochana practice going on all the time. For example, at Rumtek and Sherab Ling there is not a separate retreat for the Vairochana practice, but it is done regularly as a group practice for ten days every year.

It is also often done in monasteries upon request. For example, if someone passes away, a relative will ask the monastery to please

do Vairochana. Then it would be done for one day with the practice as it has been described here, the complete practice and the self-empowerment, and then the Southern Gate Ceremony. If it is possible and if we develop enough of a sangha to do so, we are definitely going to do it here.

STUDENT: I was interested if Rinpoche could give a little bit more detail about the very learned lama who was so knowledgeable in yoga tantra. I believe it was Rinchen Zangpo. Could you explain how he fits into the tradition?

RINPOCHE: Lochen Rinchen Zangpo was born in Ngari, in western Tibet. He was born toward the end of the tenth century. His birth date is considered to be the beginning of what is called the Sarma period, or the period of the second propagation. What had happened was that the original teachings brought to Tibet during the early propagation of the teachings had been somewhat impaired by the persecution under a king and then the end of that dynasty and the resulting confusion. There was interest among some Tibetans in going to India and retrieving fresh teachings from India itself. The first of these historically, the first Tibetan translator to go to India at that time, was Rinchen Zangpo. He was an emanation of Manjushri. He was the first to bring back the tantras that are called *Sarma* or “New.” His translations of these are still, more or less, the standard for

most uses. He translated these into Tibetan and in that sense, he started the movement that brought individuals like Lord Marpa and Chungpo Naljor to India in order to bring back more teachings, do their own translations, and so on. There are many bits and pieces that we use that were translated by Lochen Rinchen Zangpo.

STUDENT: Is there any plan for us to do this practice here?

RINPOCHE: It is not impossible. There would have to be enough people who could do the practice and then we would have to get the whole thing together; the mandala has to be created and so on. It is not so difficult that it is impossible, but it would require some preparation. Principally, as I mentioned last night, what might be created is a retreat for this yoga tantra practice. The main thing that people would need to be able to do this practice is a high level of literacy in Tibetan because it is more difficult than the practices that are done in the three-year retreat, as far as the reading part, the mudras, the ritual, and so on. The yidam practices that are done there are, in a sense, less elaborate, less complex. This practice of Vairochana involves a lot to learn, with many mudras and a lot of flipping around. It is not straight through the book from beginning to end. You have to learn it.

STUDENT: How long does it take?

RINPOCHE: In Thrangu Monastery it took a year, but the first four months of that retreat were devoted to ngondro, one month for each part. Then there were seven months of the Vairochana and then one month of the concluding rituals, the fire puja, and so forth.

Showing the Path to Liberation: The Visualization for the Southern Gate Ceremony of the Vairochana Practice

This chapter is also connected with the Vairochana practice of yoga tantra. Southern Gate Ceremony refers to a purification ceremony for the deceased. The reason why it is called “Southern Gate Ceremony” will become clear. Although this is presented as part of the Vairochana practice instruction, the visualizations given here are the basis for the visualizations for any purification ceremony for the dead; most of them can be directly applied to the other ones.

NAMA SARVA TATHAGATA VIDAYE, “Homage to all buddhas and to Vairochana in particular.” Chakme Rinpoche continues, “That which is renowned like the drum of the gods coming from the *Purification Tantra* and the *Tantra of the Nine Peaks*, that drum that has been loudly beaten by the three who are supremely learned in yoga tantra, is pleasing to the ears like the melody of Brahma. Therefore the custom of how to do this ceremony for the deceased is very well known and, indeed, most of the visualizations are clear in the liturgy itself. Because the Ceremony

of the Southern Gate is somewhat concise in its liturgy, some of the visualization must be learned from a teacher. Therefore for the benefit of those with discernment in the future, I will explain them here.” The basis for doing this is the complete practice of Vairochana with the self-visualization, the front-visualization, and the vase visualization; however, here more emphasis will be placed on the front-visualization.

Generally speaking, it is thought that when someone passes away he or she goes to the realm of Yama, which is seen as being in the south; therefore the person needs to be summoned from the southern gate of the mandala. That is why this is called “Southern Gate Ceremony.” For that same reason, you think that you are emanated from the heart of yourself, as the principal figure of the self-generation, in the form of the activity deity. Either Vajrasattva or Vairochana, without retinue, is emanated from the heart of the self-generation and takes his seat on a lion throne at the southern gate of the mandala. You are now, having been emanated in the form of Vajrasattva or Vairochana from the self-visualization, seated in the southern gate of the front-visualization mandala.

Next is the generation of the “name sheet.” In the best cases, the person’s body would be there, but that is quite rare. Usually what is used is a name sheet or name scroll. The name sheet is a

piece of paper that has several things on it, principal of which is the name of the departed. You visualize this name sheet as the person. At this point in the ceremony you actually use the name sheet as the support for your visualization of the person you are trying to assist.

After the person has been visualized, you summon the consciousness of the deceased. You think that rays of light emanate from your heart and strike the heart of the principal figure in the front-visualization mandala. Light from his heart strikes and exhorts the four gatekeepers of the mandala. From those four gatekeepers, countless forms like themselves are emanated and they summon the consciousness of the deceased. In a wrathful ceremony, this would involve a sharp iron hook that grabs, a lasso that binds, a chain that imprisons, and a bell that maddens. In this case, since you are trying to do a purification ritual for the dead, you obviously do not do it that way.

The hook, which is the scepter of the first gatekeeper, represents love from among the four immeasurables and it is the attitude of love that actually hooks the consciousness of the deceased person. You visualize that love as the hook held by the gatekeeper emanation that catches the deceased person's consciousness by the heart. Then they start pulling it in.

The emanations of the second gatekeeper are holding lassos and the lasso here represents compassion, the second immeasurable. It is the compassion that, once the person has been hooked by love, grabs them by the neck and pulls them in so that, without any control on their part, they are so attracted by your love and compassion that they are compelled to dissolve into the name sheet.

The third gatekeeper's emanations are holding a chain and the chain represents joy, the third immeasurable. They are bound to the name sheet by a feeling of joy, therefore their consciousness will not wander, will not leave until the ceremony is completed, and they are sent on.

Finally the emanations of the fourth gatekeeper are holding bells, which represent impartiality. The impartiality here causes them to be so delighted and so comfortable with taking their place in the name sheet that they identify with it and they remain there. That is the first visualization, which is called "the hook of compassion which summons the consciousness."

The next thing you do in the ceremony is to raise the deceased up from his or her downfall, which separates the person from negative karma. This is especially important if the person has already been reborn in one of the three lower realms. In that

case, you think that from the heart of the principal figure of the mandala, rays of hookshaped lights emanate from his or her heart, divide into three, and go downward. They bring the person up from the realm, catching them with the hooks. You think that beyond any control on the part of that person, the consciousness is brought up and dissolved into the name sheet.

Then you recite the mantra and do the mudras prescribed in the liturgy for the purification of the person. If, because the wrongdoing is so intense, you become aware that you cannot actually bring the person up out of the lower realms, you think that rays of light emerge from the heart of the principal figure of the mandala. These rays of light separate the deceased from the wrongdoing; you can then bring the deceased up, dissolve him or her into the name sheet, recite the mantra, and perform the mudras for the liberation from wrongdoing. Up to this point, that is the stage of the practice for the summons of the deceased.

Unless someone is a fully awakened buddha, the condition that actually ends one's life is the termination of life by the activity yama. There is always an activity yama that actually kills you at the end of your life. There are many other spirits wandering around, such as **gandharvas**, yakshas, and various sorts of spirits that can take the person's last breath. Having done so, they will sometimes infest the person's body. After someone dies, having

taken the person's last breath they will sometimes pretend to be that person, appear as that person's ghost, and using that identity engage in much mischief to confuse and harm the person's survivors. They try to use that masquerade of identity in order to get anything that is dedicated to the deceased. If food and drink are dedicated to the deceased to nourish them in the bardo, these spirits, masquerading as the person, will try to steal it. They do all sorts of things. They pretend to be the deceased and they send supposed messages from the deceased. These can be quite convincing because having taken the last breath, they know exactly how the person died. They can tell you things you might not know, which you think are being told by your deceased friend or relative. There are many spirits that do such things, according to the *Sutra on the End of Life*. If at this point in the ceremony you do not separate the consciousness of the deceased from the spirits, then they can harm the living, in which case they are called "maras for the living." Because they also hold back the deceased from moving on, they are called "impediments for the deceased." Although there are innumerable numbers of such spirits, basically they can all be categorized as one of three: male demons, female demons, and naga demons.

Naga demons are the most peaceful; therefore they are somewhat milder. They are usually dealt with using what is called "peaceful purification." Male demons are the most aggressive; therefore they

require what is called “forceful purification.” Female demons are a mixture of peaceful and aggressive, therefore they are usually dealt with by what is called “peaceful and forceful combined purification.”

In the next phase of the ceremony, three peaceful tormas with a certain shape are set up and are blessed as ambrosia with a mantra. Then, saying the offering mantra, the first one is held in your hand and you revolve your hand clockwise three times. You think that all spirits are pleased with this offering and that the karmic debts of the deceased are repaid. They are next given a changbu, a torma that is made by the imprint of the inside of a clenched fist. The shape of the changbu, the imprint, has specific significance here. You make it by pressing together your fingers in a certain way so that it leaves five edges, which represent the presentation of the five desirable things. There are six impressions made by the five fingers of one hand and one finger from the other hand. This purifies karmic debts to beings of the six realms. Because of the way you make the changbu, there is a kind of ledge running the length of it dividing the six impressions into two sections each. The twelve little indentations represent the satisfaction of the maras of the twelve years, as there is a specific mara that is connected with each year of the twelve-year cycle. The changbu is accompanied by the presentation of a lamp that is made out of torma material, which contains lamp

oil and is burned. The presentation of all of these things is the peaceful purification that deals with the peaceful spirits that are easy to satisfy.

In the second purification, the peaceful and forceful, you present a similar tormā. Instead of the peaceful offering mantra, you recite the **Sumba mantra**, which is the mantra of a wrathful deity whose name is Nödize or Sumbaraje. This time you revolve it three times counterclockwise. Again you think that those who are basically peaceful yet somewhat aggressive are, at the same time, pleased by the offering and frightened by the mantra and that they go to the darkness in between the continents. Each realm is covered by a sun that illuminates it, but in between these worlds there is the outer darkness and that is where these are cast. That is the second purification, which is peaceful and forceful.

To begin the forceful purification, you recite “the power of truth” of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This causes all the remaining beneficial spirits to leave, compelled by the power of truth. As the particularly vicious ones will not leave simply through that, rays of light from your heart exhort the principal figure of the mandala, who directs his attention to the eight wrathful deities, the four gatekeepers, and the four corner keepers. Through saying the praise of these wrathful deities, you think that each

of them emanates countless forms of themselves, which chase away or blow away all the harmful spirits like feathers being blown in the wind. Then after all the obstructers have been expelled, the wrathful deities dissolve back into their sources of emanation, the eight wrathful deities of the mandala. That is forceful purification. At that point, you should think that the consciousness of the person having been freed from all of these mischievous spirits is much more relaxed and happy, like a small bird that has been released from the grasp of a hawk. At that point the consciousness of the person is relaxed enough to be able to hear the teachings from the liturgy that you will be giving during the ceremony.

The next thing you do is a very simple fire puja to purify the wrongdoing of the person. You think that there is a black KAM in the heart of the deceased and that all of the obscurations of body, speech, and mind dissolve into that. Then the KAM is blown out the right nostril and dissolves into black sesame seeds, which you then offer to a fire. The fire is in a hearth that is shaped for pacification. You visualize within the fire the wrathful deity Humkhara, who is dark blue in color, holding a vajra and bell. His mouth is like a fire and it is gaping wide open, ready to receive the sesame seeds. You think that as the sesame seeds, which now contain all of the deceased person's wrongdoing, are offered to Humkhara, all of the wrongdoing

is burned up. Then you think that the wrathful deities dissolve. This visualization of the deity Humkhara is acceptable for any level of tantra, including the kriya and charya tantra, not just yoga tantra. This can be done also without visualizing the deity. Think that just as Vajrapani purifies the obscurations of all sentient beings of the six realms and then metaphorically casts their corpses — what is left over after their obscurations have been purified and they have been liberated — into the ocean, in the same way, you burn up the person's obscurations then you cast the flame into water.

In some purification ceremonies, instead of Humkhara, people visualize another deity who is called the Vajradaka. The Vajradaka should only be visualized in anuttara yoga purification ceremonies, not in the kriya, charya, or yoga tantras. In those, the deity should be Humkhara.

The next thing is the use of the sand. You will remember that the consecration of sand was mentioned while doing the Vairochana practice. This should be sand that is clean and that no one has been walking on. In order to create the basis for it to serve as an instrument of purification, you heat the sand and, after it has cooled down, you mix it with white mustard seed. You then consecrate the sand either during your mantra practice of Vairochana, which is best, or if not, at least when you are doing

the self-and front-generations for the purification ceremony. It is important that at some point the sand be consecrated with the repetition of mantra. Just simply using sand that has not been consecrated will not do anyone any good. You cannot purify anyone's obscurations by throwing unconsecrated sand at the name sheet. When you cast the sand at the name sheet for the purpose of purification, you think that rays of light from your heart exhort the principal figure of the mandala. As a result, in the heart of each of the deities of the mandala, on a moon disc, is their syllable surrounded by their mantras. This time the mantras turn fast, the males' to the right and the females' to the left. Five-colored light comes from these spinning mantras, which emerge from between the eyebrows of each deity, and inseparable from the sand, dissolves into the deceased represented by the name sheet, purifying all of the wrongdoing and obscurations connected with the five poisons. You think that all of that wrongdoing and obscuration is purified just as dew is melted by the rays of the sun.

In summary, we have reached the point in the Southern Gate Ceremony where consecrated sand was cast at the name sheet while at the same time you visualized rays of light coming from the deities that purified all of the obscurations of the deceased like rays of sunlight burning up the dew.

There are three ways to recite the mantras while doing this visualization. The most expanded way is to recite the mantras for all of the deities in the mandala, as well as the sand mantra. The sand mantra is a mantra that purifies the potential for rebirth in the six realms. An intermediate way is to recite the root awareness mantra of Vairochana himself, the principal mantra, and the sand mantra. Finally, an abbreviated way is to just recite the root mantra.

If the sand has been extensively consecrated through the repetition of many Vairochana mantras and blown on during that time, even if it is used outside the ritual, for example, if it is tossed on the corpse or the bones of a person or animal, then even without the whole ritual it will still benefit them very much.

The ritual of ablution follows the sand casting. Essentially this is offering ablution to the deities and then using the water that has been used to bathe the deities to bathe the name sheet. The Buddha said, “Buddhas cannot wash away wrongdoing and obscuration with water, nor can we wipe away the suffering of beings with our hands, however, we can remove suffering by presenting instruction.” The reason the Buddha said this was to dispel the misconception that was common at his time among non-Buddhist practitioners that water, even water that had not been consecrated with mantra or samadhi, could be used to

purify the obscurations of one's parents or ancestors by simply pouring it over their bones and so on. The Buddha said this in order to dispel the misconception that washing bones with water per se was going to purify obscurations. Nevertheless this does not mean that consecrated water cannot be used to purify obscurations. It is taught in the tantras that water consecrated with mantra can be used to purify obscurations.

This part of the ceremony begins with washing the deities. The deities, of course, have no obscurations, but offering ablution to the deities creates a karmic cause for the purification of the obscuration of the being for whom the ceremony is being done. You visualize in the eastern courtyard of the mandala, outside the eastern gate, a house or a pavilion of ablution, open on three sides and closed on one, that has a roof supported by columns made of precious materials. It is similar to what is called "a shade pavilion," where you seek shade from the sun. You think that the deities of the front-generation mandala are present within that, just as, for example, an image of someone is present in a mirror. In fact, you cause the image of the mandala to be reflected in a mirror and it is the mirror that you actually wash with the water from the vase. You use the water from the primary vase to first wash the deities by washing their reflection in a mirror and visualizing that the deities present in the ablution pavilion are being washed. Then you offer them towels and garments,

that is to say new garments of whatever type are appropriate for the specific deity: peaceful costumes for the peaceful deities, wrathful costumes for the wrathful ones, and so forth.

The ambrosia that has been used to wash the deities contains the deities and is of the nature of the deities. It is either put into a special vase called an “ablution vase,” or into the activity vase. It is not returned to the principal or victorious vase. In the same way that you washed the deities, you wash the name sheet, again reflected in the mirror, and you think that the water that is used to wash the person represented by the inscription — and do not forget that the consciousness has been attracted to and drawn into the inscription by the force of love, compassion, joy, and impartiality — is in essence the deities of the mandala. It also embodies the six perfections because the deities of the mandala have achieved or perfected the six perfections. By washing the consciousness with water that is the nature of the six perfections, you think that the six mental afflictions or kleshas of the deceased are purified.

The next part of the ceremony is called “the conquering of poisons.” First, you use the fan-shaped ornament that is found on top of the vase, sometimes called a dipper. The dipper is a fan made of kusha grass that is adorned with the feathers of a peacock. You hold that in your hand and you recollect that

kusha grass represents purification, and the peacocks represent imperviousness to poison because peacocks are supposed to be able to digest poisonous substances without harm. You recollect the meaning of that and also that the five colors of the peacock feathers represent the five wisdoms. In the middle of this fan, you visualize on a moon disc a white HUM surrounded by the root mantra and you think that five-colored rays of light emanate from this and purify or remove the five poisons in the mind of the deceased. The way that they remove the poisons is that the wind — the light that you visualize coming from the fan is like a wind — blows away smoke. For example, if you have a habitation where there are a lot of cooking fires and there is no wind, there will be a lot of smoke around. As soon as the wind comes through it will blow it away. It is like that. You wave the fan of peacock feathers at the name sheet as you do the visualization. While you are doing this there are things to recite that are given in the liturgy. Then again you recite the dharani and there is another ablution with water.

Next you place three containers — one of earth, one of water, and one of fire — in front of you. If you have a fan you set that up as well. This will be a different fan than the one from the top of the vase. If you do not have this fan you may simply use a mirror. Then you recite the stanzas that occur at this point in the text and you think that the poisons in the mind of the deceased

are drawn from the deceased and dissolve into the elements. Attachment, aversion, pride, and bewilderment correspond to the four elements. Think that the appropriate poisons are drawn out of the deceased and into that element. You would recite the Vairochana mantra extensively for each element, if not, simply recite the stanzas. You circle the containers of the elements around the name sheet and then you throw them out. At the end, reciting the dharani, you once again wash the name sheet. There is then an expression of auspiciousness. After that, you think that you and all of the deities of the mandala cast a ring of flowers on the deceased and express auspiciousness with beautiful melodies, like those of Brahma.

Next is the deceased's homage to the deities of the mandala. You think that emanated from the body of the person is a vast number of replicas of themselves. Led by you, they all recite verses of homage and physically prostrate to the deities of the mandala. The stanzas that are recited are: a stanza of homage to the guru, one to the dharmakaya, and five extensive — or abbreviated into one — to the sambhogakaya, one to the nirmanakaya Buddha Shakyamuni, one to the thousand buddhas of the fortunate eon, and one to the nirmanakaya in general and all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

After that you think that all of the emanated replicas of the deceased are withdrawn back into the deceased's original mental body, which is represented by the name sheet. You think that, with an expression of intense yearning, the deceased requests the protection of the deities of the mandala. You are functioning here as a liaison between the deceased and the mandala.

You recollect, and you try to help the deceased recollect that, at this point they are in between bodies. They have cast aside their previous physical body when they died and they have not yet taken up a solid or physical subsequent body. They exist now as a mental body in the bardo. With that recollection, you are encouraging the person to request the protection and to entrust their welfare entirely to the deities of the mandala. That concludes the main part of the Southern Gate Ceremony.

The completion of the ceremony is as follows. Visualizing yourself as the principal deity of the mandala, alone without retinue, you think that you lead the deceased person by the hand around the front-visualized mandala three times in circumambulation, at the end of which you think that the deceased takes his place in front of the eastern gate of the mandala. You think that on the right side of the eastern gate of the mandala is the victorious vase, the principal vase, and on the left side is yourself as the principal deity alone, seated on a lion throne. In front of you

visualize an eight-spoked white wheel, on top of which is an eight-petaled white lotus, in the center of which the deceased is kneeling in the posture used when taking vows, with palms joined in supplication and holding flowers between the palms. You think that he is wearing a pure white cotton garment.

Next is the empowerment of the deceased. While you recite the words, you think that the deceased person is repeating them after you, just as if receiving the empowerment. This is taught in the tantra, where it says, “Bestow the empowerment on the name; bestow the empowerment on the image.” In fact, what you are using as a support for the person is simply a sheet that has the name and certain other things on it that serves as an image or replica of the deceased; but by empowering this it will benefit the person in the bardo.

It is appropriate to just give the first half of the empowerment, the empowerment of a disciple, but in order that the person can become a vajra master in future lives, it is also appropriate to give the whole empowerment, including the vajra master empowerment. The reason why this remark is made is that the deceased is in between lifetimes, so they cannot serve as a vajra master, nevertheless, by giving them this empowerment they will be able to do so in future lives. In the same way, so that they attain the prosperity of a chakravartin and so forth

in future lives, you give the concluding empowerment of the seven articles of royalty.

After that, the empowerment food and other desirable things are dedicated to the deceased. At this point in the text Karma Chakme says that you might wonder about the meaning of this tradition. In many cultures there is the custom of commemorating the anniversary of the death of a parent or relative, in which case there is sometimes the dedication and giving of food and so forth to feed the spirit of that person. In fact, among the many collections of sutras, there is a sutra that deals with this practice.

In Tibet, particularly for the first twenty-five generations of the first Tibetan dynasty, before Dharma appeared in that country, when the practice was **Bön**, there was an extensive practice of the veneration of the dead and dedication of food to the dead.

For example, when a king passed away offerings were made to the king's spirit and then given to the poor people; there were yearly offerings made as well. When the ceremony was completed, food and other offerings would be dedicated to the deceased person and then, in the time before the Dharma arose, the master presiding over the ceremony was given the non-food offerings.

When the Buddhist tradition was introduced, it did not include a ceremony for the dedication of food to the dead nor did it include yearly commemorations. As a result, Bönpos that were still active in Tibet were displeased and they felt that this indicated a lack of sophistication on the part of Buddhism. In response to this, the great panditas such as Guru Rinpoche, using the Bön ceremonies as an example, composed short ceremonies for presenting food to the dead in the bardo and so on. Most of this involves using icons. The food is actually presented, but icons or cards are used that depict the seven articles of royalty, the eight auspicious substances, and the five desirables, which are presented and through that presentation and dedication are experienced and received by the consciousness of the person in the bardo.

“Nowadays,” which means in the seventeenth century when Chakme Rinpoche was writing, “in various parts of eastern Tibet in particular, when people do this Vairochana purification ceremony, or the one for the peaceful and wrathful deities, they offer meat and sometimes liquor. They are simply offering the food that is present in the home, the normal food that would be enjoyed by the person.” If you are doing the Vairochana or Akshobhya ceremonies, which belong to the lower tantras, you should not offer meat or liquor to the deceased at this point.

It is important to understand that the person does not receive the food simply through your setting it out on the table. It has to be properly dedicated in order to be received. At this point the five desirables, including the desirable taste, which is the food, are presented in accordance with the ceremony. Because the mental body of a bardo being cannot consume solid food but is satisfied by smells, the food is actually singed or burned at that point. What is presented is a singed or burnt offering.

The consciousness of the deceased person has a great attachment to food. The deceased has a mental body, created by the habits of the previous life, that keeps the habits of hunger and thirst and will not continue on the journey until actually given some sustenance. The attitude to take when you burn the food for the deceased is that you are giving provisions for the journey through the bardo. Just as you would make sure that someone going on an important journey had full necessary provisions, in the same way, before dispatching the person to the pure realms and showing the path to the pure realms, you offer food. This has two functions. The first is to pacify the appearance of hunger and thirst in the bardo, which comforts the person and enables him or her to pay attention to what is coming. The other thing is that it creates the karmic cause for having appropriate resources and prosperity in future lives.

The custom in the nomad communities at the time this text was written was based on the fear that the food that was not burned would not be consumed. The consciousness of the deceased would be upset because he would think that the food that was being dedicated to him was being thrown out, so it was necessary for the family to consume the food — all of the meat, liquor, and whatever else was presented. There is nothing wrong with that. That is fine. But the best thing you can do with the food that is not used up in the singed offering is to give it to the poor or to animals, such as birds and dogs, because then you are sealing it with generosity.

The next part of the purification ritual is the burning of, or cremation of, the name sheet. Up to this point you have been visualizing yourself as the principal deity of the mandala, alone in the eastern gate of the front-visualization mandala. You will remember that at the beginning of the ceremony, you emerged in the form of the principal figure alone from out of the heart of the main self-visualization deity and mandala. Now you dissolve back into the heart of the principal figure of the self-visualization and then you return to the attitude of considering yourself to be the principal figure of the entire self-visualization mandala. Next rays of light emanate from the five buddhas, the four consorts, and the other deities in both the self-generation and front-generation mandalas and these rays of light, which

are like fire of five colors, strike the deceased, who is in between the two mandalas.

Although the deceased has been empowered and is visualized at this point as Vajrasattva, not as their ordinary impure form, do not forget that they have a mental body that is produced by the strong habit of viewing themselves as their previous body. Consequently there needs to be some eradication or purification of that habit of the mental body and that is what is done now. The rays of light from the five male buddhas in the self and front mandalas striking the person are of the nature of the five wisdoms and through the fire or light of the five wisdoms, think that the person's habits of the five aggregates of form, sensation and so forth are eradicated and the person becomes the nature of the five buddhas and the five wisdoms. The fire that comes from the four mothers, the four female buddhas, in the self and front mandalas burns away the habit the person has of the four elements of the physical body: flesh, blood, warmth, and breath. The light or the fire that radiates from the bodhisattvas in the two mandalas burns away the habit that the person has of the ordinary six sense faculties, the eyes, ears, and so forth. The fire that radiates from the goddesses of the mandala, the charming one and so forth, burns away the habit of experiencing the five objects of the senses: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch.

Then rays of white light, red light and blue light come from the foreheads, throats and hearts of all the deities and these finally burn away all the habit the person has of ordinary body, speech, and mind. At that point, you think that the consciousness of the person is completely purified and all obscurations and habits have been burned away. Therefore at this point, you no longer even visualize the consciousness of the person as the deity Vajrasattva, but simply as a pure, white syllable AH.

Then you mix that consciousness of the deceased person with, first of all, the realization of all of the root and lineage gurus of Vairochana, with the wisdom of the minds of all the deities of the mandala, and with the realization and experience of the practitioner. You mix all of these together with the consciousness of the deceased. At this point it is sufficient to recite the supplication from the *Guru Yoga of Four Sessions*, known as “the supplication to which a mere connection is sufficient”; then you recite the supplication KARMAPA KHYENNO. You recite these in the form of a child calling to their parent from afar and then you recite the words from the *Heart Sutra*, “No form, no sound,” and so forth until you get to “no dharmas.” At this point you recite various dharanis — the root dharani of Vairochana, the Kamkani dharani, the Akshobhya dharani, and many different ones. While doing so, you actually burn or cremate the name sheet. You continue with the liturgy and you think as you chant

that the consciousness of the deceased, in the form of a white AH syllable, is raised upward. Previously it was a bit below or at the foot of the mandala. Now it is on a moon disk and raised upward so that it is in the sky in between the self-visualization, and the front-visualization.

Next comes showing the path. A remark is made about this here. You would think that because this is the practice of the Vairochana mandala, that when you are doing the purification ceremony in connection with that practice, you would send that person to the realm of Vairochana, the central realm from among the five pure realms called Densely Arrayed. You could do that in a sense because you are doing the Vairochana practice, but it is not done. The reason why that is not done is that to be born in such a realm, you must have attained the eighth bodhisattva level. Otherwise, you cannot be born there. Consequently even though you send the consciousness to that realm, the person will not succeed in being born there.

Since you have been visualizing the consciousness of the person, from receiving the empowerment until being transformed into an AH syllable, as Vajrasattva, you might think, “Well, if not the realm of Vairochana, then we should send them to the vajra family realm, Manifestly Joyful.” You could do that except that, again, to be born there they have to have attained at least some

bodhisattva level; if they have not, they will not succeed in being reborn there. Then you might say, “In the introduction to the *Tantra of the Purification of the Lower Realms*, there is a story of a deva called Vimāla, who had been born in the avichi, the worst hell, and was liberated from that and brought to the realm of Tushita, so maybe we should cause the person to be born in Tushita.” Tushita is essentially a mundane realm; although there is Dharma within it, it is not a pure realm. The person could be reborn there but might again fall back into samsara.

Instead of any of these, send the person to Sukhavati. The reason for this is that Sukhavati is the only realm in which, first of all, an ordinary person who aspires to rebirth in that realm will be born, unless the person has committed one of the five actions of immediate consequence or has abandoned the Dharma. Secondly, it is the only realm in which an ordinary person can be reborn that is irreversible. Once born there, one will never fall back to samsara and will remain there until they attain buddhahood. This is because of the power of Amitabha’s aspiration. These special features of this realm are clearly explained in the two sutras, the *Amitabha Sutra* and the *Sutra of the Realm of Amitabha*.

Although that is the best realm to direct the consciousness of the person, you might say, “What is the connection between this Vairocana practice and Sukhavati?” The connection is that

the bhagavat Vairochana is an emanation of the bodhisattva Chenrezik. Vairochana is considered an emanation of Chenrezik; therefore the mandala of Vairochana is, ultimately speaking, a form of Chenrezik mandala. It is taught that Chenrezik will lead anyone who forms a strong connection with him to the realm of Sukhavati. Chenrezik himself made this promise to Amitabha. Although there are innumerable emanations of Chenrezik everywhere, the actual source of these emanations, the actual bodhisattva himself, remains in Sukhavati. All of this is explained extensively in the sutras. It is explained in an abbreviated form in the last testament of King Songtsen Gampo and in the *Mani Khabum*, which he compiled.

Having created a connection between the deceased and this mandala, you dispatch them to the realm of Sukhavati. To show them the way, you use the words from the *Dharani of the Sound of the Drum*, which is a sutra or dharani connected with Amitabha. You say, “In the western direction from here is the realm of Amitabha. It is taught that anyone who holds Amitabha’s name will be reborn in that supreme realm. Therefore child of good family, deceased or departed one, taking hold of the name of Amitabha, go to that supreme realm.” With those words you show them the way to rebirth in Sukhavati. The visualization is that the AH syllable, resting on a moon disc in between the two mandalas — which is the actual consciousness of the

deceased appearing in that form, and which is inseparable from the wisdom deities that were dissolved into that consciousness during the preceding empowerment — is sent to the realm of Sukhavati in the following way.

You visualize yourself, the self-visualization Vairochana, as huge, the size of Mount Meru, and you think that coming from the nostrils of the self-visualization is a wind as powerful as the wind that destroys the universe at the end of a kalpa. Now, the wind that destroys the universe at the end of a kalpa is so powerful that there are not even fragments of solid material left over. You think that that wind or breath coming from your nostrils strikes the moon disc and the AH syllable, which causes it to advance like a shooting star seen in a clear sky, straight to the realm of Sukhavati.

It arrives in front of Buddha Amitabha and dissolves into a lotus flower. You recite the verse from the sutras describing rebirth in Sukhavati and then rest briefly in a state of nonconceptualization. Think that as soon as the consciousness has dissolved into the lotus flower, the person is instantaneously born with a golden body, adorned by all the marks and signs in the appearance of a bhikshu, with the three robes and so forth. Because they have been born in Sukhavati, they remember the past and they remember the kindness of the officiating master that liberated

their consciousness and sent it to Sukhavati. Think that as quick as a flash of lightning they return, come into the sky in front of you and present offerings and praises of thanks. Then they go back to Sukhavati where they now reside. Visualizing all of that, you recite the rest of the text up to the part where you request the deity to depart. You then conclude with the dedication, which seals it. The ashes left over from burning the name sheet should be made into tsa tsas while reciting the root mantra of Vairochana. You can either do this yourself or you can have someone else do it. They should be considered as stupas and should be placed where they will not be washed away by water. Then the rest of the practice is done just as in the liturgy; since it is quite clear no commentary is given on it.

The chapter concludes, “In response to the request of Lama Tsondru Gyamtso, this was spoken by me and written down by him on the full moon day of the Mindruk (Pleiades) month in the Wood Snake Year, spoken by Raga Asya. There is not a great deal of quotations in here, but it is based upon the instructions of my masters. Because it is in accordance with the words of the texts, the liturgies and so forth, there is no doubt about its correctness. May new teachers in the future, in reliance upon this, perform unceasing benefit for beings.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: I was really struck by how fortunate any dead person would be to have someone do this practice for them. Is it really effective? Does it pull them out of the hell realms and clean up their obscurations?

RINPOCHE: Potentially. Vairochana is definitely capable of doing that. The question remains whether the practitioners are up to it or not. Those doing the ritual may be of various levels and it partly depends upon their ability in meditation practice and so forth. The most important thing is compassion as the motivation of those performing the Southern Gate Ceremony.

In my homeland, there was a famous tulku called Rigyal Dorje who was very young when his mother passed away. He then lived with a stepmother who abused him. Of course, he was not known as a tulku. She abused him more and more until finally, when he was about eight years old, she took one of her boots off and hit him really hard on the head with it, at which point, depressed by all of this, he just ran away from home. He traveled for quite some distance until he reached a district called Yushu. In that place he came across a family of shepherds and was taken in by them. Of course, still no one knew who he was. The head of the family was an older man who treated him very well. Eventually

this older man passed away and the family called many lamas to come and perform this Vairochana Southern Gate Ceremony.

Of course, no one knew that Rigyal Dorje was anyone special; they thought he was just a child that had been taken in by this family. But because of his attainment, he could actually see what was going on when they performed the ceremony. Those performing the ceremony were a number of lamas that were very impressive in their performance of it. One young monk, who could not really read the ceremony, was just reciting the Vairochana mantra. If you looked at it from outside, you would think that these lamas performing the ceremony were doing it with great concentration since their chanting was excellent, their rituals were correctly done, and so forth. This young monk was just sort of mumbling this mantra. In fact, what Rigyal Dorje saw was that these lamas were actually concentrating on their chanting and, especially, on being the best chanter among the group. They were treating it as some kind of performance art and each was trying to be the most impressive of the whole bunch. They were also, of course, thinking about the offerings that they were going to get at the end of the day. They were also very proud of how well they were doing this ritual. The young monk, by contrast, was quite embarrassed because he could not read the ritual; he felt very embarrassed by the situation, and he felt very sorry for the person who had died, genuinely

sorry for him. He was worried because he was thinking that he was receiving a share of the offerings, but he could not even read the ritual. He felt very strongly that he had to pray for the deceased person. Saying the Vairochana mantra repeatedly, he was seriously praying.

The consciousness of the deceased who had been summoned by the ritual was, as Rigyal Dorje saw and later wrote about, floating around and, because the consciousness of the deceased person had some degree of extrasensory perception and could see what was in the minds of the people, it would be attracted to one person more than another. The consciousness went past all the fancy chanters that were so proud and not really concerned with the benefit for the deceased and it went in front of the young monk. The young monk did not see the consciousness as it was. He saw it as a fly, but he thought that it might be the consciousness of the dead person so, saying the Vairochana mantra, he blew on it. As a result of his genuine compassion, the consciousness of that person was liberated to the pure realms. It was because of his compassion and had nothing to do with the correct performance of the ritual by the others.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, the subject of mandalas has come up in our study group and I realize how little I know about it. It came up again today related to the Southern Gate in the presentation

of the mandala in the root tantra. My question has a few parts. Could you explain what mandala is and then, in greater detail, in terms of Vajrayana and the various levels of the tantra?

RINPOCHE: Well, generally the mandala of a deity is the embodiment of the qualities, the wisdom and purity of that deity, which is depicted or seen as being like the residence or surroundings of the deity, taking the form of rays of light and rainbow light and residences made out of precious materials such as jewels. In reality, it is not something separate from the deity. It is the deity's qualities manifesting, surrounding the deity just the way, for example, the sun's rays surround the sun. In terms of how a mandala will appear, it will appear as a residence, a palace, containing within it various deities, such as male and female buddhas and bodhisattvas. Although from that point of view you would think that the residence is something separate and the various deities within it are all separate, in fact, they are all the display of the qualities of that one deity. In the same way, although mandalas can vary a little bit in their details and so forth from practice to practice, in fact, they all embody that same fundamental wisdom.

STUDENT: Up until today I have been thinking of Karma Chakme's text as a preparation for retreat, but today I have been seeing it in a different way because we are hearing about offering em-

powerments. It sounds as if it is also a preparation for teachers. For those of us who are not in that vein, how should we view this? How should we view the text from now on?

RINPOCHE: Well, this text is pretty complete. For example, in its treatment of yoga tantra, it is telling you what empowermentments you need to receive in order to practice it and then how to do the practice and what that practice consists of. Then, having completed the practice, how to perform the self-empowerment, which is always done at the culmination of such a practice and, having done that, how, if appropriate, to give the empowerment to others and also how to use the practice as a way of benefiting the deceased. It is dealing with all the applications of this practice.

Some of what is presented in this text must seem to at least some of you to be ancient history, describing something that was done at a different time and in a different cultural situation but, in fact, it is not that at all. As I have said before, when the invasion happened in Tibet and everything changed, it happened at a time in which there was still a very strong tradition of study and practice going on all over the place. Because subsequent to the invasion many teachers and others were able to escape to India and take refuge in India, and because especially the greatest teachers of the four schools were able to reach India in that way, this tradition of practice and study has been continued and it

is not stopping. It is actually flourishing. If you go to India or Nepal you will see how much the practice of this tradition is flourishing. It is quite possible for all of these practices to be implemented in this country as well. The purpose of teaching Dharma is so that you can actually learn it, understand it, and practice it. The great teachers of all of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism have strong connections with students in the West; therefore all of these traditions are being implemented intensively in all Western countries, in North America, Europe and so on. There is no reason whatsoever that all of these practices cannot be performed in this country and there is no reason for saying that these practices are merely something out of the past.

From one point of view, simply hearing about these things is good because it establishes a seed of liberation in your mind. It gives you an understanding that you did not have before. You may have heard of kriya tantra, charya tantra and yoga tantra, but you did not know what those words meant or you did not know what the differences were between them or how one might actually practice them. Knowing that, you are in a position where at some point, if you want to, you can practice these things. Even if you do not go through all the stages of all the vehicles of practice, at least you will be able to practice something from among them. Certainly there is no reason why all of these things, including this practice of Vairochana and so on, cannot

be implemented here. It is possible to set up institutions such as retreats and so forth that are devoted to these practices and have them carried out.

STUDENT: I feel many times during practices that, at best, I do them in a nominal way. My question is how can we make those more real? I am becoming a mani-reciter in the derogatory way that Patrul Rinpoche talks about. In *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, he says, “Listen, mani-reciters.” It refers to those who have a nominal approach to practice and do the numbers without any really profound understanding of the practices.

RINPOCHE: First of all, although it is said by Patrul Rinpoche and others that it is much more beneficial to recite mantras with mindfulness and understanding, they do not mean by that to say that there is no benefit in doing them otherwise. Of course there is greater benefit when there is greater involvement in the practice. If there were no benefit at all in reciting mantras even mindlessly, then why would we raise prayer flags because the wind is mindless, literally, and yet there is benefit to the wind’s contact with the prayer flags. Therefore there is a benefit to it.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, this is about the directions. Usually in visualization “east” means whatever way you are facing, but we were wondering if this visualization also corresponds to

the worldly directions, such as the real east. Does “east” in this particular visualization mean the direction you are facing or does it mean the apparent east?

RINPOCHE: It has nothing to do with the external directions. Both the mandalas are facing east and they are facing each other. For example, the eastern gate of the self-visualization mandala is in front of you when you are within the self-visualization mandala. You are also facing the eastern gate of the front-visualization, which is facing you. From the point of view of the front-visualization, you would say you are facing west, but from the point of view of the self-visualization, you are facing east.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, what is meant by the yama activity that kills, that will always kill you?

RINPOCHE: Well, it is not the activity of Yama. It is called an “activity yama” and it is basically when you look at someone die, what happens is that the person’s breathing stops and all the physical functions stop. What we are told is happening is that it is the final act of the skandha mara, the mara that is the aggregates and which is also called the Yama or Lord of Death. That is what actually takes your life.

Bardor Rinpoche says that in this place called Pema Kō in southern Tibet that is connected with Guru Rinpoche's activity, that whenever anyone dies a rainbow always appears. When it is a good person that dies, they think he or she has been liberated to the pure realms, otherwise they think that it is actually a manifestation of the yama that takes peoples lives. Bardor Rinpoche, when he was there, at night heard this thing coming where he could actually see the depression in the grass as it walked. He did not see any form, but heard heavy breathing as though someone was carrying something very heavy. They say that whenever you hear that, someone is going to die the next day in the place that you hear it. It is because it is the yama that carries the person's spirit, even though it is said that it is the person's body that is carried away.

STUDENT: Is that related to the last breath, and how is it that the last breath is so important?

RINPOCHE: It is said that it is Yama that takes the last breath of anyone who dies and prevents him or her from breathing in again but it is nothing that anyone normally sees.

STUDENT: Why would he do that?

RINPOCHE: Because it is his karma to end the life of all beings.

STUDENT: Why is there so much information in that last breath that the demon could use to mimic the person?

RINPOCHE: He actually takes the form of the being. It is not so much that he gains the information from their last breath. It is just that, as the being dies, he takes the aggregates over.

STUDENT: Is there anything one can do to prevent that?

RINPOCHE: There is. You have to attain at least the first bodhisattva bhumi and then you are no longer prey for the yama. This is what is meant by the maras, such as the maras of the skandhas and the mara of death.

STUDENT: Do the buddhas and bodhisattvas help beings in the bardo?

RINPOCHE: They do, but their activity is limited by the receptivity of beings. If beings have a habit of faith in the Three Jewels, then there is a great deal that can be done by the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but if the beings have no prior connection with them, they are not receptive to their help.

STUDENT: How much of a connection do they need to be helped? Any connection at all?

RINPOCHE: The more, the better.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am concerned about our earth and some of the plagues that I hear are coming and some that have already arrived. We have AIDS, we have Lyme disease, we have new things that are coming up that are bothering animals. The causes of these things seem to be a global imbalance, so imbalanced that it could be a cause of these things. Rinpoche said that it would take a realized being to be able to clear this away or to help on that level. Can you say more about how that can happen, or if it is even possible in this age?

RINPOCHE: The causes of new illnesses and so forth can be viewed both from a scientific point of view and from a dharmic point of view. From a scientific point of view, each one of these things has its own cause. There are reasons that are the conditions for things coming into the world at a specific time. As many things change in how we do things, as we develop new technologies, new weapons and so on, we change everything. We change many things on the planet and so new conditions arise.

From a dharmic point of view, the reason for the rising of new illnesses and, at the same time, the discovery of cures for old illnesses, is the karma of the beings that are born on the planet. Not all of the beings that were born at any given time have been

here before; there are new beings coming into the planet with new karma, and therefore their karma determines what is present in the environment in which they live. Because the beings present at any given time have engaged in negative actions in previous lives, there will be new diseases and because they have engaged in positive actions in previous lives, there will be an absence of illness or a prosperity of cures found for previously threatening illnesses and so on. From the point of view of Dharma, that is the reason why this happens.

In terms of what can be done about it, a buddha cannot in one instant simply remove all of the suffering and all of the conditions of suffering that there are. That is why the Buddha said, “Buddhas do not wipe away the suffering of beings with their hand.” What a buddha does is teach Dharma and, through practicing Dharma, beings become free of suffering when they attain buddhahood or awakening themselves. While you are practicing Dharma, although at this point you cannot dispel all the epidemics and all the negative environmental conditions that afflict this planet, if you make the aspiration to do so and if you dedicate the virtue of your practice partly to doing so, then at some point on the path you will be able to do so. Certainly when you attain buddhahood, in your realm all of those beings for whose welfare you have made aspirations will be included and will be benefited by your activity.

STUDENT: What is the cause of beings coming into the planet with positive or negative qualities?

RINPOCHE: No one other than a buddha can actually see the workings of karma fully and clearly; therefore no one can actually indicate the precise karmic reasons for different types of persons taking birth in a specific environment at a specific time. If I were to attempt to describe these things to you, I would be lying. Nevertheless we can infer certain things. We can say that it is a result of merit to be reborn in an affluent society with good conditions where there is receptivity to Dharma and it is comparatively a result of negativity to be reborn in an impoverished society with difficult conditions and a lack of receptivity to Dharma.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I have a question about the yoga tantra practice. I am curious about the person who has died that you are working for. Does that person have to be receptive to Dharma in any way in order to be helped?

RINPOCHE: It is better if the person already has a connection with the Dharma and has not committed any of the five actions of immediate consequence or abandoned the Dharma. However, if the master performing the ceremony is powerful enough, then

that connection can be established while that person is already in the bardo.

STUDENT: I go back and forth in my practice between praying for all beings and then praying individually for the people that I know who are in trouble. This practice is all just geared towards one being. It seems like there is a lot of power in praying for or practicing for just one person, although I know it is important to practice for all beings as well.

RINPOCHE: There is no conflict between the two. You are right when you say that it is very powerful to dedicate virtue to a specific person because, by being directly aware of that person's suffering, your compassion is aroused and you are inspired to do a more whole-hearted dedication. What you can do is extrapolate from that person's situation and infer the situation of all beings by reflecting upon the fact that every being is, in one way or another, engaged in this same experience of suffering, and therefore you dedicate your virtue to all sentient beings led by that particular one that has inspired you.

STUDENT: If water relates to the fluids in our body and earth relates to the bone, which physical quality does the element space relate to?

RINPOCHE: Usually when you are talking about the physical body you only talk about the four elements, but when you want to correlate it to the five elements, then space is simply all of the apertures within the body.

STUDENT: Then when we are dying and the elements are dissolving into one another, do the elements have corresponding emotions so that you would experience one emotion dissolving into another emotion and then once that emotion is dissolved, has it disappeared, or if not, where does it go?

RINPOCHE: Basically the dissolution of the elements is the first part of dissolution at death and it is considered the coarse part. What happens during the dissolution of elements is that your mind becomes disconnected from the external world because the senses and so forth are no longer functioning. That probably causes some lessening of conceptualization and thought but, basically, the temporary cessation of emotional states happens during the subtle dissolution at the end of the process and that is not, properly speaking, any longer the dissolution of the elements.

STUDENT: This has brought up a question that I have had for some time regarding the fire puja and other pujas that we could possibly do. I live in Kingston, which is near here, and the area that I live in is actually quite old for our country, about three

hundred years old. The part that I live in was the site for a number of battles between the Europeans and Native Americans in which many people were killed. There was also a Revolutionary War battle. Some people believe that there is some sense of hostility or suffering that is lingering around this place. For some time since I have lived there, I have thought about perhaps trying to organize some kind of practice or purification or something to bless that particular area. Since we have been talking about fire puja, I thought this question might be appropriate.

TRANSLATOR: The term *fire puja* in English — which we all have to use because it is the only word that we are used to — is not good because it can mean three different things. Your question is, in part, based on confusion among these uses.

STUDENT: The question would be, given the situation I have described, what sort of practice might we do realistically?

TRANSLATOR: The best thing you can do in that situation is a type of fire puja and I am going to explain what it is. Rinpoche said, motivated by compassion you do what is called a burnt offering. It is almost better to call it *singed* because it is where consecrated herbs and so forth are *singed*, which benefits beings in the bardo and otherwise.

STUDENT: Is that called a *sur*?

TRANSLATOR: Yes, it is a *sur*. What gets translated as fire puja by me and other people is either *sang*, which means cleansing or purification, such as what we do the day before Losar; another is called *sur*, which you know about; and then what Rinpoche just mentioned at the end of the Vairochana retreat is the *jinsek*, which is completely different. It is a problem that we have not developed good precise translations for these three different things because then you do not distinguish between these three, which have very different functions, and it all just seems like a meaningless process of throwing things into a fire for no reason.

RINPOCHE: It is not surprising that there should not be so many questions this weekend because what you have been studying is something with which you were completely unfamiliar when it was brought up: the Vairochana practice and the Southern Gate Ceremony. In fact, you probably need to think about it and mull it over for some time. As you think about it, you will gain a greater understanding of what this is all about and what it means. That will, on the one hand, help you come up with more questions, and on the other hand, will deepen your connection.

Dedication

*I pray that the Lama's life be excellent,
That his supreme life be long,
And that his activity increase and spread,
Bless us that we remain inseparable from the Lama.*

*By this merit may all become omniscient,
From this attainment, after defeating evil faults,
Through the endless storm of birth, old age, sickness, and death,
May we liberate all beings from the suffering in the three worlds.*

Precious Garland: A List of Contents to Prevent Disorder

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A List of Mantras

In general, in the text we use the Sanskrit pronunciation for the mantras. We use the Tibetan pronunciation when there is no Sanskrit, for example, KARMAPA KHYENNO. On three occasions we use both Sanskrit and Tibetan because the sound is quite different and the reader may be most familiar with the Tibetan pronunciation, for example, the Medicine Buddha mantra, the six-syllable mantra, and the Vajra Guru mantra. The following list is alphabetized according to the transliterations.

ॐ

AH (*Skt.*)

ॐ

BHRUM (*Skt.*)

DRUM (*Tib.*)

ॐ

DHI (*Skt.*)

ཨ་མ་ཧོ།

E MA HO! (*Skt.*)

གུ་རུ་བཙྰ་ནམ་རྒྱ་ཏུ་རྒྱ་ནག་མ་མ་ ཨུ་ཡུལ་རྒྱ་ནག་ཀུ་རུ།

GURU VAJRA DHARMADHATU JNANA GARBHA MAMA • AYU
JNANA PUSHTIM KURU (*Skt.*)

GURU BENZA DHARMADHATU JNANA GARBHA MAMA •
AYU JNANA PUKTRIM KURU (*Tib.*)

གུ་རུ་ མཐ་པ་པཎ་ཤའོ་ཀུ་རུ།

GURU... • SARVA PAPAM SHANTIM KURU (*Skt.*)

GURU... • SARWA PAPAM SHANTIM KURU (*Tib.*)

ཧྲཱེ།

HA (*Skt.*)

ཧྲིཿ

HRI (*Skt.*)

ॐ

HUM (*Skt.*) HUNG (*Tib.*)

ॐ वज्र फट

HUM VAJRA PHAT (*Skt.*)

HUNG BENZA PHET (*Tib.*)

ཀཾ

KAM (*Skt.*)

ཀར་པ་མཆེན་ནོ།

KARMAPA KHYENNO (*Tib.*)

མ་མ་ཡུ་ཡུ་ཡུ།

MAMA • AYU PUNYE (*Skt.*)

MAMA • AYU PUNYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མཁས་ཏ་ལ་ཏ་བེ་དེ།

NAMA SARVA TATHAGATA VIDAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMA SARWA TATHAGATA BIDAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་ཨླུ་ལོ་གི་ཤུ་ར་ཡ།

NAMO ARYA LOKISHVARAYA (*Skt.*)

NAMO ARYA LOKISHORAYA (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་ཨླུ་མ་ཇུ་ཤྲི་ཡ།

NAMO ARYA MANJUSHRIYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO ARYA MANJUSHRIYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་ཨླུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཡ།

NAMO ARYA TAREYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO ARYA TAREYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་གུ་རུ་མ་ཏྲ་མུ་བྲ་ཡ།

NAMO GURU MAHAMUDRAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU MAHAMUDRAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་གུ་རུ་སྟེང་བོ་དྲེལ།

NAMO GURU SARVA VIDAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU SARWA BIDAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་གུ་རུ་བེ་རོ་ཅ་ན་ཡེ།

NAMO GURU VAIROCHANAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU BEROTSANAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་གུ་རུ་བརྩ་པ་ཅི་ཡེ།

NAMO GURU VAJRAPANIYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU BENZAPANIYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་མ་ཁྲ་མུ་བྲ་ཡེ།

NAMO MAHAMUDRAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO MAHAMUDRAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་བྲ་རྩྭ་པ་ར་མི་ཏ་ཡེ།

NAMO PRAJNAPARAMITAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO TRAJAPARAMITAYE (*Tib.*)

འི་ན་ག་ཇ་མུན་ཏི་ཨ།

NI NAGA JAMUNTI AH (*Skt.*)

NI NAGA DZAMUNTI AH (*Tib.*)

ཨྐྱ

OM (*Skt.*)

ཨྐྱ་ཨུྃ་ཧུྃ།

OM AH HUM (*Skt.*)

OM AH HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཨྐྱ་ཨུྃ་ཧུྃ་བཙྰ་གུ་པདྨ་སྟོནྟི་ཧུྃ།

OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM (*Skt.*)

OM AH HUNG BENZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཨྐྱ་མུ་ཨ་ཨ་ཏ་ཏེ་བྱེ་སྐྱ་ཧུྃ།

OM AH MUTRA AHARE BHYA SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM AH MUTRA AHAREBE SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་འུ་ཐི་ཐུ་ཨ་ལ་ར་ཐུ་སྐྱ་ཏུ། མཐ་ཐེ་ཏ་འོ་ཁ་ཁ་ཐུ་ཏི།

OM AH VISHTHA AHARE BHYA SVAHA SARVA PRETA NAM
KHA KHA KHAHI (*Skt.*)

OM AH BIKTHA AHAREBE SOHA SARWA PRETA NAM KHA
KHA KHAHI (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་ཁོ་བྱ་བི་ཐུ་གི་ཏ་ཏུྃ་ཕཎ། ཤཱྀྃ་ཀུ་ཅུ་ཡེ་སྐྱ་ཏུ།

OM AKSHOBHYA VIGHNANTA KRITA HUM PHAT • SHANTIM
KURU YE SV AHA (*Skt.*)

OM AKSHOBHYA BIGNANTA TRITA HUNG PHET • SHANTIM
KURU YE SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་མི་དྭེ་མ་ཏྲིཾ

OM AMI DEWA HRI (*Skt.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་མི་ཏེ་ཏུྃ་ཕཎཾ

OM AMRITE HUM PHAT (*Skt.*)

OM AMRITE HUNG PHET (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨྲྀ་ཏྲ་འི་པཱྌ་ཏྲ་གི་ནི་བཟླ་ཨ་ཡུཾ་ཏྲ་ན་སྒྲི་ཏྲ་སྒྲི་སྒྲི་སྒྲི་

OM ANJIDHARI PANCH DAKINI VAJRA AYU JNANA SIDDHI
HUM SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM ENDZIDHARI PENTSA DAKINI BENZA AYU JNANA SIDDHI
HUNG SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་མི་པདྨེ་ཏྲུྃ།

OM MANI PADME HUM (*Skt.*)

OM MANI PEME HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ན་མོ་རྒྱ་ག་མ་ཏི་རྒྱ་གེ་རུ་རྒྱ་ཡ། ཏ་ཐ་ག་རུ་ཡ། ཨཱ་ཏི།
སྐུ་མྱོ་བྱུ་ཡ། ཏཱ་ཐ། ཨོཾ་རྒྱེ་རྒྱེ་མ་རུ་རྒྱེ་རྒྱེ་བི་ཇ་ཡེ་སྒྲི་སྒྲི་

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNA KETURAJAYA TATHAGATAYA
ARHATE SAMYAKSAMBUDDHAYA TADYATHA OM RATNE
RATNE MAHARATNE RATNA VIJAYE SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM NAMO BHAGAWATE RATNA KETU RADZAYA
TATHAGATAYA ARHATE SAMYAKSAMBUDDHAYA TAYATHA
OM RATNE RATNE MAHARATNE RATNA BIDZAYE SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་པད་མ་ཆིན་མ་ཉི་ལ་ཧཱུྃ། ཤཱྃྱི་ཀུ་རུ་ཡེ་སྣ་ཏཱ།

OM PADMA CHINDHA MANI JVALA HUM • SHANTIM KURUYE
SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM PEMA TSINDHA MANI DZOLA HUNG • SHANTIM KURUYE
SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་སར་ཡོ་ག་ཅི་ཏུ་ཡུ་པ་མི།

OM SARVA YOGA CHITTA UTPADAYA MI (*Skt.*)

OM SARWA YOGA TSITTA UPANDAYA MI (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་སྣ་བྱ་སྣ་ཤུ་ལྷོ་སར་ཏུ་སྣ་སྣ་ཤུ་ལྷོ་ཏུ་ཧྲི།

OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA
SHUDDHONG HAM (*Skt.*)

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA
SHUDDHO HANG (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་རེ་རུ་རུ་རུ་རུ་སྣ་ཏཱ། ཤཱྃྱི་ཀུ་རུ་ཡེ་སྣ་ཏཱ།

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA • SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA
(*Skt.*)

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA • SHANTIM KURUYE SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོྲཱ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏུ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་ རཱ་ཁ་ཀུ་རུ་ཡེ་སྭ་ཀྲ།

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE • RAKSHA KURUYE SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE • RAKSHA KURUYE SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོྲཱ་བཟླ་ཨ་མྲི་ཏ་ཀུ་ཏྲ་ལྷི་ཏ་ན་ཏ་ན་ཏྲུྃ་ཕཎ།

OM VAJRA AMRITA KUNDALI HANA HANA HUM PHAT (*Skt.*)

OM BENZA AMRITA KUNDALI HANA HANA HUNG PHET (*Tib.*)

ཨོྲཱ་བཟླ་ཨ་ཡུ་ཤི་ས་ར་ཏ།

OM VAJRA AYUSHE SARAHA (*Skt.*)

OM BENZA AYUKE SARAHA (*Tib.*)

པཌལ་ལ་ལྷན་སྒྲ་མ་མ་ཁྱེན་ནོ།

PALDEN LAMA KHYENNO (*Tib.*)

ཕཎ

PHAT (*Skt.*)

PHET (*Tib.*)

५३५३।

SVABHAVA (*Skt.*)SOBHAWA (*Tib.*)

१३५

SVAHA (*Skṭ.*)SOHA (*Tib.*)

5

TA (*Skt.*)

ཏཏ་གྲ། ཨོྲེཾ་ཅཱ་ཨོྲེཾ་ཅཱ་མ་དུ་ཨོྲེཾ་ཅཱ་རྩ་ས་ཡུལ་ཏེ་སྐྱ་དུ།
སཐ་ཤུཌྲིྣ་ཀུ་རུཤེ་སྐྱ་དུ།

TADYATHA OM BHAISHAJYA BHAISHAJYA MAHA BHAISHAJYA
RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA • SARVA SHANTIM KURUYE SVAHA
(Skṛ.)

TEYATA OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE MAHA BEKANDZE RADZA
SAMUNGATE SOHA • SARWA SHANTIM KURUYE SOHA (*Tib.*)

Glossary

ABHIDHARMA (Skt.) [Tib. chos mngon pa] Higher Dharma. The part of the Tripitaka that contains the scholarly analysis of phenomena. See also **TRIPITAKA**.

AMBROSIA (Skt. amrita) [Tib. bdud rtsi] Nectar fit for gods or a substance extraordinarily pleasing to the senses. In tantric practice, a tormo or other physical support may be visualized as such an offering substance. When further consecrated with mantra and visualization, it becomes wisdom ambrosia [Tib. yes shes bdud rtsi] being of the nature of wisdom.

AMITAYUS (Skt.) [Tib. tshe dpag med] The Buddha of Infinite Life.

AMITABHA (Skt.) [Tib. 'od dpag med] Buddha of Boundless Light. One of the five dhyana buddhas, he presides over the pure realm of Sukhavati and is Lord of the Lotus Family. Rebirth in his pure land guarantees complete enlightenment in one lifetime. See also **SUKHAVATI**.

AMRITA (Skt.) See **AMBROSIA**.

ANU YOGA (Skt.) [Tib. rjes su rnal 'byor] In the Nyingma tradition, the second of the three inner tantras, corresponds with mother tantra in the Sarma tradition. Anu yoga emphasizes prajna and the completion stage. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **MOTHER TANTRA**.

ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. bla na med pa'i rnal 'byor] The highest of the four categories of tantra in Tibetan Buddhism. This inner tantra is divided into three levels in both the Sarma tradition and in the Nyingma tradition. In the Sarma tradition, it is called father tantra, mother tantra, and nondual tantra. In the Nyingma tradition the higher tantras are called maha yoga, anuyoga, and ati yoga. The characteristic feature of anuttara yoga tantra is that the yidam, the wisdom deity, is not seen as external to the practitioner. It is seen as the embodiment of the practitioner's own mind itself; therefore these three levels of tantra are called the inner tantras because the deity is understood as internal. See also **ANU YOGA**, **ATI YOGA**, **MAHA YOGA**, **FATHER TANTRA**, **MOTHER TANTRA**, **NONDUAL TANTRA**, **TANTRA**.

APPLICATIONS Uses for a particular practice other than directly attaining realization, i.e. dispelling sickness, fear, or obstacles; promoting long-life or wealth, etc. The five applications are based on practices of the Five Buddhas. The eight applications are based on practices of the Eight Wrathful Ones. The sixteen applications are based on the Sixteen Arhats.

ARGHAM (Skt.) Water for drinking. The first in the series of the common outer offerings.

ARHAT (Skt.) [Tib. dgra bcom pa] Worthy one. An arhat is one who, having exhausted all defilements and mental afflictions, passes into nirvana.

ATI YOGA (Skt.) [Tib. shin tu rnal 'byor] In the Nyingma tradition, the third of the inner tantras in which without acceptance or rejection you recognize all phenomena as the display of the dharmakaya and by cutting through all substantial and insubstantial phenomena realize dharmakaya wisdom and achieve spontaneous luminosity. Ati yoga corresponds with the nondual yoga in the Sarma tradition. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **NONDUAL TANTRA**.

AVALOKITESHVARA (Skt.) See **CHENREZIK**.

AWARENESS MANTRA (Skt. vidya) [Tib. rigs sngags] The deity's mantra.

BARDO (Tib. bar do) Intermediate state; most often referring to the period between death and rebirth. There are six bardos: the bardo of birth, of dreams, of meditation, of the moment before death, of dharmata or suchness, and of becoming.

BHAGAVAT (Skt.) [Tib. bcom ldan 'das] Victorious One. An epithet for the Buddha.

BHUMI (Skt.) [Tib. sa] A level in the series of stages of spiritual development of a bodhisattva on the path to buddhahood. The Mahayana tradition recognizes ten such levels, often called the bodhisattva levels; the Vajrayana recognizes thirteen.

BLISS (Skt. sukha) [Tib. bde ba] Pleasure, happiness, well-being, peace, comfort. Bliss, clarity, and nonthought are the three temporary meditation experiences.

BODHICHITTA (Skt.) [Tib. byang chub kyi sems] Mind of awakening. Relative bodhichitta is the desire to practice the six paramitas in order to attain Buddhahood for the

benefit of all sentient beings; absolute bodhichitta is immediate insight into the emptiness of phenomena. See also **MAHAYANA**.

BODHISATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. byang chub sems dpa'] In the Mahayana tradition, a bodhisattva dedicates his or her existence throughout all rebirths to the attainment of enlightenment in order to liberate other beings who are suffering in samsara. The bodhisattva ideal is in contrast to the way of arhats and pratyekabuddhas, who attain nirvana solely for their own benefit. See also **MAHAYANA**.

BODHISATTVA POSTURE (Skt. sattvasana) [Tib. sems dpa'i skyil krung] The seated posture in which the legs are bent with the outside of the knees lying flat and the right foot is in front of the left. See also **SEVEN-POINT POSTURE OF VAIROCHANA**, **VAJRA POSTURE**.

BODHISATTVA VOW (Tib. byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa) The essence of the bodhisattva vow is to preserve the mind of bodhichitta, which sincerely wishes to benefit all beings, not merely for the temporary alleviation of sufferings but to bring all beings without exception to a state of full and complete awakening. The bodhisattva vow is received from a

master who has maintained the vow without breaking it. See also **MAHAYANA**.

BÖN (Tib. bon) The religion of pre-Buddhist Tibet, believed by its adherents to have been introduced by Shenrap from an area located in what is now Persia. Bön now reflects many aspects of Tibetan Buddhism but still retains a distinct identity.

BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI (Skt.) [Tib. sha kya thub pa] Sage of the Shakyas. The historical Buddha was born a prince into the Shakya clan in the fifth century BCE. Upon attaining enlightenment at Bodhgaya, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the Dharma. He is the fourth of the thousand Buddhas of the present era.

CHAKRASAMVARA (Skt.) [Tib. 'khor lo bde mchog] A main yidam of the anuttara tantra set of the New Translation school; he is associated with practices for mental purification and the transformation of obstacles. His consort is Dorje Phakmo.

CHAKRAVARTIN (Skt.) [Tib. 'khor los sgyur ba'i rgyal po] A universal ruler; a king who propagates the Dharma.

CHANGBU (Tib. changs bu) A type of tormo made from meal leftovers and squeezed in the fist forming a distinctive shape. See also **TORMO**, **WATER TORMO**.

CHARYA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. spyod rgyud] Also called “upa tantra.” The second of the four levels of tantra is a combination of two aspects: the conduct of kriya tantra and the view of yoga tantra, emphasizing external ritual with internal visualization. See also **TANTRA**.

CHENREZIK (Skt. Avalokiteshvara) [Tib. spyan ras gzigs] The bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all buddhas. Chenrezik is the patron deity of Tibet. Both His Holiness Karmapa and His Holiness Dalai Lama are manifestations of Chenrezik.

CHIK SHE KUN DROL (Tib. gcig shes kun sgrol) “Knowing one liberates all.” This series of empowerments was collected and composed by the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje. Although the empowerments are the same, they vary only in the details of the deity and mantra, therefore the way the empowerment is prepared for by the master, as well as the self, front, and vase generation, is essentially done according to yoga tantra.

CHÖ (Tib. gcod) Meditation practice in which the meditator offers his or her body in order to overcome the false belief in and attachment to the ego, including the fear associated with the ego's dissolution. The practice was widely taught by Machik Lapdrön, who received it from the Indian teacher Padampa Sangye. See also **KANGLING**, **MACHIK LAPDRÖN**, **PADAMPA SANGYE**, **THRAM MIK**.

CHOJE LAMA (Tib. chos rje bla ma) “Superior Dharma Master.” A title conferred upon a lama indicating the authority to teach all aspects of Dharma.

CHOKYI WANGCHUK (Tib. chos kyi dbang phyug) The Sixth Shamar Rinpoche, Karma Chakme Rinpoche's guru.

DHARMADHATU (Skt.) [Tib. chos dbyings] The all-encompassing space, without origin or beginning, in which emptiness and interdependent origination are inseparable.

CIRCUMAMBULATION (Skt. pradakshina) [Tib. skor ba] The act of moving oneself in a clockwise direction around a sacred person, place or thing. This was taught by the Buddha as a means to accumulate merit and purify wrongdoing, especially that of body.

CLEAR LIGHT (Tib. 'od gsal) The ground clear light. The experience of the mind's nature through lucid awareness, which is inexpressible and beyond conceptualization. It is the nature of all things and all beings, and is what arises for any being at the time of death, recognized or not. See also **LUCIDITY**.

COMPASSION (Skt. karuna) [Tib. snying rje] Active concern for the sufferings of all sentient beings, wanting them to be free from their sufferings. Chenrezik is the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas. See also **FOUR IMMEASURABLES**, **LOVING-KINDNESS**.

COMPLETION STAGE (Skt. sampannakrama) [Tib. rdzogs rim] The second of two vajrayana or tantric stages of meditation in which the meditator dissolves the previously established visualization and allows the mind to come to rest in its natural state. In the Mahamudra based traditions, completion stage is associated with the six dharmas of Naropa. See also **GENERATION STAGE**.

CUBIT A unit of measurement based on the length of a forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

DAKA (Skt.) [Tib. dpa' bo] Male counterpart of the dakini.

DAKINI (Skt.) [Tib. mkha' 'gro] Sky-walker. Female tantric deity who fulfills enlightened activities, and who protects and serves the Buddhist teachings and practitioners. Dakinis transmit secret teachings to select practitioners when the time is ripe.

DEWACHEN See **SUKHAVATI**.

DHARANI (Skt.) [Tib. gzungs] Short sutras or condensed recitations which hold essential meaning. They may be recited like mantras but are typically longer.

DHARMA (Skt.) [Tib. chos] The teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha; one of the Three Jewels in which one takes refuge. It is also a term for “phenomena,” “truth,” “law,” etc.

DHARMACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. chos kyi 'khor lo] Wheel of Dharma. Cycle of teachings that were given by the Buddha.

DHARMAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. chos sku] The unoriginated wisdom beyond form that manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya.

DHARMAPALA (Skt.) [Tib. chos skyong] Protectors of the doctrine. Fierce and powerful, the Dharma protectors vow

to guard the Dharma and its practitioners. Dharmapalas are “wisdom protectors,” who are emanations of buddhas or bodhisattvas, and “mundane protectors,” (Tib. ‘jig rten mgon po) who are virtuous samsaric beings usually bound by oath to protect the Dharma.

DORJE (Tib. rdo rje) See **VAJRA**.

DORJE PHAKMO See **VAJRAYOGINI**.

DRALA and **WERMA** (Tib. dgra lha / wer ma) Types of protective gods associated with one’s body and family lineage.

DRUKPA KAGYU (Tib. ‘brug pa bka’ rgyud) One of the schools of the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which goes back to Lingje Repa Pema Dorje who founded Ra Lung monastery circa 1180. The Drukpa Kagyu especially took root in Bhutan where it rose to prominence.

DRUPCHEN (Tib. sgrub chen) [Skt. mahasadhana] Great Practice. In the Nyingma traditions, it is the most elaborate version of ritual performed.

DRUPCHÖ (Tib. sgrub mchod) Great offering; it is the most elaborate version of ritual performed.

DRUPCHUNG (Tib. sgrub chung) Lesser offering. A less elaborate ritual making due when time or resources are limited.

DUTSI (Tib. bdud rtsi) See **AMBROSIA**.

DZOKCHEN (Tib. rdzogs chen) [Skt. maha ati] The Great Perfection is the highest yana of the Nyingma school. Taught by Garab Dorje, brought to Tibet by Guru Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra, it is the ultimate way to achieve direct realization of the clear and luminous quality of mind itself. The three classes of Dzokchen are mind class (sems sde), space class (klong sde), and instruction class (man ngag sde).

EIGHT OFFERING GODDESSES (Tib. mchod pa'i lha mo brgyad) These are the goddesses of beauty (Tib. sgegs mo ma), garlands (Tib. phreng ba ma), song (Tib. glü ma), dance (Tib. gar ma), flowers (Tib. me tog ma), incense (Tib. bdug spos ma), light (Tib. snang gsal ma), and perfume (Tib. dri chab ma).

E MA HO (Skt.) An expression of wonder often preceding a poem, stanza, or song of realization written by great masters.

EMPOWERMENT (Skt. abhisheka) [Tib. dbang bskur] Empowers and authorizes students to engage in a specific Vajrayana practice. It must be conferred by a Vajrayana master who embodies the lineage. See also **INSTRUCTIONS**, **READING TRANSMISSION**.

EMPTINESS (Skt. shunyata) [Tib. stong pa nyid] The assertion that all things lack an inherent existence as demonstrated by their dependence on causes and conditions. The direct realization of emptiness is the perfection of wisdom and marks the entrance of a bodhisattva into the bhumis.

FATHER TANTRA (Tib. pha rgyud) In the Sarma tradition, one of the three inner anuttara yoga tantras; father tantra emphasizes the generation stage. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **MAHA YOGA**.

FATHOM/GREAT SPAN (Tib. gru gang) Unit of length based on twelve widths of the Buddha's fist or eighteen fist widths of an ordinary person.

FIRE PUJA See **JINSEK**, **SANG**, **SUR**, **INTERNAL FIRE PUJA**.

FIVE BUDDHAS Vairochana of the Buddha family, Akshobhya of the Vajra family, Ratnasambhava of the Ratna

family, Amitabha of the Padma family, and Amoghasiddhi of the Karma family. Each of the five Buddhas identifies a specific klesha and then transforms it into a specific wisdom, bringing about the spiritual evolution required for enlightenment.

FIVE FEMALE BUDDHAS Consorts of the Five Buddhas of the Buddha, Vajra, Ratna, Padma, and Karma families respectively: Dhatvishvari (Vairochana), Mamaki (Akshobhya), Buddhalochana (Ratnasambhava), Pandaravasini (Amitabha), Samayatara (Amoghasiddhi).

FIVE SISTERS OF LONG LIFE See **TSERING CHE NGA**.

FIVE VICTORS The fathers or heads of the five Buddha Families.

FOUR ACTIVITIES (Tib. 'phrin las bzhi) Pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying. These are the means by which buddhas, bodhisattvas, and their emanations tame the minds of beings and bring them to a state of liberation.

FOUR IMMEASURABLES (Tib. tshad med bzhi) The “four boundless qualities.” They are unlimited love, boundless compassion, unsurpassable joy, and inconceivable equanimity.

Loving-kindness is the wish that all sentient beings, without any exception, be happy. Compassion is the wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering. Joy is rejoicing in the happiness and virtues of all sentient beings. Equanimity is regarding all sentient beings as equals, irrespective of their present relationship to oneself. See also **COMPASSION**, **LOVING-KINDNESS**.

FOUR POWERS (Tib. stobs bzhi) To be authentic and fully effective, any act of confession must contain all four of the following components — the power of reliance or support; the power of regret; the power of remedy for harmful actions, which is any virtuous action specifically dedicated to purification; and the power of resolution, or the intention never to repeat the wrongdoing. See also **RENUNCIATION**.

FOUR STAGES OF MAHAMUDRA (Tib. rnal 'byor bzhi) or Four Yogas. These are one-pointedness (Tib. rtse gcig); simplicity (Tib. spros bral); one taste (Tib. ro gcig) and nonmeditation (Tib. sgom med). Each may be subdivided into lesser, intermediate, and greater.

FOUR THOUGHTS THAT TURN THE MIND (Tib. blo ldog rnam bzhi) The four ordinary foundations. Reflections on precious human birth; impermanence, and the inevitability

of death; karma and its effects; and the pervasiveness of suffering in samsara. See also **RENUNCIATION**.

FRONT-VISUALIZATION (Tib. mdun skye) An aspect of creation stage meditation in which the yidam is visualized in front of one, facing the meditator. See also **SELF-VISUALIZATION**.

GANACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. tshogs kyi 'khor lo] Literally, “wheel of gathering.” A ritual feast offering, part of many sadhanas.

GANDHARVA (Skt.) [Tib. dri za] Literally, “scent eater.” A class of nonhumans who live off smells. Also celestial musicians living in clouds near Mount Meru.

GEK (Tib. gegs) [Skt. bighanan] Obstructor. Obstructive energy or spirit that in its nature is openly confrontational rather than mischievous or manipulative.

GEKTOR (Tib. gegs gtor) Obstructor tormas. A tormas offered to obstructive spirits at the outset of an empowerment or session of practice in order to remove the impediments they could otherwise create.

GENERATION STAGE (Skt. utpattikrama) [Tib. skyed rim]

Also translated as creation stage or development stage. The first of two vajrayana or tantric stages of meditation in which the meditator establishes and maintains visualizations of a deity and its corresponding mandala. Normally accompanied by mantra, appearances are replaced with “sacred outlook,” which identifies all phenomena with the mandala of the deity, the very display of the mind’s wisdom. See also

COMPLETION STAGE.

GEOMANCY (Tib. sa dpyad) The examination of the ground. The study and analysis of the features and elements of the environment in order to create conducive conditions for one’s purposes. Karma Chakme’s teachings on geomancy are based on tantric sources such as those from Manjushri.

GROUND CLEAR LIGHT See **CLEAR LIGHT.**

GURU (Skt.) [Tib. bla ma] A teacher of practical and/or scriptural dharma. In the strictest sense of the word, a guru must demonstrate extraordinary learning, compassion, direct realization, ethics, and the skill to guide disciples. Such qualified masters are said to be few.

GURU RINPOCHE See **PADMASAMBHAVA.**

GURU YOGA (Tib. bla ma'i rnal 'byor) A practice of devotion to the guru culminating in receiving his blessing and becoming inseparable with his mind. It is also the fourth preliminary practice of the Vajrayana ngondro.

GYALPOS (Tib. rgyal po) Powerful local spirits of Tibet. They are often depicted in paintings wearing the distinctive gyalpo hat, a flat, wide-rimmed metal helmet.

GYALWA GYAMTSHO (Tib. rgyal wa rgya mtsho) Belonging to the anuttara yoga tantras, it is a principle yidam of the Sarma traditions, especially of the Karma Kagyu. A red form of Chenrezik, it is considered to be the embodiment of all sources of refuge, thus the name, which translates as “ocean of victors.”

HEART SUTRA (Skt. *Prajnaparamita hridaya sutra*) [Tib. shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i snying po'i mdo] In the presence of the Buddha, Avalokiteshvara responded to Shariputra's question, “How does one practice the perfection of wisdom”? The *Heart Sutra* contains these instructions. It is known especially for the lines reading, “Form is emptiness and emptiness is form...” as well as the mantra, GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA. See also **PRAJNAPARAMITA**.

HOMA See **JINSEK**.

HOOKED KNIFE (Skt. kattari) [Tib. gri gug] A curved, crescent-shaped hooked knife with a vajra handle. The “dakini’s knife” symbolizes destruction of the demonic forces of conflicting emotions.

HUNDRED-SYLLABLE MANTRA The mantra of Vajrasattva, which is known mainly as a mantra of purification.

INNER TANTRAS See **ANUTTARA TANTRA**.

INSTRUCTION (Tib. ngag) Directions from one individual to another — written, oral, or otherwise — on how to apply a technique in Buddhist practice. Instruction should come from an individual qualified to give it, but more importantly, it should be of unbroken lineage of transmission in order to be effective. See also **EMPOWERMENT**, **READING TRANSMISSION**.

INTERDEPENDENCE MANTRA A short mantra usually recited in conjunction with the ali kali, the Sanskrit alphabet. It has the power to purify violations of speech and repair omissions or mistakes incurred during a session of mantra recitation. Such mistakes may include incomplete mantras,

inadvertent additions of syllables, interruptions of recitations with ordinary speech, and so forth.

INTERNAL FIRE PUJA Offerings of food and so forth made to the deities within one's own body. See also **JINSEK**, **SANG**, **SUR**.

JAMBHALA (Skt.) [Tib. dzam bha la] A god and sworn protector of this world, he is associated with wealth and its attainment for altruistic purposes. Although appearing as a mundane protector in the retinue of various yidams, he is in reality considered to be a bodhisattva abiding on the eighth level.

JAMBUDVIPA (Skt.) [Tib. 'dzam bu gling] The southern of the four principal continents in Buddhist cosmology.

JAMGON KONGTRUL THE GREAT (Tib. 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas) Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, (1811-1899). As a proponent of the nonsectarian movement of the 19th century, he is one of the most influential figures in Tibetan Buddhism. He is credited with reviving teaching transmissions that otherwise would likely have been broken or lost. As well, he authored numerous texts including the famed collections *Encyclopedia of Knowledge* (Tib. shes bya

kun khyab) and *Treasury of Oral Instructions* (Tib. gdams ngag mdzod).

JAMYANG KHYENTSE WANGPO (Tib. ‘jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po) Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) was a renowned teacher, scholar and tertön of nineteenth century Tibet. He was a leading figure in the nonsectarian Rime movement. He was recognized as the rebirth of Jikme Lingpa. He was also the manifestation of King Trisong Detsen, Vimalamitra, and many other masters. He was regarded as one of the five kings among the hundred major tertöns of the Nyingma tradition. One of his main reincarnations was Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro.

JETSUN (Tib. rje btsun) A title indicating a master, teacher, or lord, for example, Jetsun Milarepa.

JINSEK (Tib. sbyin sreg) [Skt. homa] Literally, “burnt offerings.” A term used for rituals that involve fire. It is common to conclude an intensive yidam retreat with jinsek in order to purify errors or omissions in one’s practice. See also **INTERNAL FIRE PUJA, SANG, SUR.**

KADAMPA (Skt.) [Tib. bka’ gdams pa] A tradition brought to Tibet by Atisha at the end of the first millennium that

emphasized the gradual path. It has not survived as an independent school, but rather has been absorbed into the other schools.

KAGYU (Tib. bka' brgyud) One of the four main lineages of Buddhism in Tibet and one of the three main schools of the New Translation tradition, the Kagyupa school is subdivided into four greater and eight lesser lineages, not all of which have survived to the present day. The Kagyu traces its lineage back to the mahasiddha Tilopa, who received the teachings directly from Vajradhara. The Kagyu are particularly known for their many great yogis as well as the monastic tradition that began with Gampopa (1079–1153). See also **KARMAPA**.

KALACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. dus kyi 'khor lo] “Wheel of Time.” The tantra itself contains vast explanations of time, math, geography, and astronomy as well as deity sadhanas and yogic applications. Tantra and yidam practice of Kalachakra has been made famous by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, who offers the empowerment publicly throughout the world.

KANGLING (Tib. rkang gling) As an instrument for the practice of chö, it is made of a human thighbone and played by the practitioner. It is held in the left hand and blown while

the right hand slowly plays a large hand drum. See also **CHÖ**, **MACHIK LAPDRÖN**, **PADAMPA SANGYE**, **THRAM MIK**.

KAPALA (Skt.) [Tib. thod pa] Skullcup. A shallow cup made from the top portion of a human skull. The skullcup is an important part of Vajrayana symbolism as a reminder to practitioners to generate compassion for beings and cut through fixation on concepts of pleasant and unpleasant. The fruition of the path is a state of abiding in unchanging great bliss, the union of bliss and emptiness, as represented by the red interior lining and white bone exterior of the kapala itself.

KARMA (Skt.) [Tib. las] Action. The universal law of cause and effect, according to which one inevitably experiences the results of one's own positive and negative actions.

KARMA KAGYU See **KAGYU**.

KARMAPA (Tib. ka rma pa) The Gyalwang Karmapa is the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. The present Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, is the seventeenth in an unbroken lineage that began with Dusum Khyenpa. The Gyalwang Karmapas, who embody the activity of buddhahood, were prophesied by both Buddha Shakyamuni

and Padmasambhava. A manifestation of Chenrezik, they are pure examples of wisdom and compassion and have revealed their realization as scholars, yogins, artists, and poets. See also **KAGYU**.

KARTOR (Tib. dkar gtor) A white tormo used as a general offering for various peaceful deities and spirits.

KASHYAPA BUDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. 'od srung] The previous buddha of this age. It is taught in the sutras that there will be a total of one thousand buddhas to appear in this world, each to turn his own wheel of dharma. Buddha Shakyamuni is the fourth, to be succeeded by the Buddha Maitreya.

KAYAS (Skt.) [Tib. sku] The three natures, or “bodies,” of buddhas. See also **DHARMAKAYA**, **NIRMANAKAYA**, **SAMBHOGAKAYA**.

KLESHAS (Skt.) [Tib. nyon mongs] Emotional obscurations. The three primary kleshas, the “three poisons,” are attachment or desire, aversion or anger, and ignorance or delusion. Along with pride and envy, they are referred to as the five kleshas.

KRIYA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. bya ba'i rgyud] Action tantra. The first of the outer tantras, focusing on cleanliness, purity, and correct behavior. See also **TANTRA**.

KUNRIK (Tib. kun rigs) The practice of the Buddha Vairochana.

KUSALI (Skt.) [Tib. dge ba can] One who meditates and practices in a simple way free from elaborate external supports. The word *kusali* means “beggar.” In the sense of “Gathering the Accumulations for a Kusali,” it means hermits and renunciates who lack any other possessions making offerings of their own bodies for the great accumulation of merit. See also **PANDITA**.

LEJANG (Tib. las byang) A liturgical practice or ritual. See also **PUJA**, **SADHANA**.

LA (Tib. bla) Literally, the word *la* means “above” or “higher.” Inhabits the body as a type of “spirit,” departing the body upon death. It should not be confused with *lha* (Tib. lha), which means deity or god.

LHAKTONG See **VIPASHYANA**.

LOCAL SPIRIT/PROTECTOR A nonphysical being who resides in or presides over a particular land area, body of water, mountain, valley, etc. See also **DHARMAPALA**.

LOTSAWA (Skt. locava) [Tib. 'jig rten mig gcig] Translator.

LOTUS SUTRA, SUTRA OF THE LOTUS OF THE TRUE DOCTRINE (Skt. *Saddharma pundarika sutra*) [Tib. dam pa'i chos padma dkar po'i mdo] A foundational text of Mahayana Buddhism in which the Buddha explains the principles underlying the unity of the three yanas and the concept of skillful means in adapting the teaching to the capacities of different beings.

LOVING KINDNESS (Skt. maitri) [Tib. byams pa] The unconditional wish for all beings, excluding none, to attain happiness. On the bodhisattva path, one trains in loving kindness and compassion. Many great masters have asserted that these two constitute the essence of the Buddha's teachings. See also **COMPASSION, FOUR IMMEASURABLES**.

LUCIDITY, CLARITY, LUMINOSITY (Skt. prabhasvara) [Tib. bsal ba or 'od gsal] In *Mountain Dharma*, especially in the discussion of Mahamudra, these three terms are used

interchangeably. They are defined as the aspect of the mind's nature that permits appearances in their vivid clarity, the nature of the unimpeded display of appearance, which arises inseparably as emptiness. The genuine realization of lucidity-emptiness is synonymous with Mahamudra. See also **CLEAR LIGHT**.

MACHIK LAPDRÖN (Tib. ma chig lab kyi sgron ma) (1055–1145) Machik Lapkyi Drönma, a disciple of Padampa Sangye and founder of the Chö lineage in Tibet. Under intense scrutiny by Indian panditas, she became the first Tibetan to transmit a dharma lineage back to India. See also **CHÖ**, **KANGLING**, **PADAMPA SANGYE**, **THRAM MIK**.

MADHYAMAKA (SKT.) [Tib. dbu ma] “Middle-way.” Founded by Nagarjuna in the second century CE, this philosophical school of Buddhism, based on the teaching of emptiness and the adherence to the middle path between eternalism and nihilism, declares the relative nature of all phenomena and uses a rigorous dialectic to prove the ultimate non existence, or emptiness, of both self (mental events) and other (external objects and events).

MAHAMUDRA (Skt.) [Tib. phyag rgya chen po] Literally, “great seal.” A meditation practice particularly emphasized in

the Kagyu tradition, Mahamudra is the direct experience of the empty, luminous, and pure nature of mind.

MAHASATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. sems dpa' chen po] Literally, “great being.” This title is reserved for a great being or teacher.

MAHASIDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. grub thob chen po] Great adept; highly realized master in the Vajrayana tradition. Also refers to the eightyfour great and eccentric mahasiddhas who lived in India between the eighth and twelfth centuries CE, and who reached great spiritual attainment through the diligent practice of tantra. Tilopa and Naropa are two of the eighty-four mahasiddhas.

MAHAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. theg pa chen po] The “greater vehicle.” The teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma in which shunyata (emptiness) and compassion for all beings are emphasized. See also **BODHICHITTA**, **BODHISATTVA**, **BODHISATTVA VOW**.

MAHA YOGA (Skt.) [Tib. rnal 'byor chen po] In the Nyingma tradition, the first inner tantra, which emphasizes the generation stage of visualizing the deity as being luminosity inseparable from great emptiness. See also **FATHER TANTRA**, **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**.

MAITREYA (Skt.) [Tib. byams pa] The Buddha of the future, who at the present time resides in Tushita, a heavenly realm, from which he emanates manifestations into other realms. He will take birth as the fifth buddha of the present era.

MALA (Skt.) [Tib. phreng ba] Rosary. Row of beads used for counting mantra or other repetitive recitations.

MA NAM ZHI KOR (Tib. ma nam bzhi bskor) The four lines within the Guru Yoga section of the ngondro liturgy that begin “...and all my mother sentient beings, equal to the sky, supplicate the guru...” See also **NGONDRO**.

MANDALA (Skt.) [Tib. dkyil ‘khor] Symbolic representation depicting the palace of a particular deity. These circular diagrams are sometimes elaborately executed with grains of colored sand and are used for empowerments and elaborate meditation practices. The mandala offering, the third of the four special foundations, perfects the accumulation of merit by repeatedly offering the entire universe to the sources of refuge. See also **NGONDRO**.

MANI STONES Stones painted or carved with the mantra, OM MANI PADME HUM, then piled or placed about. This

is a common practice for lay and monastic devotees alike as a means to accumulate merit.

MANJUSHRI (Skt.) [Tib. 'jam dpal dbyangs] One of the eight main bodhisattvas, he is the personification of the perfection of transcendent knowledge or wisdom and thus a frequent figure in the prajnaparamita sutras of the Mahayana tradition. He is shown wearing sambhogakaya ornaments and holding a flaming sword in his right hand and a text in his left hand.

MANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. sngags] The authentic sound of emptiness, mantras are sacred sounds representing various energies that symbolize and communicate the nature of a deity. Manifestations of the speech aspect of enlightenment, mantras range from single syllables to lengthy combinations. OM MANI PEME HUNG, the mantra of Chenrezik is among the most widely practiced.

MARA (Skt.) [Tib. bdud] Mara is anything that obstructs the practice of Dharma and seduces you into abandoning your practice in favor of worldly activities. The first of the four maras of the mind is the deva putra mara, which is attachment to and craving for pleasure. The second, the klesha mara, causes one to take rebirth in the six realms of samsara. The third is called skandha mara because the

skandhas or aggregates are the cause for the presence of suffering. The fourth one is the *mṛtyu mara*, the mara of death. Mara is also a type of powerful local spirit of Tibet that gathers in places of black, rocky landscapes.

MAUDGALYAYANA (Skt.) One of the Buddha's main disciples known for his siddhis.

MENTAL AFFLICTIONS See **KLESHAS**.

MILAREPA (Tib. *mi la ras pa*) This famous yogi (1040–1143) is one of the greatest and most celebrated teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite having accumulated heavy negative karma in his early adulthood, he became the student of Marpa and attained full awakening in one lifetime. *The One Hundred Thousand Songs* were spontaneously created to elucidate his experience of realization. His students include Gampopa and Rechungpa.

MIND ONLY SCHOOL (Skt. *cittamatra*) [Tib. *sems tsam*] Literally, “merely mind.” Mahayana school founded by Asanga in the fourth century. It asserts that appearances are only mind.

MOTHER TANTRA (Tib. ma rgyud) In the Sarma tradition, one of the three inner anuttara yoga tantras; mother tantra emphasizes the completion stage. See also **ANU YOGA**, **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**.

MUDRA OF PERFECT AWAKENING The hand gesture commonly held by the Buddha Vairochana. His two hands are in front of his heart, each with the thumb and index finger together while the others are extended. The left palm faces upward while the right faces outward.

MUNDANE PROTECTOR See **DHARMAPALA**.

NAGA (Skt.) [Tib. klu] Powerful serpent beings who inhabit waters and are often the custodians of treasures, either texts or actual material treasures.

NAMTHAR (Tib. rnam thar) Literally, “records of liberation.” Biographies of the enlightened masters of Tibet depicting the spiritual path by which the master attained enlightenment, most often written by their disciples.

NEW TRANSLATION SCHOOL See **SARMA**.

NGONDRO (Tib. sngon ‘gro) The preliminary practices of Tibetan Buddhism in which the practitioner begins the Vajrayana path, performing 111,111 repetitions of refuge prayers and prostrations; 111,111 Vajrasattva mantras; 111,111 mandala offerings; and 111,111 guru yoga practices. The preliminary practices prepare the student for the successive stages on the Vajrayana path. See also **MA NAM ZHI KOR**.

NIRMANAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. sprul sku] Emanation body by which buddhas appear in physical form in the realm of sentient beings.

NIRVANA (Skt.) [Tib. mya ngan las ‘das pa] “Beyond suffering.” The extinction of the causes of samsara resulting in liberation from cyclic existence. The Hinayanas view nirvana as one’s own individual liberation whereas the Mahayanists state that there is no real difference between samsara and nirvana; that it is one’s own perceptions, which reflect one’s spiritual development. See also **SAMSARA**.

NONDUAL TANTRA (Tib. gnyis med rgyud) In the Sarma tradition, one of the three inner anuttara yoga tantras; nondual tantra emphasizes the integration of the generation and completion stages. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **ATI YOGA**.

NYEN (Tib. gnyan) A type of spirit that inhabits certain localities such as the sides of mountains, valleys and meadows.

NYINGMA (Tib. rnying ma) The Old Translation school, which represents the Buddhist teachings as they were first translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit and other languages. This school began in the eighth century CE with Padmasambhava, who buried terma, “hidden treasures,” to be discovered at the appropriate time in the future by tertons, “treasure discoverers.” Dzokchen is the highest meditation practice in the Nyingma tradition.

NYUNGNE (Tib. smyung gnas) The fasting practice of Thousand-Armed Chenrezik, the bodhisattva of infinite compassion.

OBSTRUCTORS See **GEK**.

OLD TRANSLATION SCHOOL See **NYINGMA**.

OUTER TANTRAS See **CHARYA TANTRA**, **KRIYA TANTRA**, and **YOGA TANTRA**.

PADAMPA SANGYE (Tib. pha dam pa sangs rgyas) Indian master of the Shije or Pacification lineage who, having

traveled to Tibet on several occasions, transmitted his lineage of Chö to Machik Lapdron. See also **CHÖ**, **KANGLING**, **MACHIK LAPDRÖN**, **THRAM MIK**.

PADMASAMBHAVA (Skt.) [Tib. pad ma ‘byung gnas, guru rin po che] The “lotus-born” buddha of Uddiyana, who brought the Vajrayana teachings to Tibet in the eighth century CE. He subdued the negative forces of Tibet, founded the Nyingma tradition, and concealed terma or “treasures” that are still being discovered today as the need arises for the benefit of future generations. Known to Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche, he is considered by many a second buddha of our time. While his influence pervades all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, it is especially with the Nyingma lineage that he is venerated as a central figure.

PADYAM (Skt.) Water for washing the feet. The second in the series of the common outer offerings.

PANDITA (Skt.) [Tib. mkhas pa] Great scholar. One who is highly learned and skilled in debate, the sciences, meditation practices, and so on. See also **KUSALI**.

PARINIRVANA (Skt.) [Tib. yongs su mya ngan las ‘das pa] Completely beyond suffering. The highest nirvana, the final

passing away of buddhas, which is entered at death once having achieved complete enlightenment.

PHOWA See **TRANSCERENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**.

PHURBA (Tib. phur pa) A three-sided ritual dagger made of metal. It is usually depicted in the hands of wrathful deities displaying gestures of force or subduing, and is the symbolic weapon which “pierces and destroys” the negativity of ego clinging.

POSTMEDITATION Time spent when not formally practicing meditation, when one is going about the activities of daily life.

POTALA (Tib. po ta la) The celestial palace of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Skt.) [Tib. Chenrezik]. The palace of His Holiness Dalai Lama in Lhasa is also called Potala as he is considered to be an emanation of that bodhisattva.

PRAJNA (Skt.) [Tib. shes rab] Prajna is the knowledge or wisdom realized at the moment of insight or intuitive understanding; it is the sixth of the Mahayana perfections or paramitas.

PRAJNAPARAMITA (Skt.) [Tib. shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa] Mother of all buddhas. Transcendent knowledge. The Mahayana teachings on the cultivation of insight resulting in the direct realization of emptiness. See also **HEART SUTRA**.

PRELIMINARY PRACTICES See **NGONDRO**.

PRETA (Skt.) [Tib. yi dvags] Hungry ghost. See also **SIX REALMS**.

PROTECTION CIRCLE (Tib. srung 'khor) Protective perimeter of a visualized mandala, established at the beginning of extended sadhanas.

PROTECTOR See **DHARMAPALA**.

PUJA (Skt.) [Tib. mchod pa] A Buddhist ceremony that varies from the very simple to the most elaborate. See also **LEJANG**, **SADHANA**.

RAGA ASYA (Skt.) Sanskrit name for Karma Chakme.

RAKSHASA (Skt.) [Tib. srin po] A particularly vicious type of being that thrives on killing and consuming flesh.

RANGJUNG DORJE (Tib. rang 'byung rdo rje) (1283 1339)

The Third Gyalwang Karmapa. He is known particularly for his written compositions, such as *The Profound Inner Meaning*, which is still widely relied upon as a meditation manual.

READING TRANSMISSION (Tib. lung) The transmission of authorization to study a scripture by listening to it being read aloud by a lineage holder, which is a necessary preliminary to doing a yidam practice. See also **EMPOWERMENT**, **INSTRUCTION**.

REFUGE Safety sought from the perils of cyclic existence.

This can only be found in those sources that embody the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, such as buddhas and bodhisattvas, the teachings of the Buddha, and the community of enlightened practitioners. In the Vajrayana, the notion of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, is extended to the lamas, yidams, and protectors as well. These six sources of refuge are known as the “Three Jewels and Three Roots.”

REFUGE VOW Formal statement of one's intent to take refuge, usually done in a ceremony accompanied by a liturgy. The vow of refuge, like all Buddhist vows, must be received from a qualified preceptor who has himself maintained it

without breakage. The vow of refuge marks the beginning of the Buddhist path and remains as a foundation of one's commitment for all other vows. See also **REFUGE**.

RENUNCIATION (Tib. nges 'byung) The stable renunciation of samsara, which means that what you previously regarded with attachment you now regard with revulsion and disgust because you recognize the futility of samsara and the value of liberation. See also **FOUR THOUGHTS THAT TURN THE MIND**.

RISHI (Skt.) [Tib. drang strong] In past times this referred to saints or sages who had extraordinary longevity or supernatural power. They also may have been known for power of speech, which enabled them to bring things to fruition simply through proclamation. This is said to result from abstention from lying and other wrongdoing of speech and the accomplishment of mantra recitation.

ROOT GURU (Tib. rtsa ba'i bla ma) According to the anuttara yoga tradition of the Vajrayana, your root guru is the embodiment of all buddhas because the mind of the guru is the dharmakaya, the wisdom of all buddhas. Since the guru is the source of Dharma, the speech of the guru is the embodiment of all Dharma. Whether the guru manifests as

a monastic or as a chakravartin, the body of the guru as the foremost member of the sangha is the embodiment of the whole sangha. The qualities of the guru are what manifest as the yidams and other deities, and the activity of the guru is what manifests as dakinis and Dharma protectors. In Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma, your root guru is defined as the teacher who points out the nature of your mind.

SADHANA (Skt.) [Tib. sgrub thabs] Literally, “means of accomplishment.” A Vajrayana liturgy and method for accomplishing a deity, which includes chanting, visualization, and mantra recitation. See also **LEJANG**, **PUJA**.

SAKYA (Tib. sa skya) One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The lineage, headed by His Holiness Sakya Trizin, is passed from father to son. It emphasizes lam dre teachings and Buddhist logic.

SAMADHI (Skt.) [Tib. ting nge 'dzin] Meditative absorption. A onepointed focus of the mind in which there is a nondual experience of the object of meditation and the subject meditating.

SAMANTABHADRA (Skt.) [Tib. kun tu bzang po] Literally, “all good.” One of the eight great bodhisattvas, he is an

emanation of Vajrasattva, and the primordial dharmakaya buddha for the Nyingma lineage.

SAMAYA (Skt.) [Tib. dam tshig] Sacred word or vow. The sacred commitment of Vajrayana is primarily to one's root guru and to the practice one has committed to, but also to the sangha.

SAMAYASATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. dam tshig sems dpa'] A visualized deity, not the actual one. The actual deity, the jñanasattva (Skt.) [Tib. ye shes sems dpa'], is the wisdom being, the pristine awareness aspect of the deity See also **WISDOM DEITY, YIDAM**.

SAMBHOGAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku] Enjoyment body, through which buddhas appear perceptible only to bodhisattvas.

SAMSARA (Skt.) [Tib. 'khor ba] Cyclic existence, in which ordinary beings are trapped in an endless cycle of rebirth in the six realms, which contain endless suffering. The state of ordinary beings bound to suffering by attachment, aggression, and ignorance. See also **NIRVANA**.

SAMYAKSAMBUDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas] Completely and perfectly awakened.

SANG (Tib. bsang) Smoke offering, for cleansing or purification.. Rather than fire, generating smoke is the means to make offerings to the Three Jewels and various nonphysical beings who can imbibe it. It has the power to purify one's own karmic debt and release beings from the lower realms. It is what we do the day before Losar. See also **INTERNAL FIRE PUJA, JINSEK, SUR**.

SANGHA (Skt.) [Tib. dge 'dun] The community of practitioners who have taken refuge in the Three Jewels. Also, the noble sangha of realized ones.

SARMA (Tib. sar ma) The New Translation school, which includes the Kagyu, Geluk, and Sakya schools. These schools rely on the texts of the second propagation, brought by Rinchen Zangpo.

SECRET MANTRA (Tib. gsang sngags) Refers to the Vajrayana.

SELF-VISUALIZATION (Tib. bdag skyed) An aspect of creation stage meditation in which one visualizes and identifies

one's body, speech, and mind with that of the yidam and surrounding mandala. See also **FRONT-VISUALIZATION**.

SENTIENT (Tib. sems) Conscious mind. A sentient being (Tib. sems can) having conscious mind, has awareness and is cognizant as opposed to inanimate objects such as stones.

SEVEN ARTICLES OF ROYALTY The precious wheel (Tib. 'khor lo rin po che), the precious jewel (Tib. nor bu rin po che), the precious queen (Tib. btsun mo rin po che), the precious minister (Tib. blon po rin po che), the precious elephant (Tib. glang po rin po che), the precious horse (Tib. rta mchog rin po che), and the precious general (Tib. dmag dpon rin po che).

SEVEN-POINT POSTURE OF VAIROCHANA (Tib. rnam snang chos bdun) The seven Dharmas of Vairochana are the seven essential points concerning the meditation posture. These are: 1) sitting crosslegged, 2) resting the hands in the manner of meditative equipoise four finger-widths below the navel with straightened arms, 3) raising the shoulders, 4) bending the neck slightly forward and pressing down, 5) straightening the spine, 6) lowering the gaze just beyond the tip of the nose, and 7) resting the tongue on the palate, barely

closing the lips and leaving a slight space between the teeth.
See also **BODHISATTVA POSTURE**, **VAJRA POSTURE**.

SHADOW SPIRITS (Tib. grib gdon, or grib 'dre) Also known as spirits or dōns of obscuration, they are attracted to those who misappropriate offerings, bringing with them further negative influence. They are said to depart by the waning shadows of dawn, return with the waxing shadows of twilight, and remain through the night until the next dawn.

SHAMATHA (Skt.) [Tib. zhi gnas] Literally, “calm abiding.” Tranquility meditation in which the meditator uses techniques, such as following the breath, to attain a calm and focused mind. See also **VIPASHYANA**.

SHARIPUTRA Highly regarded arhat and foremost disciple of Buddha Shakyamuni, he was known for his attainment of wisdom and his exemplary qualities of compassion, patience, and humility. The Buddha declared that Shariputra was a perfect disciple.

SHRAVAKA (Skt.) [Tib. nyan thos] Early disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni, the Shravakas practiced meditation and contemplated the Buddha's words, which they actually heard

because they were present at that time he was teaching. The Shrivakayana was the first yana.

SIDDHI (Skt.) [Tib. grub] Literally, “success.” Attainments acquired on the path. Siddhis may be common, such as the acquisition of extrasensory perception or various supernatural powers. For the true yogi, however, extraordinary siddhi is sought, which is enlightenment itself.

SINGHAMUKHA (Skt.) [Tib. seng gdong ma] Lion-faced dakini.

SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA (Tib. na ro chos drug) Naropa taught Marpa these tantric practices, which are an important part of the Kagyu teachings and a standard practice in the traditional three-year retreat. They consist of tummo, illusory body, dream yoga, clear light, bardo, and phowa.

SIX REALMS (Tib. khams drug) The six realms of samsaric existence as shown on the Wheel of Life. The god realm is the highest of the six realms, where beings are dominated by pride and suffer because they will fall to the lower realms. In the asura realm the beings are dominated by jealousy and envy and suffer as a result of their constant quarreling and fighting. The human realm is characterized by desire and

attachment, and although the beings suffer from ceaseless struggle, it is the best rebirth because one has the opportunity to practice Dharma. The animal realm is dominated by ignorance and stupidity; beings there suffer from constant fear. The hungry ghost realm is dominated by greed, and the preta beings suffer terribly from hunger and thirst. The lowest of the realms, the hell realm, is dominated by hatred and aggression, and the beings there endure intense suffering.

SIX-SYLLABLE MANTRA Refers to OM MANI PADME HUM, the mantra of Chenrezik.

SKULLCUP See **KAPALA**.

SOJONG (Tib. gso sbyong) Literally, “renewal and purification.” The practice of confessing transgressions of one’s vows and renewing them in the form of chanting from a liturgical text. It is commonly performed by monks in assembly on a monthly basis. It is necessary to recite sojong vows, as well, prior to performing certain rituals that require purity of ethical discipline, such as water torma, “chaptor.” See also **WATER TORMA**.

STUPA (Skt.) [Tib. mchod rten] A monument that contains the relics of the Buddha or high teacher. The stupa symbolizes

the dharmakaya, the mind of the Buddha, and can range from small and simple to monumental structures.

SUKHAVATI (Skt.) [Tib. bde ba can] The pure realm of Amitabha Buddha, located in the west. See also **AMITABHA**.

SUMBA MANTRA A mantra of clearing and dispelling obstacles, beginning OM SUMBANI SUMBANI HUNG HUNG PHET....

SUR (Tib. gsur) Burnt or singed offering. Consecrated herbs, barley, and other substances are singed, which benefits beings in the bardo and otherwise. See also **INTERNAL FIRE PUJA**, **JINSEK**, **SANG**.

SUTRA (Skt.) [Tib. mdo] Discourses of the Buddha, derived directly from the Buddha, and recalled from memory by his disciple Ananda, who had committed them to memory throughout the Buddha's lifetime. Each begins with the words "Thus I have heard...."

TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. rgyud] Textual and practical instructions of the Vajrayana. Tantric practitioners consider tantras the words of the Buddha, who taught them while manifesting in samboghakaya form and bestowed them as

a powerful means to overcome the obstacles of degenerate times. The Tantras do not abandon the Hinayana or Mahayana ideals, but build upon them using skillful means to swiftly bring about enlightenment. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **ANU YOGA**, **ATI YOGA**, **CHARYA TANTRA**, **FATHER TANTRA**, **KRIYA TANTRA**, **MAHA YOGA**, **MOTHER TANTRA**, **NONDUAL TANTRA**, **YOGA TANTRA**.

TATHAGATA (Skt.) [Tib. de bzhin gshegs pa] Literally, “Thus-Gone One.” A fully enlightened buddha; also used as an epithet of a buddha.

TERMA (Tib. gter ma) Literally, “hidden treasure.” These include texts, ritual objects, relics, and mentally concealed treasure, which were hidden mainly by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal to be discovered at the proper time by a tertön for the benefit of students.

TERTON (Tib. gter ston) A revealer of hidden treasures that were concealed primarily by Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal.

TEURANG (Tib. the'u rang) A malignant being who brings havoc and causes one to break his moral commitments.

THANGKA (Tib. thang ka) A Tibetan scroll painting depicting buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities, used as religious objects and supports for meditation.

THRAM MIK (Tib. khram mig) A secret chö practice that is done in a special place when someone is very seriously ill. See also **CHÖ**, **KANGLING**, **MACHIK LAPDRÖN**, **PADAMPA SANGYE**.

THRANGU MONASTERY Established in the fifteenth century by the Seventh Karmapa in the Thrangu region of Tibet. The Kyabgon Traleg Rinpoche is the supreme abbot of Thrangu monastery.

THREE JEWELS (Skt. triratna) [Tib. dkon mchog gsum] The precious Buddha, the precious Dharma, and the precious Sangha. See also **REFUGE**.

THREE ROBES OF A MONK The chögö or lagö, the inner yellow garment; the namjar, an upper yellow garment but worn only by the fully ordained; and the shamthab, or lower garment, the actual robe.

THREE SAMADHIS ACCORDING TO SUTRA Heroic samadhi, illusory samadhi, and vajra-like samadhi.

THREE WHITES AND THREE SWEETS The three whites are milk, butter, and yogurt; the three sweets are sugar, molasses, and honey.

THREE-YEAR RETREAT A traditional retreat curriculum, principally within the Kagyu schools, which spans three years, three months, and three days. In it, one receives, learns, and practices the principal yidam and meditation practices of the lineage, such as Vajravarahi and the six dharmas of Naropa.

THREE YOGAS Nyingma term for elaborate, unelaborate, and very unelaborate styles for yidam practice.

TONGLEN (Tib. gtong len) Sending and taking, a meditative method in which one considers the suffering of others and mentally exchanges it for one's own happiness.

TORMA (Tib. gtor ma) Ritual cake used in tantric ceremonies. Meaning “That which is scattered or thrown,” it derives its name from the practice of dispersing the offerings to animals after a ceremony. The inner meaning is the discarding of attachment connected with such offerings. See also **CHANGBU**, **WATER TORMA**.

TRANSCERENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS Also known as phowa (Tib. ‘pho ba) The practice of transferring the consciousness of the recently deceased to a pure realm such as Dewachen. A qualified practitioner may perform the transference on himself, although the task is normally entrusted to a qualified lama.

TRIPITAKA (Skt.) [Tib. sde snod gsum] The Buddhist canon. Literally, “the three baskets,” these are the sutra-pitaka (discourses of the Buddha), the vinaya-pitaka (ethics and discipline), and the abhidharma-pitaka (principles of higher doctrine).

TSA TSA (Tib. tsha tsha) Representations, often small, of the Buddha or a wisdom deity. Made from clay, they are often generated in large numbers as a means to accumulate merit. It is also customary to incorporate ground bone or ashes from the funeral pyres of great masters to benefit the deceased.

TSEN (Tib. btsan) A powerful warlike spirit which inhabits reddish mountainsides, rocks, and landscapes. They are said to have red bodies, wear red clothing, ride red horses, and so forth.

TSERING CHE NGA (Tib. tshe ring mched lnga) The Five Sisters of Long Life. The central figure of the five, Tseringma, is the dakini and protectress for lengthening the life of yourself or another. These are the five demons who first appeared to Milarepa with the intention of creating obstacles to his meditation. Through his power he subdued them and bound them to an oath, which is still invoked in the common daily rituals of the Karma Kagyu and other schools.

TSONDRU GYAMTSON (Tib. brtson 'grus rgya mtsho) [Skt. Virya Sagara] The disciple who requested Karma Chakme to teach about mountain Dharma and then served as the scribe during the text's composition.

TSURPHU MONASTERY (Tib. mtshur phu) Principal seat of the Gyalwang Karmapas located in central Tibet just west of Lhasa, Tibet.

TULKU (Tib. sprul sku) [Skt. nirmanakaya] "Emanation body." A reincarnate lama. It is customary to reserve the title only for those who were accomplished meditators in the previous life and/or demonstrated signs of control over the process of death and rebirth. The term itself implies they are an emanation or a direct rebirth, which is only possible for those abiding on the bodhisattva levels or higher.

TUMMO (Tib. gtum mo) [Skt. chandali] Inner heat yoga. One of the six dharmas of Naropa, it has been made famous by yogis like Milarepa who mastered it to the point of demonstrating complete resilience to the cold Tibetan winter. Besides the physical effects of generating heat and bliss, it is a powerful means to bring about realization and complete enlightenment.

TWO ACCUMULATIONS (Tib. tshogs gnyis) Refers to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Wisdom is the experience and realization that results from the purification of emotional and cognitive obscurations leading to enlightenment. Merit is the positive karmic accumulation resulting from virtuous actions. Using the metaphor of a wisdom flame that burns away obscurations, merit is like the fuel, which ignites and sustains the flame. While the pursuit of wisdom through meditation will itself generate merit, it is the Vajrayana approach to gather the two simultaneously as a quicker means to accomplishing the path.

TWO TRUTHS (Tib. bden pa gnyis) Relative truth is how ordinary beings perceive phenomena; it is considered true on a conventional level. Ultimate truth is the absolute nature of relative truth, that all phenomena are beyond arising,

dwelling and ceasing. This ultimate truth is emptiness, which is only perceived by realized beings.

UPASAKA (Skt.) [Tib. dge bsnyen] A Buddhist layman who is given this status by taking refuge in the Three Jewels. He maintains precepts and gives alms to ordained sangha.

VAJRA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje] Translated as “diamond,” “thunderbolt,” “adamantine.” The legendary weapon of the god Indra that is said to be absolutely indestructible. The vajra is used in the Vajrayana mainly as a symbol of the mind’s unchanging nature. As well, it represents stability, power and the male principle of skillful means.

VAJRADHARA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje ‘chang] Dorje Chang, literally “vajra holder.” He is the dharmakaya buddha of the Sarma school.

VAJRA POSTURE (Tib. rdo rje skyil krung) Seated posture where the legs are fully crossed with the feet resting on the upper thighs. It is commonly mistaken for lotus-posture or full-lotus, although in Tibetan Buddhism lotus posture is the joining of the palms of the feet or crossing of the ankles as depicted by the consorts of sambhoghakaya deities. See also

BODHISATTVA POSTURE, SEVEN-POINT POSTURE OF VAIROCHANA.

VAJRASATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje sems dpa'] The buddha of purification. The second of the four preliminary practices, which is intended to purify obscurations and wrongdoing.

VAJRAVARAHI (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje phag mo] See
VAJRAYOGINI.

VAJRAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje theg pa] The indestructible path. The Vajrayana follows the bodhisattva path of the Mahayana and is characterized by an additional set of teachings based on the tantras, which emphasize deity practice using visualization, mantra, and mudra. Also sometimes called Tantrayana, or Secret Mantra.

VAJRAYANA VOW See **SAMAYA**.

VAJRAYOGINI (Skt.) [Tib. rdor rje rnal 'byor ma] The embodiment of wisdom, she is one of the main yidams of the Kagyu lineage and the consort of Chakrasamvara. A semiwrathful yidam, she is red, with one face and two arms, young and beautiful, and wearing ornaments of human bones.

She represents the transformation of ignorance and passion into shunyata and compassion.

VEHICLE/PATH See **YANA**.

VIDYADHARA (Skt.) [Tib. rig ‘dzin pa] Literally, “awareness holder.” An accomplished tantric master, especially one who purely holds the three vows — the pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and samaya.

VIMALAMITRA (Skt.) [Tib. dri med bshes gnyen] One of the greatest masters and scholars of Indian Buddhism. He went to Tibet in the 9th century where he taught and translated numerous Sanskrit texts. He was a student of Sri Singha and later became an important teacher within the lineages of the Nyingmapa and Dzogchen traditions.

VINAYA (Skt.) [Tib. ‘dul ba] “Discipline.” Part of the Tripitaka, it contains the Buddha’s teachings on ethics, discipline, and conduct. See also **TRIPITAKA**.

VIPASHYANA (Skt.) [Tib. lhag mthong] Insight meditation, which develops insight into the nature of reality. See also **SHAMATHA**.

WATER TORMA (Tib. chab gtor) The ritual offering of torma in the form of water. Based on the instructions of the Buddha, when properly performed, this practice will generate incalculable merit for oneself, liberate and/or pacify the sufferings of innumerable beings in the lower realms, and pacify one's karmic creditors. The practice of chaptor (also called "chotor") is one that in form follows the style of kriya yoga practice, requiring extreme cleanliness, pure morality, and so forth. See also **CHANGBU**, **TORMA**.

WHITE TARA (Tib. sgrol dkar) Female deity whose special function is to promote good health and long life, both for the practitioner and for others. She is white with two arms, and seven eyes of perfect wisdom that show she can see through all beings' suffering. White Tara is also a form of Prajna-paramita or "Perfection of All Wisdom."

WISDOM DEITY (Skt. jñanasattva) [Tib. ye shes sems dpa'] A wisdom being is so named because it is the embodiment or display of the mind's innate wisdom. This includes buddhas, bodhisattvas, yidams, and wisdom protectors such as Mahakala. Wisdom deities may also masquerade amongst mundane beings in order to turn them to the service of the Dharma. See also **SAMAYASATTVA**, **YIDAM**.

YAKSHAS (Skt.) [Tib. gnod sbyin] One of four species that make up the lowest level of the desire god realms.

YAMA (Skt.) [Tib. gshin rje] Lord of Death, the personification of impermanence.

YANA (Skt.) [Tib. theg pa] Vehicle or path. The three main yanas are the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. See also **MAHAYANA**, **VAJRAYANA**.

YESHE TSOGYAL (Tib. ye shes mtsho rgyal) (757-817) “Victorious Ocean of Wisdom.” Consort and main disciple of Guru Padmasambhava; she received his lineage and concealed terma for future generations. She practiced with great perseverance and attained a level equal to Padmasambhava.

YIDAK (Tib.) See **PRETA**.

YIDAM (Tib. yi dam) A tantric deity. The yidam, or meditation deity, is a personal protector of one’s practice and a guide to enlightenment. See also **SAMAYASATTVA**, **WISDOM DEITY**.

YOGA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. rnal ‘byor rgyud] The third of the outer tantras — kriya, upa and, yoga. It emphasizes the view

rather than the conduct and to regard the deity as being the same level as oneself. See also **TANTRA**.

YOGI/YOGINI (Skt.) [Tib. rnal 'byor pa, rnal 'byor ma]
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