

MILAREPA'S WISDOM

A Commentary on the
Teachings of Milarepa in Thirteen of His
100,000 Songs of Realization

**Khenchen Thrangu
Rinpoche**

MILAREPA'S WISDOM

Three Teachings from
The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Oral translations from
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and David Karma Choephel

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Editor's Notes

Tibetan words in the text are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan. The actual spelling of the words can be found in the Glossary of Tibetan Terms.

We use the convention of BCE (Before Common Era) for B.C. and CE (Common Era) for A.D. designation of BCE or CE is made, it is assumed to be CE. We capitalize practices so that tranquility is a peaceful state of mind and Tranquility is Shamatha meditation, insight is a penetrating thought and Insight is Vipashyana meditation.

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Editor's Preface

*All the water and drink you've consumed
From beginningless time until now
Has failed to satisfy your thirst or bring you contentment.
Drink therefore of this stream of enlightened mind,
O fortunate ones.*

— Milarepa

Two thousand five hundred years ago the Buddha gave a remarkable set of teachings in which he proclaimed that everyone experiences suffering. He further taught that to overcome this suffering, this feeling that the world is not going the way one wants it to go, could only be done by examining the mind. After reaching realization, the Buddha spent the next fifty years of his life giving teachings on how to overcome this suffering and how to attain complete freedom from suffering, that is, complete awakening or enlightenment. This process involves first understanding why we

suffer, then contemplating the causes of this suffering, and finally examining our mind through meditation. While the Buddha was alive, he taught his students Tranquility (Shamatha) meditation, which became the common meditation of all Buddhist traditions.

The teachings of the Buddha spread gradually throughout India. These teachings were very popular in India because the prevalent Hindu religious belief was that if one was born into a particular caste such as the *dhobi* (clothes washing) caste, one had to remain in that caste doing exactly what one's father did with no possibility of going into a higher occupation in this lifetime or the next. The exception to this was the Brahmin caste whose members were the only ones allowed to give religious teachings and perform religious ceremonies. In contrast, the Buddha presented a religion where any person, male or female, from any caste or tribe or race, could practice religion, and if they lead a virtuous life, they could be reborn in a better situation.

Buddhism spread throughout Asia and almost a thousand years later, in the eighth century, the King of Tibet invited Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita to come to Tibet and make Buddhism the state religion. The scholars first developed a written Tibetan language, and then imported many texts to Tibet and translated them into Tibetan, and finally also founded what is known today as the Nyingma lineage. In the tenth century the Tibetan King, Langdarma,

tried to destroy the Buddhist religion in Tibet. He was later assassinated, and Buddhism fell more or less into chaos. In the tenth and eleventh centuries this chaos led to three more major lineages being established. These new lineages sent intrepid practitioners to India to bring back additional Buddhist teachings and practices, thus creating the second wave of Buddhist teachings entering Tibet.

One of these new lineages became the Kagyu lineage. Marpa (1012-1097) was a Tibetan farmer who travelled to India three times and learned many Indian languages. He brought back a large number of texts of Vajrayana teachings that were being practiced by the mahasiddhas. These mahasiddhas often lived outside of monasteries and practiced and taught the people in their own language, not in Sanskrit. The teachings of the mahasiddhas were a living tradition of tantric teachings that had been passed down from guru to disciple for centuries. A guru could not share these teachings until he or she had fully accomplished the practice themselves. And then, the teachings could only be passed on to students who had demonstrated that they were ready to receive them. These tantric teachings were very important transmissions of Buddhism because they weren't simply words on a page — they were living teachings transmitted by highly accomplished practitioners.

The first two founders of the Kagyu lineage lived entirely in India. The first was Tilopa, a mahasiddha who practiced tantra and taught

the Ganges Mahamudra to Naropa in the form of a *doha*.¹ The second Kagyu lineage holder, Naropa, was a scholar at Nalanda University who left his academic position to become a mahasiddha and received, practiced, and transmitted tantric teachings to practices to Marpa who brought them back to Tibet.

Along with this book, *Milarepa's Wisdom*, Thrangu Rinpoche has published *Tilopa's Wisdom and Naropa's Wisdom* — forming a trilogy of teachings from three early lineage holders. These three lineage holders lived around the eleventh century when history about siddhas in India was extremely sparse and often contradictory. However, history in Tibet was much more accurate so we know where and when Milarepa was born, which caves he practiced in, where he met his important students, and the details about his Dharma practice. There is even a video² showing the house Milarepa was born in, the seven-story tower that he built, and the caves that he practiced in.

Marpa made three trips to India to receive the authentic teachings and underwent great hardship to bring these teachings back to Tibet. He had to completely master these practices to get permission to pass them on. As a result, he was able to achieve enlightenment in

1. In India (particularly Bengal, where Tilopa lived) many religious texts were taught in the form of a *doha*, a form of rhyming couplets. When these texts came to Tibet, they became *gurs* which are non-rhyming lines of a certain number of syllables. We therefore use “spiritual song” or “song of realization” for *gurs*.

2. *The Footsteps of Milarepa* is an hour long video on [YouTube](#). See the [Bibliography](#) under Milarepa.

one lifetime. Marpa received the complete Vajrayana practices of Hevajra, Chakrasamvara, and Vajrayogini. In addition, he received the Six Dharmas of Naropa and the Mahamudra teachings. Marpa had many students in Tibet, but Milarepa was considered his closest. Milarepa underwent incredible hardships under Marpa's direction to become Tibet's most famous saint.

While Milarepa was alive, he was not considered a great Buddhist saint. Milarepa also did not write treatises on Buddhist topics, but remained in high mountain places in Tibet and Nepal practicing and teaching students who came to see him. He did not teach his students as Tibetan teachers do today, by explaining a topic arranged into many different subtopics and then very carefully following this outline, but rather Milarepa sang beautiful, spontaneous spiritual songs on profound Buddhist topics.³

To demonstrate his great realization when he passed into nirvana, Milarepa did not leave his physical body behind. At that time several of his students began writing down stories of his life and collecting his spiritual songs. Quintman (2014) reports that the first stories and spiritual songs that were collected and written down were by three of Milarepa's closest students. First, Ngendzon Repa wrote four chapters on Milarepa's life making it the earliest biographical materials on Milarepa. He also wrote down five spiritual songs by

3. See the Bibliography for David Karma Choephel singing a few of these songs in Tibetan using traditional melodies.

Milarepa on the five Tseringma sisters and a spiritual song on the bardo — the interval between dying and being reborn in the next life. One of these five spiritual songs of Milarepa is given in the first section of this book. The second close student of Milarepa was Gampopa who became another important founder of the Kagyu Lineage and who also wrote about the life and songs of Milarepa. A translation of Gampopa's biography of Milarepa and a few of Milarepa songs are also available in Quintman's book. The third recorder of Milarepa's life and songs was his disciple Rechungpa, who went to India and brought back teachings that later were absorbed into the Drukpa Kagyu lineage, particularly by Padma Karpo. Thrangu Rinpoche draws from Padma Karpo's commentary in [Part Three](#) of this book.

For the next 370 years there were about twenty-five different Tibetan texts that have survived containing spiritual songs of Milarepa. Tiso and also Quintman have made detailed analyses of these works to show how these spiritual songs gradually evolved.

Then in 1488 a remarkable event happened when Tsang Nyön Heruka published two books — *The Biography of Milarepa* (Tib. *mila namtar*) and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* (Tib. *mila gurbum*). Before Tsang Nyön, all the collections of stories of Milarepa's life and his songs were collected together. However, Tsang Nyön separated out Milarepa's songs from his biography into two

beautifully written books. Even to this day these two books are inspirational books in Buddhism. Tsang Nyön, “the crazy man from Nyön,” was called “crazy” because in his early days he broke traditional rules of Tibetan society, like drinking urine and eating feces, and offering them to others. Tsang Nyön had collected Milarepa’s spiritual songs from all over Tibet and over a period of years put these together in the book *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. This title, it should be noted, is not a correct translation of the work in English because the Tibetan word *bum* literally means “100,000” but it can also mean “a great many” or “a collection of” in Tibetan (Roberts). It has been suggested that a more correct title in English would have been *The Collected Spiritual Songs of Milarepa*. While these songs were not 100,000 in number, the number of songs in *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* are numerous with Stagg’s translation of this work into English running 700 pages.

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa is a combination of prose and verse with Tsang Nyön often setting the scene in prose with Milarepa meditating somewhere, then people coming to him and asking questions, and then Milarepa singing a spiritual song answering the question based on his profound realization. Tsang Nyön’s genius was that by presenting these songs in this way, he could describe how a person attains enlightenment in a down-to-earth way that was so different from the academic Buddhism taught in the monasteries in Tibet. If an ordinary Tibetan person at that time

(and also to a great extent even today) had gone to a Buddhist monastery where the Dharma was taught and debated, he or she would not have understood the teachings because monasteries teach in classical Dharma Tibetan, and not the ordinary Tibetan spoken by the populous. This difference will be explained in much more detail in [Part Three](#) of this book.

Tsang Nyön Heruka's *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* was not perfect and did not contain all the known songs of Milarepa. For example, six of Milarepa's songs that were collected by Rechungpa's lineage have been translated and published by Sernsi. Tsang Nyön also did not always place the songs in the correct geographic locations because he tried to fit them into caves that Padmasambhava had visited three centuries before Milarepa was born (Quintman, 1977). Tsang Nyön also interjected some of his own prejudices, for example, substituting one of Milarepa's foes as a *geshe*, a Buddhist scholar, rather than a Bön priest (Tiso). Finally, it has been noted that some very basic stories — such as Milarepa's building the seven story-tower and tearing it down three times — are surprisingly not mentioned in any of the early accounts of Milarepa (Roberts).

We must remember, however, that these are only minor details and that Tsang Nyön Heruka did a heroic task making Milarepa one of the best known and dearly loved yogis in Tibet, and inspiring

hundreds of thousands of ordinary persons to practice the Dharma with diligence.

Milarepa's spiritual songs were fairly unknown outside of Tibet for about 400 years after Tsang Nyön published these books. Then, in 1928 Kazi Dawa Samdup translated, and Evans-Wentz edited, Tsang Nyön's spiritual biography with the title *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa: A Biography from the Tibetan*. This is said to be the first book ever translated from Tibetan into English. Even though the book was on a Buddhist subject and described a very foreign environment, it had a tremendous impact in the English-speaking world and was soon translated into many different languages. We could say that this book put Tibetan Buddhism on the map.

Following this, in 1962 Garma Chang published his translation of Tsang Nyön's *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* and thus introduced the Western world to Milarepa's spiritual songs. A more modern translation of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* has been published by Staggy in 2016.

Thrangu Rinpoche is one of the most respected scholars of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and is recognized for not only having a tremendous scholarly background, but also for having great meditative insight into the Buddhist teachings. He has taught Milarepa's teachings three different times in three different places.

Editor's Preface

Each teaching was unique, so in *Milarepa's Wisdom* we have divided the book into three parts.

The first part is “Lessons from Ten Spiritual Songs,” discussing the teachings in these spiritual songs of Milarepa. The second part is a spiritual song entitled “Milarepa’s Thirty Instructions” concerning how to practice the Dharma. The third part, “The Perfect Description of the Middle Way” demonstrating that Milarepa was not simply a practicing yogi because he actually studied the Dharma extensively and presents a Buddhist view which is quite modern.

— Clark Johnson, Ph. D.

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For the First Part we would like to thank Ken Holmes for translating the oral teaching of Rinpoche and Gaby Hollmann for her enormous work in transcribing and editing this manuscript. We would also like to thank Jean Johnson for going over the manuscript and Peter Roberts for carefully retranslating parts of this manuscript and giving his advice on technical details. The songs of Paldarbum are from *The Rain of Wisdom*, translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee.

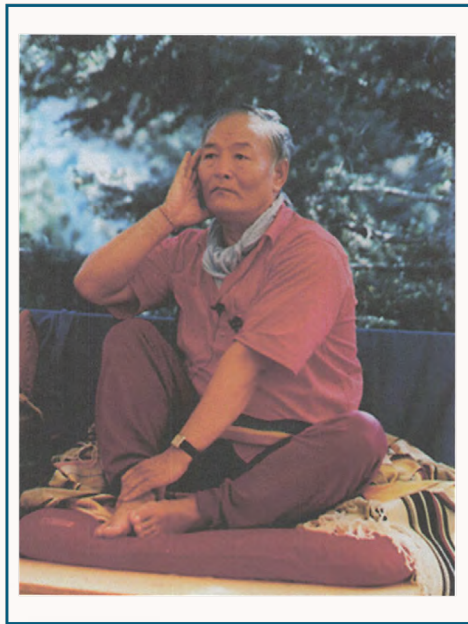
For the Second Part we would like to thank David Karma Choephel for translating the teachings and Adrienne Mihelic for transcribing them.

For the Third Part, we would like to thank Peter Roberts for orally translating the teachings. We would like to also thank Tony Duff for providing his translation of the root verses in Part Three. We would especially like to thank Adrienne Mihelic for her invaluable help in editing all these teachings into a book.



Milarepa in Meditation

This is the traditional picture of Milarepa. Note that his posture is not the usual Vajra or full lotus pose. He is sitting on a deer skin which represents peacefulness and love of all beings because deer never harm other sentient beings. His right hand is up at his ear and this is often described as “listening to the universe.” He is wearing a simple cotton robe and has a meditation belt. *Painting by Karma Drodul.*



Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche demonstrating the yogic pose that he believes Milarepa was using in his meditation. *Photo courtesy of Clark Johnson.*

Part One:

LESSONS FROM
TEN SPIRITUAL SONGS

Editor's Introduction to Part One

*This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds
To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking
At the movements of a dance.
A lifetime is like a flash of lightening in the sky,
Rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain.*

— The Buddha quoted by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Every year since 1986 Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche has shared his wisdom and teachings with Western students through his Namö Buddha Seminars at his monastery in Nepal. At the Namö Buddha Seminar in 1988 he gave a series of teachings on songs from *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. This first part of Milarepa's Wisdom covers ten different chapters that Thrangu Rinpoche selected from Tsang Nyön Heruka's *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* to illustrate important Buddhist concepts.

If the full translation of the root text of the original songs in these ten stories were added to Rinpoche's commentary, it would have taken Rinpoche months to teach and this book would be hundreds of pages longer. Because there are now two complete translations *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* — one by Chang published in 1962 and the other by Stagg in 2016 — Rinpoche chose to tell the story of Milarepa and the songs in his own words. He told his students that they should also read Milarepa's wonderful songs in the original.

In this first part we have indented Milarepa's words without quotation marks: to indicate that they were summaries, not literal translations of the Milarepa's songs. However, the other two parts of this book, we have a complete translations of the spiritual songs.

Thrangu Rinpoche begins with teachings from Milarepa that were given to non-human beings. The reader may feel that these stories of ghosts and demons and supernatural powers are simply folk legends. This certainly would be an orthodox Western historian's view. However, even today there are great Tibetan practitioners who perform miracles similar to those described in the *Hundred Thousand Songs*. Many of the lamas and lay persons, including many Western practitioners, have seen non-human beings and witnessed "miracles," and so the Western reader is cautioned from dismissing the accounts of Milarepa as being simply folklore.

To give an example, a few years ago Thrangu Rinpoche and his monks were in a day long puja and the monks noticed that Thrangu Rinpoche kept looking up to the top left part of the shrine. Afterwards, they asked his attendant Lobsang to ask Rinpoche what he was looking at. Rinpoche said, “Didn’t you see Mahakala up there?”

Another time, Thrangu Rinpoche was building his monastery in Nepal at Namu Buddha — a sacred site where a previous buddha had fed his own arm to a starving tiger. One of his monks developed a terrible, painful rash. The monk went to many doctors who couldn’t help him at all. Then he was visiting a particular monk who was known to have clairvoyant abilities and could actually see invisible non-human beings. The monk said, “You have really upset a local deity, what did you do?” The ailing monk then remembered that he had found a local non-Buddhist shrine at the base of the hill where Namu Buddha Monastery was to be built and had taken the non-Buddhist shrine down. When Thrangu Rinpoche was told about this, he told his monks that they had to do a large offering ceremony in which they apologize for what the monk had done and made vast visualized offerings to this earth deity. These offerings were visualized because non-human invisible beings cannot benefit from anything material, but can enjoy and benefit from things that are visualized. A few days later, the monk’s skin disease went away.

Editor's Introduction to Part One

This teaching was given in 1988 in Nepal with Ken Holmes doing the original oral translation. The translation was emended by Peter Alan Roberts in 1995, and was published by Namo Buddha Publications and Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications in 2003. That book is now out of print and so we have included it here with two other teachings of Rinpoche.

1. Milarepa and the Kagyu Lineage

The *Biography of Milarepa* (Tib. *mila namtar*) by Tsang Nyön Heruka is clearly written and easily understood. It has been translated into English and it does not require much additional explanation. However, there is a collection of the spiritual songs of Milarepa entitled *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* (Tib. *mila grubum*) which was also compiled by Tsang Nyön. I shall give a commentary on ten selected chapters of this book.

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa was compiled by Tsang Nyön Heruka who was said to be an emanation of Milarepa. He was a siddha who had gained the appellation “nyönpa” which means “crazy.” He was one of three famous contemporary “crazy siddhas”: Druk Nyön who was “the crazy man from Bhutan,” Ü Nyön who was “the crazy man from Ü” (Ü is a province in central Tibet), and Tsang Nyön who was “the crazy man from Tsang.” *The Biography of Milarepa* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* were published in Tibet in the fifteenth century to inspire students

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to practice Milarepa's lineage of instructions. This lineage consists of the "path of means" which focuses on the Six Dharmas of Naropa, and the "path of liberation," focusing on Mahamudra meditation.

Brief Introduction to the Kagyu Lineage

It would be good to briefly describe the Kagyu Lineage and then go into more depth by discussing a brief prayer to the early lineage holders. One of the main practices mentioned in this book is the Six Dharmas of Naropa. The Six Dharmas of Naropa has four root dharmas or practices — Subtle Heat, Illusory Body, Dream Yoga, and Clear Light. Tilopa received these practice instructions from four different gurus in four different transmissions. Although he received these transmissions from different living teachers, Tilopa ultimately received these transmissions from Vajradhara. He then passed these precious teachings onto Naropa.

Naropa

Naropa was a great scholar, or *pandita*. Nevertheless, he was told by a wisdom dakini to go and find Tilopa. She told him that just being a great scholar was not enough and that he needed to receive practice instructions from Tilopa. Naropa had to undergo great hardships seeking out and eventually finding Tilopa. Tilopa, having the conduct of a mahasiddha, did not just directly give Naropa the instructions. Naropa had to undergo further great hardships before

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finally receiving the instructions. After receiving the instructions and practicing them, he became a great siddha himself. Naropa then passed these instructions on to Marpa.

Marpa

Marpa left Tibet for Nepal to go to India. He didn't just go once, he went three times to India. Tilopa had previously given a prophecy to Naropa that a pupil by the name of Chökyi Lodro would come and that Naropa should give him instructions. So, when Marpa Chökyi Lodro came to him, Naropa gave him these instructions. Marpa spent a total of sixteen years and seven months with Naropa during which time he received, practiced, and achieved the transmission of his lineage.

During Marpa's second visit to India, Marpa's student Milarepa had a dream that conveyed the information that there were instructions that Marpa needed and that he should obtain them from Naropa. Milarepa told Marpa about his dream and the instructions that he should receive. Marpa replied, "Yes, Naropa had said something about these teachings and I've never received them, so I must go to India again and obtain them from him."

When Marpa's students heard this, they were not very pleased. They said, "You are rather old so you shouldn't go to India. Maybe you should send your son instead. Or, if you insist on going yourself,

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you should have an attendant or companion to look after you, because on the way to India there are high passes, narrow ledges, and wide rivers. And there are bandits and thieves, as you yourself have already told us so many times. If you insist on going and something happens to you, then we will be very upset. We will have lost our refuge, our teacher, and our protector. So, you must stay.”

But Marpa said, “I am not sending my son, he is too young. If I send him, all that will do is cause worry for me. If somebody comes with me as a companion or attendant, all that will do is cause additional problems. It is true there are high passes that are very cold, plains that are very hot, large rivers to cross, and thieves and bandits. But I have complete confidence in being able to make the trip. I have all the instructions and teachings that will counteract any negative circumstance. And, I am not so old that I can’t go to India.”

So, Marpa went to India and met Naropa and asked him for these instructions. Naropa was very surprised saying, “I have not told you about these instructions, so how did you hear about them?” And Marpa explained how he had a pupil called Mila Töpagwa who had been told in a dream that he should ask Naropa for these instructions.

When Naropa heard this, he recited a verse saying, “In the darkness of the north it is like a sun that is rising over the snows.” The north refers to the northern land of Tibet where the Dharma had not spread extensively, so it was like a place of darkness. A “sun”

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means that there is an individual who is like a bright shining light in the land of darkness (Tibet). Naropa was speaking of Milarepa. After reciting the verse, Naropa then bowed in homage in the direction of Milarepa saying, “I pay homage to that person.” This happened in Phullahari, and it is said that when Naropa bowed, the mountain and the trees all also slightly bent in that direction. This shows how Milarepa was to become Marpa’s main disciple. One of Milarepa’s names was *Tōpaga*, which means “Joyful to Hear.” He was given this name because when he was a child, he had a very beautiful voice that caused great joy in people who heard him sing.

In the Karma Kagyu lineage, the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, taught the Mahamudra practice in three texts. He explained Mahamudra in the long *The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, the middle length *The Mahamudra which Eliminates the Darkness of Ignorance*, and the short *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*. These three texts provide us with a progressive path of meditation beginning with the Four Common Preliminaries often called the Four Ways of Changing the Mind⁴ and progressing to the stages of Shamatha meditation and Vipashyana meditation⁵ by explaining the methods of practice that lead to the ultimate experience.

4. The four ordinary foundations are contemplating the precious human birth, impermanence and death, karma cause and effect, and the faults or suffering of samsara.

5. Meditation can be divided into Tranquility (Skt. *Shamatha*) and Insight (Skt. *Vipashyana*) meditation. Shamatha meditation is the development of the mind so it can rest where one places it. Vipashyana meditation is looking directly at the nature of mind to understand the nature of phenomena which is emptiness.

A Prayer to Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa

Milarepa was an exceptional master because he had an exceptional guru, Marpa, and an exceptional disciple, Gampopa. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo concisely described these three masters in a short prayer that is regularly recited in the Karma Kagyu lineage. In this prayer, one verse is dedicated to each of these masters, with each verse describing three special qualities that the master possessed. In the Kagyu lineage we recite these three verses in our daily practice and at the beginning of the nightly Mahakala practice. These short verses are very easy to understand and easy to remember, so we frequently recite them in our practices. If we understand their meaning, we can receive the great blessing they possess and be filled with great faith and devotion.

Marpa

Great courage you went to the noble land many times.

With great wisdom, you saw the true nature of phenomena.

With great accomplishment, you performed great miracles.

I supplicate the great translator Marpa.

The first verse in the prayer describes Marpa, Milarepa's root guru. Marpa underwent considerable hardships to go to India three times. He did not do this for his own benefit but to meet great gurus such as Naropa and Maitripa, receive the teachings from them, and put

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these teachings into practice. Not only did Marpa have the great confidence that he could receive these teachings, but he also had the confidence that he could introduce these teachings into Tibet and teach many students to practice and embody them correctly and completely, and then transmit them on to their own students. He did this so that their lineage would grow and prosper throughout the future.

When Marpa went to India, he met his gurus and received their instructions. But he didn't just learn these instructions, he also practiced them and attained full realization. Through the power of his wisdom, Marpa saw the true nature of phenomena and attained the supreme accomplishment (enlightenment) within that very lifetime. Marpa not only saw the true nature of phenomena, but as a sign of his attainment of the dharmakaya, he was able to display a variety of miraculous powers to his students who then followed the Dharma with deep devotion.

We might wonder why Marpa was such an important and wonderful master. The four lines in this first verse talk about four different qualities that he had. First, "With great courage he went to the noble land many times." Marpa went from Tibet to India three times. In those days going from India to Tibet and back on foot involved traversing many high mountains, staying in isolated places that were extremely cold, and other places that were extremely hot.

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Many places on the way were filled with thieves, huge rivers to ford, thick forests full of dangerous animals, and other dangers. And, at that time there were no real hostels or resting places along the way. But Marpa had the courage and confidence to go. The reason that he went to India was not for any political or personal gain. He went because he realized that the instructions given by the Buddha were profound and would be beneficial to many students seeking spirituality in Tibet.

So, first of all, Marpa had great faith and devotion, which helped him to go on. He knew that if he went and received these instructions, it would not only benefit him, it would also benefit many other sentient beings. So, he had very strong loving kindness and compassion for other beings and took this dangerous journey from Tibet to India three different times. This took a great deal of courage and a great deal of confidence. So, the first line is, “With great courage he went to the noble land many times.” The “noble land” means India.

During this time in the Eleventh Century, there were many translators who went from Tibet to India. Some of them made it and some of them did not. Some had great difficulties along the way because they became sick or were unable to learn the many different languages of India. Some were so exhausted by the journey that they simply died. But Marpa the Translator went three times and did not have

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any such difficulties because of the strength of his resolve and his aspirations to get the Dharma.

The second line says, “With great intelligence he realized true nature of phenomenon.” When Marpa traveled to India, he specifically went to Nalanda monastic university. At this time the teachings of the Buddha were flourishing in India. Many individuals in India were meditating, practicing, and studying the Dharma. This was particularly true at Nalanda, so Marpa received many instructions there. He also met the great scholar Naropa at his hermitage in Phullahari and received much advice from him. In particular, he received the special Thirty Instructions that are the subject of the [Part Two](#) of this book. In Marpa’s life story it describes that he studied and contemplated the Dharma until the age of forty. But this is not just studying. At the same time as he was studying, he was also listening, contemplating, and meditating to unify the practice of all he had learned. Through this he was able to see the true nature of phenomena. Because of this realization, he developed many great qualities and was able to give these particular instructions.

The third line reads, “Through his great accomplishments, he displayed many miracles.” Marpa was able to experience signs of accomplishment and display miracles. For example, he was able to transfer his consciousness to a dead body by ejecting his consciousness from his body to enter the corpse of a dead being, and

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then later have his consciousness leave that corpse and re-enter his own body. This was just one of many miracles that he displayed. So, this was his third quality.

The fourth line of the verse describes the activity of Marpa the Translator. The final line reads, “I supplicate the great translator Marpa.” When Marpa received the practice instructions in India, he didn’t just leave it at that. Instead, he translated these teachings into Tibetan, and then after translating them, he taught them to many of his students including Milarepa. As a result, the teachings of the Buddha have continued on to this day. In particular, the teachings that were given to Marpa by the great scholar Naropa, such as the Six Dharmas of Naropa, are still available and are still practiced. We have been able to practice them in Tibet for almost a thousand years, and now students from many different countries are able to practice them as well. This is completely due to the efforts and kindness of Marpa the Translator. Because Marpa actually translated these instructions, they were not lost and have remained in this world.

Life of Milarepa

With great power, you destroyed your enemies.

With great hardship, you pleased your guru.

With great diligence, you raised the victory banner of practice.

I supplicate the great yogi Milarepa.

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The second verse of the prayer summarizes the activity of Milarepa — what he did in the early part of his life, the qualities he developed, and how he brought benefit to all sentient beings.

There was one occasion when Milarepa's students gathered around and asked him, "Please tell us your life story so that we can develop faith and devotion. Tell us how you entered the gate of the Dharma, and how you practiced, and what qualities you developed." And so, Milarepa told his life story. At the end of the story his students said, "You must not have been an ordinary person. You must have been an emanation of a buddha or a bodhisattva, so please tell us which buddha or bodhisattva's emanation you are so we can increase our faith and devotion." And Milarepa replied, "You are thinking that I am an emanation of a buddha or bodhisattva. It is fine that you have a pure perception of me and that you have faith and devotion, but this is not beneficial. The reason it is not of any benefit is that, in terms of the Dharma, it is actually a wrong view because I am not the emanation of a buddha or bodhisattva. I was a very wicked person and did very evil deeds. I was an ordinary person, but because I was very diligent practicing the Dharma and had such strong faith and devotion in the Dharma, I was able to practice and achieve a good result. And so, if you think that I must have been the emanation of a buddha or bodhisattva, that is a sign that you have the wrong view of believing that the Dharma doesn't have the power to bring an ordinary person to enlightenment."

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In the first part of his life Milarepa experienced many difficulties and many problems. When he was a very little boy, his family was wealthy. But when his father passed away, his family lost all of their possessions and wealth to greedy relatives. He and his mother and sister were left destitute and experienced many difficulties and hardships. Finally, his mother told him that he must go and learn sorcery so that he could wreak revenge on their enemies. So, Milarepa went and learned sorcery and developed great powers. As it says in the first line of the verse, “With great powers you destroyed your enemies.”

Milarepa’s sorcery was very powerful and later he felt great regret about killing over a dozen of his relatives. He thought to himself that he had done an extremely evil action and that he needed to serve a guru to purify his misdeeds. Because of previous karmic connections and his aspirations, he felt great faith in Marpa the Translator and went to serve him.

At first Milarepa thought that because he had mastered sorcery and become extremely powerful in a very short time that Dharma practice would be really easy for him to learn. So, to help Milarepa overcome this false belief, Marpa was not gentle with him. In fact, he was very harsh and very strict with him. Marpa gave Milarepa many tasks and put him through a lot of hardships. He made him build a nine-story tower for Marpa’s son. In fact, he made Milarepa

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start building several different houses and then made him tear them all down and rebuild them. Eventually, Milarepa did build the nine-story tower. And through all of this suffering, Milarepa continued to have great faith and devotion in Marpa. His great hope was that he would receive Dharma instructions, and yet Marpa did not give him the instructions until he had really developed complete renunciation, a thorough weariness with the world.

And yet, throughout the entire experience, Milarepa never had a negative view of his guru and never resented Marpa's harshness. This is what is meant by the second line, "Through great hardship he pleased his guru." He underwent great hardships and underwent many trials. In the end he had carried earth back and forth and worked so hard that he developed sores and wounds all over his back. Yet, he felt no regret for this. The reason he went through all of these hardships was to please the guru.

The reason Milarepa was able to please his guru was that he had such strong faith and devotion and belief in the Dharma. Understanding this, Marpa gave Milarepa the instructions. After he received all of Marpa's instructions, Milarepa went to a cave in the mountains near to where Marpa lived at Lhodrag (in the southern part of Tibet). He spent eighteen months there meditating with a lamp on top of his head the entire time. One night he had a dream where he saw that his own home was destroyed, that his mother had died, and

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that circumstances were very sad. When Milarepa asked Marpa for permission to return home, Marpa replied that the impermanence and sadness that he would encounter would be a great aid to his practice. Indeed, when Milarepa returned to his home, he found that his mother had died, that the house had fallen down, and that his sister had gone wandering as a beggar. This made him feel extremely sad. These disheartening circumstances and evidence of impermanence caused Milarepa to think that there is no benefit in trying to achieve anything worldly, and he resolved to put all of his effort and diligence into the practice of the Dharma.

At that time, Milarepa sang a spiritual song describing his home in ruins, saying that it looked like a donkey's ears and that the beams in the house looked like the upper jaw of a lion. When I (Thrangu Rinpoche) first read this song, I thought, "This is a very strange analogy that Milarepa used. Why does he say the house looks like a donkey's ears?" Later, when I returned to Tibet after being away for over forty years and saw the ruined temples and houses there — the lower story of the house had crumbled and fallen away while the upper story with the beams were jutting out looking just like the ears of a donkey. I was very impressed and thought, "Milarepa used an excellent analogy for a ruined house."

Milarepa's living situation was very meager. He practiced as hard as he could, not caring about his worldly livelihood until he achieved

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the result. For many years all he had to eat were nettles and nettle soup. When his sister finally found him, she said “Well, I’ll cook you soup. What shall I put in your soup?” He said, “All I have is nettles.” She said, “Don’t you have any salt? Don’t you have any meat or vegetables to put in the soup?” He said, “For many years I have subsisted entirely on nettles. So, if you want salt, put in more nettles. If you want meat and vegetables, just put in more nettles.” So, this the way that he spent many years practicing and with great diligence he raised the banner of accomplishment.

After raising the banner of accomplishment, the fourth line of the verse reads, “I prostrate at the feet of the great cotton-clad yogi.” Through his practice of Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*) he was able to stay warm, no matter what the weather outside was like, he was able to practice wearing only a cotton cloth. The high Himalayas are extremely cold, and most people would not be able to bear it without wearing heavy clothes. And yet, Milarepa spent many years in these high mountains due to the strength of his practice. Whether it was summer or winter, he was able to practice. He was called the great cotton-clad yogi (Tib. *repa*) which was a sign of his great accomplishment. This four-line supplication to him describes the great activity he was able to do.

Milarepa knew that practicing the instructions he had received was more important than any worldly activities. So Milarepa lived in

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caves even if it meant that he had to go without food or clothes, and he practiced with diligence until he achieved enlightenment. He then passed on his realization in Dharma teachings to many students, thus raising the victory banner of practice. The next verse is a prayer to his student Gampopa:

The Great Vehicle awakened your heritage.

Due to the Mahamudra your realization manifested itself.

Your great activity extended as far as space extends.

I prostrate to the great meditator from Nyel.

It has been nearly a thousand years since Milarepa gave his instructions, but these instructions still flourish. This is because of Milarepa's students — particularly the two who were like the sun, Gampopa, and like the moon, Rechungpa, — continued to practice and to teach others. Milarepa had a dream of Vajrayogini who prophesied that Gampopa would come to him and be his student. For that reason, I would like to give you a brief biography of Gampopa.

The first line of this verse describes Gampopa developing realization in the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana. One of the reasons Gampopa was such an exceptional practitioner was that he had completely awakened his potential in the Mahayana. He had practiced the Mahayana and because Milarepa gave him the opportunity to practice the instructions of Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa, he

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was also able to master the Vajrayana which completely awakened his potential.

Now there are several reasons why Gampopa was able to completely awaken his potential. First of all, Gampopa was a householder and a very skilled physician. He had a wife, a son, and a daughter. But, due to an illness that he could not cure, his two children and wife died. Because of that, he felt great revulsion for samsara and developed a strong wish for liberation, so he entered the practice of the Dharma. Because of this tragedy, he was able to practice the Dharma to its ultimate result and his activity spread throughout the world. So, the cause for him to completely awaken his potential was developing a revulsion for samsara.

Following that, Gampopa became ordained as a monk and received instructions from lamas of the Kadampa tradition and practiced those instructions. One day Gampopa overheard a conversation about Milarepa from some beggars and the moment he heard Milarepa's name, he felt great faith in him. He then went to his Kadampa master and asked, "Can I go to see Milarepa?" His lama said to him, "As long as you do not give up your robes and your monastic practice, you may go and receive instructions from Milarepa." And so, he went to visit Milarepa.

Gampopa found Milarepa, received the instructions from him, and practiced them. Gampopa was a perfect vessel, capable of receiving

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the instructions of the practice of Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa. Through diligently practicing these instruction, he developed the realization of Mahamudra, and that was another cause for him to completely awaken his potential. The second line says, “Due to the Mahamudra your realization manifested itself.” So, this is the second quality, the realization of Mahamudra.

The third quality is described as, “His great activity spread throughout space.” After Gampopa received the instructions, practiced them, and developed experience and realization, he then engaged in the vast activity of spreading these teachings. Milarepa foresaw this in a dream where he saw that there was a vulture that landed on a mountain. Then there came a single goose that landed near the vulture.⁶ And slowly, another goose came, and then more geese. Then each goose was surrounded by a hundred geese, creating a crowd of more and more geese until the entire ground was filled with geese. Milarepa interpreted this dream to mean that the “Teacher from Ü” (a province in central Tibet), referring to Gampopa, will benefit many sentient beings. So, this is the prophecy that Milarepa made.

Just as the prophesy indicated, Gampopa received the instructions and then he taught the instructions of the Kadampa lineage to his ordinary disciples and taught the Vajrayana instructions — the Six Dharmas of Naropa and Mahamudra — to his exceptional disciples.

6. A vulture in Tibetan culture is an auspicious animal.

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In this way many great masters received instructions from him. These were the masters of the four greater and eight lesser Kagyu lineages⁷ and many of their many students. Gampopa had a great number of disciples and then they had a great number of disciples. Because of this, the teachings flourished and are available to this day. So, in this way, “the Mahamudra realization became manifest and great activity spread throughout space.”

The three great forefathers we have discussed have different qualities and types of activity. Marpa's activity was that of a translator. Milarepa's activity was receiving meditation instructions and practicing them. He was able to become the great cotton-clad yogi who taught the instructions on Subtle Heat, and this was his particular quality. Gampopa's particular quality is mentioned in the fourth line of the verse was, “I prostrate at the feet of the great meditator from Nyel.” Gampopa's strength was that he was the great meditator from Nyel, the name of his homeland. He was a great meditator because he had superior samadhi and meditation, and was able to join the Kadampa and Mahamudra traditions. Because of this, he was able to teach the common preliminaries, the special preliminaries, the instructions on Mind Training, and other methods to develop bodhichitta. He was able to teach the instructions on Mahamudra

7. The four “greater” lineages were the lineages founded by students closest to Gampopa and the eight “lesser” lineages were the lineages that developed by followers of Phagmo Drupa, a master of one of the four greater lineages.

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that descended from Tilopa and Naropa so that students could also realize the nature of their own mind.

Gampopa himself received the instructions; he practiced them until he reached the ultimate result; and then he taught these instructions to many others so his activity spread throughout space. These are his particular qualities. Gampopa was an exceptional practitioner who had been prophesied by the Shakyamuni Buddha.⁸ Gampopa then achieved the ultimate realization of Mahamudra and passed on the transmission of his teachings through four great practitioners: Dusum Khyenpa (the first Karmapa), Tsultrim Nyingpo, Barom Dharma Wangchuk, and Pagmo Drupa, forming the four primary and eight secondary Kagyu lineages.⁹ These teachings on Mahamudra meditation and other Vajrayana practices have literally spread around the world, so the instructions of Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa have thus continued uninterrupted due to the extensive activity of Gampopa.

8. 8. In a previous life, Gampopa had been a great bodhisattva at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. At that time the Buddha in the *King of Samadhi Sutra* prophesied that Gampopa would take rebirth in a distant land as a monk named Tzod zad. The name Tzod zad indicated that he would be a doctor, so this prophecy can be seen to point to Gampopa, who was born in Tibet, became a doctor, and later took monastic ordination at a Kadampa monastery. — Thrangu Rinpoche. See Thrangu Rinpoche's *The King of Samadhi* for details.

9. See [Appendix A](#) for a description of these lineages.



Gampopa

Gampopa was one of Milarepa's two most important students. Before Gampopa met Milarepa, he was a Kadampa monk maintaining all his ordination vows. When he left to find Milarepa, he promised his Kadampa teacher that he would maintain his vows and stayed an ordained lama throughout his life. He is depicted here wearing monk's hat and robes and holding the wish-fulfilling jewel. He established the first Kagyu Monastery and began training monks in the Kagyu lineage. Because of this, the Kagyu lineage became one of the four major lineages in Tibet, with tens of thousands of followers. *Drawing by Jamyong Singhe.*

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

The *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* is divided into three parts: the teachings Milarepa gave to non-human beings, the teachings he gave to his principal disciples, and the general teachings he gave to his ordinary students. This chapter concerns a teaching that he gave to non-human beings.¹⁰ These verses clearly concern the desire to abandon samsara, devotion to the guru, and meditation on compassion for non-human beings.

The story begins when Milarepa was practicing Mahamudra meditation in the Kyung Dzong (Garuda Castle) cave in Chong Lung (Carnelian Valley). One day he thought he would eat something but discovered that he had run out of food, water, and even firewood. He realized that he had been a little too diligent in his meditation

10. See [Appendix B](#) which gives the corresponding chapters in the translation in Chang's *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* and in Stagg's *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*.

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

and had ignored his physical welfare and that he should now pay a little attention to the material world.

There are some people who believe that they need to undergo the same hardships as Milarepa by being very poor and eating very sparsely. But in fact, deprivation is not a necessity for the spiritual path. Hardship alone does not bring about buddhahood. It is the practice of the Dharma and practicing meditation that achieves buddhahood. Milarepa had an overriding desire to meditate, and thus underwent hardships because everything else meant little to him.

So, Milarepa left his cave to collect some firewood. A sudden gale came up and began to blow his firewood away, and when Milarepa held on to his wood he began to lose the cotton robe he was wearing to the wind. This put Milarepa into a dilemma of either holding onto his wood or to his robe, until he thought, “I’ve been meditating for so many years to overcome attachment to the self, but I haven’t even been able to abandon my attachment to firewood and this piece of cotton. If the wind wants to take my wood, then let it take it! If it wants my cotton robe then let it take it!” So, he let the wind blow away both his firewood and his robe.

Milarepa was in such a state of physical exhaustion due to his exertions and living on very little food that he passed out. When he came to, he saw his cotton robe was hanging from a tree. He took it down, sat down upon a stone, and gazed into the east where he

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

could see a white cloud far away. He thought, “Marpa is living in the land of Drowolung (Wheat Valley) just under that cloud.” He also thought of his many Dharma companions who would be there, receiving instructions and empowerments from Marpa. He thought about this until he had an unendurable longing for that place, his guru, his fellow students, and his guru’s teachings. With sadness, faith, and devotion, he sang a spontaneous song, in which he said:

*In the east there is a white cloud.
Beneath that white cloud is Drowolung, the
hermitage where Marpa Lotsawa is living.
In the past I was able to see Marpa.
If I could see him now, I would be so happy.
I don’t have enough devotion, but I long for
my exceptional guru so intensely.
I would be so happy to be able to see him again.*

The second verse describes Marpa’s wife, Dakmema. She was very loving, particularly to Milarepa, so Milarepa says:

*Dakmema showed more love to me than my own mother. If she
were here and I could see her, I would be so happy. She is so far
away and the journey to her would be difficult, but I long to see her.
Now Marpa is in Drowolung and will be giving the four kinds of
empowerments: the vase empowerment, the secret empowerment,
wisdom-knowledge empowerment, and the word empowerment.*

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

If I could receive such profound empowerments now, it would make me so very happy.

Though I am poor and have no offering to give for the empowerments, nevertheless, it is so fortunate to request and receive the four empowerments. I long for them and I long for my guru.

When one meets Marpa in the hermitage of Lho Drowlung, he gives one the instructions which allow one to reach buddhahood in one lifetime, within the one body.

These are the instructions of the profound Six Dharmas of Naropa.

It is fortunate to dwell in Drowlung and to see Marpa and to receive these instructions of the profound Six Dharmas of Naropa.

If I could have that good fortune now, I would be happy.

Although I don't have enough diligence to meditate on these instructions, they are profound. If I could only receive and meditate upon them, I would be happy.

There are many fortunate Dharma companions who are scholars and practitioners from Ü-Tsang who are staying at the hermitage of Drowlung.

They receive empowerments and instructions together and when they practice the Dharma together, they compare their various experiences and realizations, examining them to see how good they are.

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

When they receive instructions from the guru, they compare their understanding of these instructions to see whether they have clearly understood their meaning or not. Due to this, their experiences and realizations increase. If I could have that good fortune, I would be happy.

I have faith and devotion in my guru who is never apart from me, but my intense longing for him is unendurable; I am intensely miserable.

So, I am praying to you to dispel my sadness.

When Milarepa had finished singing this song, a cloud in the east extended towards him. Upon its foremost tip was Marpa Lotsawa, more majestic than ever, mounted upon a white lion. Marpa said, “What is the meaning of this? Why are you calling me so loudly? Are you distressed that you can’t receive the blessings¹¹ of the Three Jewels? You can’t meditate because you think too much. Are you pining for pleasures and worldly activities? Whatever is the matter, we are inseparable; I am always with you. Therefore, practice the Dharma well, preserve the teachings, and benefit other beings in the future.” Milarepa was overjoyed to see Marpa, and sang a spiritual song, saying:

11. Blessings (Tib. *jinlap*) in Buddhism are slightly different from blessings in other religions. The deities and sacred places have an energy to them and if a person is open and receptive to this energy, they can gain guidance and help from this energy.

2. The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood

I had great sadness when thinking of my guru's life: how he lives at Drowolung with his students and followers, teaching the Dharma, and bestowing empowerments.

I felt great longing and devotion, and thus received the guru's compassion and blessing, terminating my non-dharmic thoughts.

I have disturbed my guru with my loud cries, but please forgive me and continue to look upon me with compassion.

I am practicing with great diligence, enduring the hardships of hunger, thirst, and cold. I offer this practice to my guru to please him.

I dwell alone in the mountains as a pleasing service to the dakas and dakinis.

Though I disregard physical hardships, I apply myself to the practice of the Dharma as an act of service to the teachings of the Buddha.

I will practice for as long as my life lasts, as a gift of Dharma to the beings who are without a refuge, without a protector.

If I'm going to die, I'll die; if I'm going to be sick, I'll be sick — it will not make any difference to me. I shall practice considering it to be more important than anything else.

This is my purification of negative karma and obscurations.

Undergoing hardships is the necessary condition for developing experiences and realizations.

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Therefore, you, Marpa, have shown me great kindness in giving me the complete empowerments and instructions that will enable me to achieve buddhahood through diligence.

To repay that kindness I am practicing the Dharma, so look upon me with compassion.

Having prayed in that way, Milarepa's mind was filled with joy. He put his cotton robe back on, gathered up the firewood, and returned to his cave. However, when he entered his cave, he saw that there were five strange Indian yogins, called *atsaras*, with tiny black bodies and huge eyes. One of them was sitting on Milarepa's seat, teaching the Dharma, another two were listening to him, another one was making food, and another was reading through Milarepa's texts. They all stopped what they were doing and stared at Milarepa. When he entered the cave, Milarepa felt a little frightened but thought, "I've been meditating here for so many years, but I've never offered any thanks by giving torma offerings to the deity who is master of these lands, or to any of the local deities or spirits."¹² Therefore, they have created this illusion. I must express my thanks for being in this place." So Milarepa sang this song:

12. Local deities are beings in samsara who inhabit specific places and are invisible to most humans. In Tibet they can cause harm or create obstacles if they are not respected, just as we would get upset and angry if someone violated our home without permission. Tibetans show their respect by making offerings even if they cannot see them.

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This is a place of solitude, an excellent place for the accomplishment of buddhahood. It is said that many siddhas have dwelt here in the past. This is an excellent place where I can live alone and practice that which is good. This is a pure place, with pure water, where the birds live free from fear without any care. The birds and monkeys are relaxed, free from worries, and kind to each other. Such a place as this is very good for me and it is conducive to practice.

I dwell here meditating on the bodhichitta of aspiration and the bodhichitta of application. It is perfect for me. Now that you have come, I will meditate on love and compassion towards you. Be happy and depart.

When Milarepa finished his song, the five yogis were still very angry. They increased in number from five to seven and faced him as an angry group. Milarepa tried wrathful mantras against them, but they had no effect. Meditation on compassion and giving them teachings was no help either. Then Milarepa thought, “I am Marpa’s pupil. He taught me the realization that all phenomena are nothing other than the mind. Therefore, these beings are nothing but the creations of my own mind and I shouldn’t be afraid of them.”

With this realization, Milarepa sang a song of confidence and faced the demons who shrunk back and disappeared. After this, Milarepa’s practice improved greatly.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

The third chapter of *The 100,000 Songs of Milarepa* is called “The Song of the Snow Range.” This chapter describes Milarepa’s practice of meditation, especially his practice of Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*).

The reason we study Milarepa’s life story is not because we can only accomplish the Dharma by practicing in the way that Milarepa did, rather it is an example of how diligence leads to the ultimate goal. It would be excellent if we could develop a diligence like Milarepa’s, but even if we can’t, the development of Dharma practice over a long time can still attain the same result.

The first chapter of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* describes how Milarepa subdued demons in Tramar Chonglung. This chapter describes how Milarepa went to Lachi Snow Mountain and subdued the leaders of many demons there. He became famous as a lama for developing great powers that could subdue demons.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

Milarepa went to stay at Nyanang and other places near Lachi Mountain. He said, “Staying in the middle of villages is depressing. I must go on my own to a place of solitude where I can accomplish my practice and my guru’s instructions. Living in a village is not a very good thing anyway, so I shall go to stay on Lachi Mountain for a second time.”

Milarepa’s students made a request, saying, “Great lord, your only concern is the welfare of beings, therefore give us teachings. If you remain here with us for the winter it will be of very great benefit. Please you must stay here. Winter on Lachi Mountain is very difficult with so much snow and cold.” Milarepa replied, “I am a pupil in the lineage of Naropa, so I am not afraid of such things. Marpa commanded me to avoid distractions and to practice in solitude.”

Milarepa took only a little barley flour (Tib. *tsampa*), rice, meat, and butter as he set off for Lachi Mountain. He was escorted by several students to the mountain, where he took up his residence in Dundul Pumoche Cave (Great Cave of the Subjugation of Mara). As the escorts started their return journey to the village, the weather turned bad. It snowed heavily and they reached the village with great difficulty. It snowed continuously for nine days and nine nights so that the route between the village and where Milarepa was staying was cut off for six months. By the first Tibetan month Milarepa’s students were certain that there was no way he could

3. The Song of the Snow Range

have survived and that he must have died, so they made funeral offerings to him. In the fourth Tibetan month (around May or June), they decided that they should at least go and collect his body so that they could properly honor it. Therefore, some of them forced their way through the snows to reach Lachi Mountain.

When they neared Milarepa's cave, they saw a snow leopard upon a rock and thought, "Milarepa's body will have been eaten by that snow leopard and we are not even going to be able to bring back his body." When they reached the spot where the snow leopard had been, they saw human footprints. They wondered, "What is this? Is the snow lion some deity or spirit?" But when they came close to Milarepa's cave, they heard him singing and calling out, "Hurry up! Where have you been that has made you so late getting here?" They got to the cave and discovered that Milarepa had already prepared a meal for them.

The practitioners then asked, "How did you know we were coming?" Milarepa replied, "I saw you when I was sitting on that big rock over there." But they said, "But all we saw was a snow leopard on that rock, so what do you mean?" Milarepa then said, "That was an emanation of myself. I have meditated for so long that I have mastery over my mind and subtle winds,¹³ so I can manifest many emanations."

13. In Tibetan medicine and meditation, the body contains numerous subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*) in which subtle winds (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) travels. See [Appendix E](#) for details.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

Milarepa was in good health but he did not have enough food to keep him alive, so they asked him how he had survived. Milarepa said, “I don’t need much food because in my practice of meditation, the dakinis sometimes bring me a portion of their feast offerings. Therefore, I only need to eat a spoonful of tsampa a day to keep myself alive. Also, in the fourth Tibetan month I had a vision of you surrounding me and offering me a great deal of food. After that I did not need to eat at all.” The villagers said that was the time when, thinking he was dead, that they had made the funeral offerings to him. Milarepa said, “This proves that when people do good actions for the sake of someone who has died, it really does help them.”

Then they requested him to return to the village. At first Milarepa refused saying, “My meditation is going well here, so I’m not going to leave.” The followers insisted saying, “People will accuse us of leaving you here to die and they will be very angry, so you must come back this one time to the village with us.” Milarepa agreed to come, and so they set off together, with some going on ahead to tell the villagers that Milarepa was alive and on his way. A great number of villagers came to welcome him and escort him to the village. When they asked Milarepa how he was, he replied with a song:

3. The Song of the Snow Range

I am happy that today that we have come together and we are all still alive. This old man has many songs, so I will sing an answer to your question.

Listen well: saddened by samsara, I did not stay in the village, but went to Lachi Snow Mountain.

It was as if the sky and the earth had planned a snowstorm. So many clouds gathered that the sun and moon could not be seen; at night the stars and planets could not be seen, it was as if they had been thrown into prison.

The snow fell for nine days and nine nights with snowflakes coming down as large as birds and as small as sesame seeds. I was in a high place and the dark mountains around me all turned white.

When this great snow fell, people's homes were changed into prisons because they could not leave. Animals, deprived of food, suffered a famine. The wild animals also had no food. Neither did the birds in the sky. Mice hid under the ground like a treasure, and animals of prey had nothing to eat.

When the blizzard fell upon me, the winter wind and my thin cotton robe competed with each other to see who could make the winter coldest for me. Since I am of a lineage of heroes, I didn't run away and all ended well.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

Therefore, I believe that in the future the teachings of the Practice Lineage will spread, there will be many siddhas, and I, Milarepa, will be famous for my accomplishment of the Dharma.

You, my students, will have faith in me, the future will be good, and the Buddha's teachings will spread. That's how I am. How are you?

The villagers danced with joy. Milarepa's experience and realization intensified and he danced too, leaving his footprints and imprints from his staff all over the rock beneath him.

When he arrived in Nyanang village, the villagers said, "You are in good health and must have developed exceptional realizations and experiences in your meditation. Please tell us about them." In reply, Milarepa sang a spiritual song about his experiences and realizations in which he describes his view, meditation, conduct, and commitment:

My view is that the realization of the true nature of the mind exactly as it is — the mind to be unborn and empty. There is nothing to be viewed. There is the destruction and disappearance of the viewed and the viewer. I have obtained such an excellent view.

*My meditation is an unbroken continuity of luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*), like the constant flow of a river. My meditation is on the true nature of the mind. The true nature of the mind never changes; my meditation is unceasing, with no difference between*

3. The Song of the Snow Range

periods of meditation and non-meditation. It is as if I have lost the capacity to distinguish between meditation and meditator. Everything is now meditation, giving me great diligence.

My conduct is that there is no change in the mind's fundamental clarity in whatever I do. The interdependence of phenomena is empty. All distinction between acts that are done, and the individual who acts, are destroyed.

My commitment is free of hypocrisy, artifice, hope, and worry. The distinction between a commitment that is kept and the keeper of a commitment is ended and destroyed. So, I have this excellent commitment.

The result of this is that the mind is seen as the dharmakaya causing a spontaneous achievement of benefit for myself and others. There is no distinction between a result that is achieved and one who achieves it. Therefore, I have this excellent result.

This is an old man's song about the happy time he has had. In my retreat I was cut off by the snow. I was looked after by dakinis. I had the best of drinks — the water of melted snow.

Milarepa's pupil, Shakya Guna, expressed his joy that Milarepa had returned without harm, that none of his students had died, and that they had all met again. He requested Milarepa to give them a Dharma teaching from the six months that he had spent in retreat. Milarepa replied with a song on the signs of accomplishment from his practice:

3. The Song of the Snow Range

Note: In the Spiritual Song below we separated out Milarepa's words from Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary by putting Rinpoche's commentary in brackets.

*Saddened by worldly activities I went to Lachi Mountain, where
I stayed in the solitude of the Dundul Puk Cave (Cave of the
Subjugation of Mara), practicing for six months.*

I experienced the six signs of accomplishment.

The six external objects are:

If it obstructs, it is not space.

If they are countable, they are not stars.

If it moves, it is not a mountain.

If it diminishes or increases, it is not the ocean.

If it can be crossed by a bridge, it is not a great river.

If it can be grasped by the hand, it is not a rainbow.

The six inner faults are:

Looking up at the planets is not the view. {This means that the view should be free of conceptualization and identification.}

Meditation should be free of mental dullness or excitement. {With these two obstructions, it is not a valid meditation.}

If there is accepting and rejecting, it is not conduct. {When we arise from meditation and engage in activities, that conduct should be free from the distinction of good and bad conduct.}

3. The Song of the Snow Range

If there are concepts, it is not yoga. {One who has the true view, meditation, and conduct is a yogi. A yogi should always be free from thoughts, otherwise he or she is not a true yogi.}

If there is fluctuation, it is not true wisdom. {The yogi must have wisdom that does not fluctuate between clarity and obscurity.}

If there is birth and death, then the result is not buddhahood. {The ultimate result is freedom from suffering, birth, and death.}

The six kinds of bondage that prevent liberation from samsara are:

Anger is a bondage that binds one to the hell realm.

Miserliness is a bondage that binds one to the hungry ghost realm.

Stupidity is a bondage that binds one to the Animal realm.

Desire is a bondage that binds one to the human realm.

Envy is a bondage that binds one to the jealous god realm.

Pride is a bondage that binds one to the god realm.

These six disturbing emotions¹⁴ are bandages that bind one from being liberated from the six realms of samsara.

14. The Tibetan word *nyon mong* (Skt. *klesha*) has been translated as “afflictions” or “poisons” to refer to attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and pride. These are emotions that disturb the mind so we prefer the translation “disturbing emotions.” *The Great Tibetan Dictionary*, for example, defines *nyon mong* as, “mental events that incite one to non-virtuous actions and causes one’s being to be very unpeaceful.”

3. The Song of the Snow Range

The six qualities on the path that leads to liberation from sam-sara are:

If one has great faith, that is the path to liberation.

If one follows with great faith a guru who is learned and self-controlled, that is the path to liberation. {If having great faith, one follows a guru who is learned and self-controlled, one will go along the path to liberation}

If one keeps one's commitments to the guru, that is the path to liberation. If one wanders in the mountains, that is the path to liberation. {If one has faith, relies on a guru, and keeps unbroken commitments, and then one wanders in the mountains in retreat, one will be able to truly accomplish the path to liberation.}

If one stays alone avoiding distractions, that is the path to liberation. {By staying alone and avoiding distractions one will be able to practice the Dharma properly, and therefore this is the path to liberation.}

If one practices remaining in solitude that is the path to liberation. These are six profound results of Dharma practice: Coemergence is the mind at rest in an uncontrived state. {This natural state is not newly created, but is primordially innate within us.}

When there is no distinction between internal and external, this is called the profundity of knowledge.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

When the all-pervading knowledge is free from fluctuation in its clarity and is always present, it is called the expanse of wisdom.

When that wisdom pervades everything, it is the profundity of the true nature of phenomena.

When that expanse of the true nature of phenomena is free of loss and change it is called the profundity of the subtle drops (Skt. *bindu*). {The true nature of phenomena is always present and cannot be lost or changed}

When experience is free of loss or change, that is the profundity of meditation. These are the six profound results from Dharma practice. {These six kinds of bliss are the results of the path of means such as the practice of Subtle Heat.¹⁵}

When the heat of the tummo practice blazes in the body, there is bliss.

When the karmic winds that move through the left and right subtle channels enter the central channel, there is bliss.

When the flow of bodhichitta descends in the upper body, there is bliss.

15. Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*) is an advanced Vajrayana practice taught usually in the three-year retreat which involves visualizing the three channels running along the spine: a left white channel, a right red channel, and a dark blue central channel. One visualizes the movement of the subtle winds going into these channels. When this is successful, one is able to meditate for hours in a state of bliss. A side-effect of tummo is that heat is also generated, so yogis can meditate in extreme cold. See [Appendix E](#) for more details.

3. The Song of the Snow Range

When the lower body is pervaded by the subtle drops, there is bliss.

When the white and red drops come together in the middle of the body, there is bliss.

When the subtle drops meet, the body is permeated by immaculate bliss.

These are the six kinds of ultimate bliss in yoga.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

Marpa had told Milarepa that he should meditate on Palbar Mountain. Milarepa went there and discovered that the Lingpa Cave was very pleasant, so he meditated in that cave. One day he heard a loud voice coming from a crack in the rock. Milarepa got up and looked but decided it was just a meditator's illusion and sat down again. Then a bright light shone out from the rock. Inside the light there was a red man astride a musk deer being led by a woman. The man gave Milarepa a slight blow and then disappeared in a gust of air. The woman changed into a red female dog that seized Milarepa's big toe on his left foot and would not let go. Milarepa, understanding that this was a manifestation of a rock sinmo¹⁶ sang her a song:

16. (Skt. *rakshasa*, Tib. *sinmo*) One of the eight classes of worldly spirits. These eight are maras, matrikas, nagas, kimaras, rahula, tsen (Tib.), rakshasas, and yakshas.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

Rahula, who is the deity of the eclipse, please do not be an enemy to the sun and moon that shine their light from the sky down onto beings.

Snow blizzards, please do not attempt to harm the white snow lion when he is wandering on the snow mountains.

The concealed pit filled with pointed stakes, do not harm the tigress who dwells within the jungle, who is the champion amongst the beasts of prey.

Hooks, do not harm the golden fish that swim in Lake Man-sarovar.

Hunters, do not harm the vulture in the sky that seeks food without killing anything.

I am Milarepa, practicing for my benefit and the benefit of others. I have forsaken this life's wealth and possessions, food, and clothes. I have developed bodhichitta and I am attaining buddhahood within one life-time. Therefore, rock sinmo, do not harm me.

The rock sinmo still wouldn't release Milarepa's toe and replied to Milarepa with a song delivered by a disembodied voice using practically the same poetic images, and concluding with:

You say that you accomplished the welfare of yourself and others, that you have developed the bodhichitta, and that you are

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

achieving buddhahood within one lifetime so that you will become a guide for all the beings in the six realms of existence.

However, when you meditate one-pointedly, strong tendencies from your previous lives cause illusions to appear. These tendencies are causes, the illusions are the conditions, and the result is that your own thoughts appear to you as enemies or demons.

If your own thoughts did not appear as your own enemies, I, the rock sinmo, could not appear to you.

The demons and spirits that appear to you are due to negative tendencies and come from the mind.

If you do not know the nature of your own mind, even though you tell me to leave, I won't.

Milarepa thought that what the rock sinmo had sung was very true. He replied to her with a song using eight images:

Your words are very true. Nothing could be truer. I have wandered through many places but I have never heard anything as beautiful as your song.

Even if I questioned many scholars, I would never have heard a higher meaning. The eloquent words from your mouth are like a golden needle that pressed onto the heart dispels the excess winds in the heart.¹⁷ It dispels the darkness of delusion and

17. In Tibetan medicine, madness is considered to be caused by an influx of subtle winds into the heart. The application of a golden needle is a Tibetan medical method, now rarely used, to cure this.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

ignorance, causing the lotus of the mind to blossom, causing the torch of self-knowledge to blaze, and causing wisdom to awaken.

When I look up into the sky, I think of emptiness, the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, I have no need to be afraid of material phenomena.

When I look at the sun and moon, I think of the fundamental clarity of the mind. Therefore, mental dullness and excitement cannot harm me.

When I look at a mountain's peak, I think of the stability of meditation. Therefore, loss or change in meditation cannot harm me.

When I look at a river, I think of the unbroken continuity of meditation experience. Even if a sudden condition appears, it can cause no harm.

When I look at a rainbow, I think of the unity of appearance and emptiness, in which emptiness does not harm appearance, and appearance does not harm emptiness. Since I have realized the union of appearance and emptiness, I am not afraid of eternalism and nihilism.

When I look at the reflection of the moon on water, I think of it being ungraspable, therefore thoughts of grasped and grasper cannot harm me.

When I look inwards at my own mind, I think of a naturally radiant butter lamp in a bowl. Therefore, the dullness of igno-

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

rance cannot harm me. Because I listened to your instructions, my meditation and self-knowing wisdom (Tib. rang rig) has become clear. Therefore, I am free of obstacles from demons and obstructing spirits.

You have given many teachings, and clearly understand the nature of the mind, so why have you become a demon? You have become a demon because you harmed beings and ignored the law of karma.

Therefore, you should now contemplate karma and the harmfulness of samsara, and abandon all evil actions.

I was only pretending to be afraid of demons. I was playing a trick on you. Don't think that it was real.

The rock sinmo now developed faith in Milarepa and stopped trying to harm him. She answered him with a song in which she said, "I am fortunate to have met Milarepa. It has been good to hear the Dharma being taught. I am what I am because I have harmed many people." Milarepa, deciding that she must be bound to an oath, replied to her with a song saying:

These elevated words you speak will be of no use to you.

You are in this body because you have harmed others.

You must abandon those negative actions, practice

what is good, and be of assistance to yogins.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

*What you need now is to pay careful attention to cause and effect,
and you must promise to support all Dharma practitioners and be
a friend to all yogis in particular.*

The rock sinmo, who now had true faith in Milarepa, showed him her body and sang a song in which she said:

*I have committed many negative actions.
I had strong defilements and extreme malevolence and intolerance.
I am fortunate to have met you and to have
received the Dharma from you.
I repent creating an illusion and attacking you.
I vow that I shall no longer harm others and that I will be a friend
to yogins practicing Dharma in retreat.*

Milarepa then taught her the Dharma and, in particular, he sang a song in which he said:

*There is a demon that is greater than
you — attachment to the self.
There is a demon that is eviler than you — evil intent.
There is a demon that is wilder than you — your thoughts.
Take an oath to subdue them and enter the Dharma.
If you do not break your word, all will be well with you.*

When Milarepa had completed his song, the rock sinmo took that vow and disappeared. At dawn the rock sinmo with her entourage

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

of beautiful males and females wearing elegant jewelry, appeared to Milarepa bringing him many offerings. The rock sinmo said, “I have a spirit’s body because I harmed beings in a previous life.¹⁸ I request that you to teach me the Dharma.” She then sang the following song:

I have met many siddhas, but you are the one who had the greatest kindness and blessing for me. I request the Dharma from you. Some give the teachings containing the provisional meaning and some give the Foundation Vehicle teachings, but these are unable to subjugate the mind’s defilements. Others speak many words and give many teachings, but cannot provide refuge from suffering and the conditions for suffering. You are a nirmanakaya of the Buddha, and therefore you have realized the true nature of phenomena. Please bestow upon us the profound teachings that come from your own mind.

In reply, Milarepa sang her a song with twenty-seven images (three for each of nine verses) in which he said:

*I don’t usually sing about the ultimate truth,
but since you have asked me to, I shall.
Thunder, lightning, and clouds appear from
the sky and merge back into the sky.*

18. What the rock sinmo is saying is that in her previous life as a human she committed evil deeds and her karma caused her to be reborn as a spirit in a realm similar to the hungry ghost realm where one has no physical body so one cannot enjoy any material things.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

*Rainbow, mists, and fog appear from the
air and merge back into the air.*

*Honey, fruit, and crops arise from the earth
and merge back into the earth.*

*Forests, flowers, and leaves arise from the
hillside and merge back into the hillside.*

*Rivers, foam, and waves arise from the ocean
and merge back into the ocean.*

*Latencies, clinging, and attachment arise from the ground
consciousness and merge back into the ground consciousness.*

*Self-knowledge, self-clarity, and self-liberation arise
from the mind and merge back into the mind.*

*Non-arising, non-cessation, and indescribability arise from
the true nature of phenomena and merge back into it.*

*The appearance, the belief in, and the concept of demons arise
from yoga and merge back into yoga.*

Starting with the seventh line above on latencies, the mind has karmic latencies¹⁹ that have been laid down throughout beginningless time. These latencies result in how we recognize and feel about outer phenomena. Based on these latencies, the mind clings to the perceptions of things that we desire. Finally, there is an attachment

19. Karmic latencies (Tib. *bakchak*) are imprints that enter the eighth (ground) consciousness. These imprints are not the experience itself, but more like dormant seeds. They can be positive, negative, or neutral depending upon the action or thought they came from. These imprints are then activated with experience and lead to positive and negative experiences in our life.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

to outer phenomena which mind believes is truly real. All these latencies originate and arise from the ground consciousness. The seventh consciousness also called the afflicted or *klesha* consciousness has a continuous attachment to the self whether we consciously think of it or not. Whether these seven consciousnesses are present or not, the continuity of the mind never ceases because of the presence of the eighth ground consciousness. There is always the ground consciousness from which all the appearances involved in the latencies originate. Therefore, latencies, clinging, and attachment arise from the ground consciousness, and when they disappear, they then merge back into the eighth ground consciousness.”²⁰

The eighth line, “self-knowledge, self-clarity, and self-liberation arise from the mind and merge back into the mind,” refers to when we are meditating on the true nature of mind: the mind has a natural luminous clarity that knows itself and can liberate itself from the disturbing emotions. These three qualities of self-awareness, luminous clarity, and the ability to liberate the mind, are not newly created through meditation, but rather they arise from the true nature of the mind itself, and this is what is meant by the phrase that they “merge back into it.”

The ninth line, “Non-arising, non-cessation and indescribable arise from the true nature of phenomena (Skt. *dharmata*) and merge back

20. See [Appendix C](#) for a description of eight consciousnesses.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

into it” means that at first there is non-arising, and at the end there is non-cessation, and the time in-between this process is indescribable. These are the characteristics of the true nature of the mind.

The tenth line, “The appearance of demons, the belief in demons, and the concept of demons arise from yoga and merge back into yoga” refers to the fact that appearances, beliefs in, and concepts of demons may arise on the relative level of reality, but with the yogic practices of tantra, they will merge back into it. This is because obstacles and obstructing spirits are also just manifestations of the mind. If we don’t realize that they are empty,²¹ we will believe them to be demons. If we do realize that they are empty, this creates the natural liberation of demons.

There are many delusions that occur in samsara: outer delusions, delusions of defilements, and so on. The mind is the source of all these delusions.²² All delusions naturally cease when there is the realization of the nature of the mind. The true nature of the mind is a natural fundamental clarity that is empty, beyond coming or going. Though we perceive numerous external phenomena, they are all delusions manifested by the mind. They are empty by nature,

21. This refers to things being empty of inherent nature or emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*) on the ultimate level of reality.

22. The failure of the mind to recognize its own true nature is what is meant by the Tibetan term *marigpa*, or “ignorance of the nature of reality.” By believing in an “I” and “other,” causes the mind to have this dualistic clinging which we have had since beginningless time and it never stops until we reach enlightenment.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

but nevertheless appear. Though they appear, their nature is empty. This is the inseparability of emptiness and appearance.

Even meditation is just a thought, even non-meditation is just a thought. Whether we meditate or not, the nature of the mind does not change. Therefore, even a belief in meditation and non-meditation is a delusion. Phenomena have no reality, they are like space, but their emptiness must be understood. If we wish to have the correct view, we must see the emptiness that transcends the intellect. If we desire to have correct meditation, we must meditate without distraction. If we wish to have correct conduct, it must be effortless and natural. If we wish to gain the full result, hope and fear must be abandoned.

This ends the teaching of Milarepa on ultimate reality.”²³

Questions

Rinpoche, I have a question about the karmic consequences of an action. For example, let us say someone worked as a forest ranger and their job was to provide information to people and a hunter came to the ranger and asked for the location where they might hunt deer. If the ranger provided that information and the hunter

23. This story ends with Milarepa giving the rock sinmo the advice: “For food, you’ll eat the food of great bliss; when thirsty, you’ll drink undefiled amrita; for work, you’ll be a support for all yogic practitioners.” Then she and her retinue became Dharma protectors of those practitioners who stayed at Palbar Mountain.

4. The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave

does go and kills a deer, are there karmic consequences for the forest ranger?

In the job of a forest ranger, you just have to look after the forest, so it doesn't involve killing. If a hunter comes and asks where the animals are and you tell the person, this would be a definite lack of compassion for the animal and there would be some bad karma accumulated from that action. That would not be good. But, if you are doing the work as a forest ranger and don't tell anyone where to go to kill something, then there wouldn't be any bad karma.

What if the person stays in this job because on previous occasions, they have succeeded in convincing the hunters not to kill the deer?

It is primarily a matter of the motivation. If a person thinks, "If I leave this job, more animals will be killed and if I stay in this job, then I will be able to save some animals" it is a good motivation and it would be good to keep that job. But if it is just a pretense, thinking, "I really need this job, so I'll do what can to stay in this job," then this motivation is not good and the decision may create negative karma.

In general, if there is a good motivation, then there won't be any harm coming from the action.



The Nine-Story Tower that Milarepa Built

This tower still stands after a thousand years. It is on the corner of what used to be Marpa's land. In the last century several out buildings have been added to the tower. These include the buildings in front and the side shrine attached to the side of the actual tower. *Photo courtesy of Klaus-*

Dieter Mathes.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

I have chosen this spiritual song from the collected songs of Milarepa because Yolmo Mountain is very near to Kathmandu, Nepal and there are persons here (in Kathmandu where the seminar was given) who feel a strong connection to Yolmo.

Marpa directed Milarepa to practice at Yolmo Snow Mountain. At Yolmo Mountain Milarepa stayed in a cave called Tapuk Senge Dzong (Tiger Cave at Lion Castle) in the forest of Singa Ling (Land of Lions). While he was there, local deities caused him no obstacles and manifested themselves in peaceful forms, and took an oath to serve and honor him. Milarepa's meditation progressed well there.

One day, five young men and women came and asked him to teach them the Dharma. They said, "This is such a terrifying place, the quality of someone's practice is bound to be very unstable. Has this happened to you?" To answer to their question, Milarepa sang them a spiritual song in which he said:

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

Yolmo has pastures, flowers, trees, forests, monkeys, birds, and bees, in summer, winter, autumn, and spring.

Here I meditate on emptiness. Sometimes many thoughts arise and these thoughts aid my meditation. This is very good.

I do not accumulate negative karma here and therefore I have good health. I do have thoughts that will disturb my body and make me uncomfortable, nevertheless, that is beneficial for my meditation experience and so this is very good. I am therefore free from the defilements and free from birth and death, and this is good.

Though deities and spirits are malevolent and create illusions, they only increase my realization. This is very good.

I am free from sickness, but if suffering occurs, it appears as bliss, which is very good.

I have the pleasure of different kinds of meditational experiences, but sometimes when I jump, run, or dance, I am even more blissful.

The five practitioners felt great faith on hearing Milarepa's song. He then gave them instructions, which they meditated on and attained good qualities. This pleased Milarepa and then he sang them a song about the kind of conduct they should have:

There are many Dharma practitioners, but you are very fortunate to meditate upon this path. You are practicing to attain

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

buddhahood within one lifetime using your one body. Therefore, do not have attachment to this life.

Many good and bad actions are done for the sake of this life and these prevent you from properly following the path of the Dharma.

In serving the guru, you should not feel proud that you have done so well, since this prevents the accomplishment of the goal.

To keep your commitments, you should not associate with ordinary people, which brings the danger of breaking your commitments.

When you are studying, you should not feel proud that you have understood the meaning of the words, since this will cause the disturbing emotions to blaze up like a fire and ruin your good activities.

When you meditate with your companions in the Dharma, you should not have many tasks to perform, since they will cause a distraction and be an obstacle to the Dharma.

After those general instructions, Milarepa gave specific instructions on how his students were to conduct themselves on the path of means by giving them the oral transmission on such profound practices as the Six Dharmas of Naropa saying:²⁴

24. These six special yogic practices were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa and consist of the subtle heat, the illusory body, the dream yoga, the luminosity, the ejection of consciousness, and the bardo practice.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

In doing these meditations, you should not use the powers developed from the oral transmission of subjugation or receiving blessings of demons. If you do, your own being will become demonic, many obstacles will occur, and you will fall into worldly activities.

When practicing the Dharma there will sometimes be meditation experiences and realizations of the true nature of your mind. When these occur, do not brag that you are doing well and do not display any clairvoyant powers.

If you talk about signs of progress that you have attained, you will develop pride, envy, anger, and the signs will then diminish your progress. You need to understand this and abandon all these faults.

Then Milarepa's students asked him how they could practice self-sufficiency and Milarepa sang some general instructions saying that they must practice well, have firm faith and devotion, and so on. They did practice well, and with great faith in Milarepa, they offered him a mandala of gold and asked for an instruction on the essence of the view, meditation, and conduct. Milarepa said that their practice was better than an offering of gold and returned the gold to them. Then he sang them a song:

The view, meditation, conduct, and result are the foundation of the Vajrayana. The view of the Vajrayana is how we should understand the true nature of phenomena.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

Intellectual knowledge of the view is not sufficient to reach enlightenment because we have to meditate on what we have to understand. Just engaging in meditation is also not sufficient for attaining enlightenment because we have to know if our meditation is correct or not. Finally, to reach enlightenment we have to engage in pure conduct when we are not meditating.

The essence of the Vajrayana is engaging in the correct view, proper meditation, and pure conduct. Each of these has three objects. The Buddha's view has two aspects: the sutra and tantra views. In the sutra path we engage in understanding the true nature of phenomena by primarily engaging in logical arguments. On the tantra path, however, we engage in the understanding of the nature of phenomena through direct perception of mind. In this song of realization Milarepa first describes that there are three aspects or "nails" to the Vajrayana view which are called the view, meditation, conduct.²⁵

The first nail is: "All phenomenal existence is subsumed in mind." This means that all external images, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations arise within the mind. The mind's sensations of happiness, suffering, defilements, thoughts, and anything else are also derived from the mind itself.

25. The Tibetan word for a "nail" (*zer*) in this context means "a crucial or pivotal point" so that this song is often called "the three nails."

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

The second nail is: “Mind itself is the nature of luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*).” We can ask what is mind? It is not a material thing. It is luminous clarity and knowledge. The mind can think and change, and with luminous clarity it can engage in all kinds of thoughts.

The third nail is: “The mind’s nature is emptiness so cannot be pointed to.” While some teachers first introduce their students to emptiness and then introduce them to luminous clarity, Milarepa introduces the luminous clarity of the mind first and then introduces emptiness by pointing out that this clarity cannot be identified.

Then Milarepa says that there are the **three aspects of the view**.

First, many thoughts appear in meditation. If the nature of mind is not identified, the thoughts become an obstacle. However, when the true nature of the mind is realized and these thoughts arise, they are liberated as the dharmakaya.

Second, when thoughts are naturally realized as the dharmakaya, the clear knowledge of the mind is a state of bliss that is free from suffering. Meditation is then accompanied by the experience of bliss.

Third, meditation on the mind has not created anything new. The mind resting in its own natural state dispels delusion without any alteration made to it or any artifice added to it. The mind must rest in the nature of the mind itself.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

Then Milarepa says that there are **three aspects of conduct**.

First, in the Vajrayana we do not need to deliberately achieve the ten virtuous actions.²⁶ The practice of good actions will occur spontaneously from the realization that comes from meditation.

Second, the ten unvirtuous actions will be spontaneously avoided without any need to deliberately control our actions. With the realization of the nature of mind, we do not need to have contrived conduct.

Third, there will also be no need for us to deliberately contrive remedial actions to engender realization through effort. If we rest relaxed in the natural state of the mind, the realization of clarity and emptiness will naturally arise.

Finally, Milarepa said that there are the **three aspects of the result**.

The first aspect is that according to the Buddha's exceptional view of the Vajrayana, nirvana and buddhahood are not located in some other place; we do not have to go somewhere else to achieve buddhahood. They are also not a new creation or achievement.

The second aspect is that samsara is not like garbage that has to be thrown away. There isn't anything that can be thrown away because the very nature of samsara is nirvana, whether we realize it or not.

26. See [Appendix D](#) for the ten virtuous and unvirtuous deeds.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

The third aspect is that nirvana is not something we need to create, and samsara is not something we need to eliminate, because both are buddhahood. There is no buddhahood that is other than us; it is the nature of our own mind. When we have gained the elimination of all the negative qualities and gained all the positive qualities of realization, it is the unchanged nature of our own mind, exactly as it is, which is buddhahood. We have not realized this fact, so we are under the power of the disturbing emotions and wander in samsara. When we realize the true nature of the mind, there develops the conviction that the mind is buddhahood.

This song of realization on meditation, conduct, and result has three aspects each, making twelve aspects in all, or as Milarepa says, “the twelve nails hammered in.” There is an additional thirteenth nail which applies equally to view, meditation, conduct, and result, and that is the nature of phenomena, which is the ungraspable emptiness that transcends all extremes and all conceptualization.

Who is it that hammers in these thirteen nails? It is the guru who introduces the student to recognition of the ungraspable nature.²⁷ If we analyze too much, the mind becomes confused and the nails will not go in. However, when we understand the innate nature exactly,

27. This recognition, called “pointing out the mind,” is brought about during a teaching, a ritual ceremony, or guided meditation when the teacher does something to shock the student into actually experiencing the true nature of their mind. Tilopa, for example, suddenly slapped Naropa in the face with his sandal and Naropa saw the true nature of reality.

5. Songs of Yolmo Snow Mountain

the nails will be hammered in. These thirteen nails are the wealth that belongs to all Dharma practitioners. Milarepa says, “They have arisen in my mind. Take pleasure in them and practice them.” Then Milarepa sang them another song reminding the students to have diligence and faith when they practice and concluding with, “You must practice in solitude. Yolmo Mountain is an excellent place to practice. Having followed my own advice in my own practice of meditation, I enjoyed the most perfect happiness.”

6. The Story of Nyama Paldarbum

The fourteenth chapter of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* contains the teachings that Milarepa gave in response to the questions of Nyama Paldarbum. She asked Milarepa many questions, and the answers that Milarepa gave her are profound and beneficial to our own practice.

One autumn Milarepa came to a place named Gepa Lesum, where the people were bringing in the harvest. He was asking the people for food and a young girl named Nyama Paldarbum said, “Go to that house over there and I will come to you soon and give you food.” Milarepa went to the door of the house and tapped on it with his staff. There was no response. He tapped again and an old woman came out and said, “You so-called yogis do a lot of begging and when there’s no one at home you go in and steal, which is exactly what you were planning to do!”

Milarepa then sang her a song describing the suffering of old age and how in the midst of those sufferings one must practice the

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Dharma and follow a guru. When he had finished the old woman was filled with regret and felt faith in Milarepa. With her hands together, she supplicated him with tears streaming from her eyes.

Paldarbum arrived at this point and thought that the yogi must have hit the woman. “What do you think you’re doing, hitting an old lady?” she asked him. The old lady corrected her, “He didn’t hit or insult me, I insulted him. Then he gave me a Dharma teaching that aroused great faith in me. I’m crying because I feel great regret for what I said to him. I’m very old, but you’re still young, so you should serve this lama, Milarepa, and request the Dharma from him.”

Paldarbum said, “You are both amazing. If you are Milarepa then I am very fortunate to meet you. I have heard that when students listen to the account of your lineage, they develop great faith in the Dharma and their perceptions are transformed. I have heard that you have very profound instructions. What are they?”

Milarepa could see that this girl had the karma to be an excellent student and so he sang her a spiritual song that described the profundity of his lineage. The description of his lineage is usually given with a succession of gurus — Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa. Here, however, he describes his lineage as the Dharma that begins with the Buddha as the source of the Vajrayana teachings in terms of the three Buddha’s bodies (Skt. *kayas*). In the song, he states that the dharmakaya is the all-pervading wisdom of the Buddha’s mind, it is

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the all-pervading Samantabhadra,²⁸ who is not an individual buddha but represents the compassion and wisdom of buddhahood. The dharmakaya gives rise to the sambhogakaya, which is beautified by the eighty major and minor physical signs. The sambhogakaya is a manifestation of form for practitioners. This is called Vajradhara, which is not to be confused with the dharmakaya Vajradhara. This Vajradhara is not an individual buddha but represents the changeless continuity of the sambhogakaya. The nirmanakaya that benefits ordinary people is the Shakyamuni Buddha who has manifested to guide impure beings. Milarepa concludes, “I am a yogi who holds these three kayas. Is there a female student with faith in these three?”

Paldarbum replied, “This is an excellent lineage, but one needs a root guru from whom one can directly receive the instructions. What kind of root guru did you have?” Milarepa could have answered quite simply that his guru was Marpa Lotsawa, but instead he sang her a song of the outer, inner, and ultimate gurus:

The outer guru communicates the continuity of knowledge through signs. He or she teaches the instructions through symbols and other various methods.

The inner guru is the one who teaches the continuity of wisdom and causes the direct recognition of the true nature of the mind.

28. Samantrabhadra is the original buddha. It is said that when samsara began, he realized that everything that was perceived is false because it was dualistic in nature, while true reality is a unity.

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The ultimate guru is the one who teaches the ultimate truth by increasing the clarity of wisdom until the final result is attained.

Paldarbum then asked, “One needs to receive an empowerment from a good guru. What kind of empowerments have you received?”

Milarepa could have answered, “I have received the empowerments of Hevajra and Chakrasamvara,” but instead he sang a song of realization in which he said that he had received the outer, inner and ultimate empowerment. The outer empowerment is the vase being placed upon the crown of the head and is symbolic use of ritual objects. The inner empowerment is a symbolic demonstration that one’s own body is the body of the deity. It is the meditation that one’s body is the body of the deity that allows one to receive the blessings, and in which the subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*) and subtle drops (Skt. *bindu*) of the body are empowered. Finally, he said that the ultimate empowerment causes the direct recognition of the true nature of the mind and that he had received all three of these empowerments.

Paldarbum replied, “Those are very excellent empowerments. But having received these empowerments, one needs instructions so that one can follow the correct path. What kind of instructions did you receive?” Milarepa replied with a song:

I have received the outer, inner, and ultimate instructions.

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The outer instructions are to listen, contemplate, and meditate on the Dharma in order to gradually understand its meaning.

The inner instructions are to be resolute and have intense diligence in meditation that will be the basis for accomplishing the final result.

The ultimate instructions are having the continuous presence of realization and experience, which comes from diligence in meditation. I am the yogi who has these three instructions.

Paldarbum then said, “You have received good instructions. But when one has received instructions, one needs to go into the mountains to practice the Dharma. What kind of Dharma practice have you done?” In reply, Milarepa sang of the outer, inner, and ultimate Chöd practice,²⁹ which are forms of the “cutting” practice in which one cuts through one’s attachment to the self:

The external Chöd is to wander in fearful places where there are deities and demons.

The internal Chöd is to offer one’s own body as food to the deities and demons.

The ultimate Chöd is to realize the true nature of the mind and to cut through the fine strand of hair of subtle ignorance.

29. Tib. *Chöd* (pronounced chö). This is a practice of “cutting off” ego by visualizing what is most precious to us — our body — and then visualizing cutting it up and giving it to demons to feast on.

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I am the yogi who has achieved these three kinds of Chöd practice.

Paldarbum then asked, “That is a very good Chöd practice. When yogis do this practice, they say PHAT³⁰ in order to transform bad circumstances onto the path. What is the meaning of this PHAT? To this Milarepa replied with a song about the outer, inner, and ultimate PHAT:

The outer PHAT is dispelling the thoughts that prevent a stable meditation, and it instantly cuts these negative thoughts.

The inner PHAT is clearing away the dullness or excitement that affects the mind’s alertness in meditation.

The ultimate PHAT is resting in the true nature of the mind.

I am the yogi who has these three kinds of PHAT.

Paldarbum said, “This PHAT is very good. When you practice in this way what kind of mental states occur?” Milarepa then sang of the mental states of the uncontrived ground, path, and result:

The uncontrived ground is resting in the all-pervading true nature, the true nature that pervades all phenomena.

The uncontrived path is not a gradual progress, but a direct arrival.

The uncontrived result is the true nature as Mahamudra.

30. The Sanskrit syllable PHAT is usually pronounced “pai” in Tibetan and is used to cut distracting thoughts and to arouse the consciousness from drowsiness in meditation.

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I am a yogi who has mastered these three mental states.

In this song, Milarepa points out the difference between the logical analysis and the direct approach to understanding emptiness. If we attempt to use inferential reasoning to uncover the ultimate nature of phenomena, we will not be successful because the process of logically deducing the emptiness of phenomena requires a very long process of developing confidence in the ultimate nature. In the Mahamudra approach, however, there is a direct leap. By leaping we are moving past all conceptual consideration and leaping into the direct experience of the nature of our own mind. In this leap there is no analysis or labelling or establishing what exists and does not exist and so forth. We simply look directly at the nature of our own mind, directly experiencing it, and thereby directly meditating upon it.

Paldarbum then said, “This is marvelous, it’s like the sun is shining upon me. What kind of confidence have you gained from your practice?” Milarepa sang of the confidence in the view, meditation, and result:

The confidence in the view is the realization of emptiness. This is the view that there are no deities nor any demons, so we cannot benefit from deities or receive any harm from demons.

The confidence in meditation is the absence of an object of meditation. This means that there can be no distraction for us.

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The confidence in the result is the absence of hope to achieve it. This means there is the absence of fear of failure. I am a yogi who has these three confidences.

Paldarbum felt great faith in Milarepa and prostrated to him, invited him in and served and honored him saying, “I am definitely going to practice the Dharma, so please keep me in your compassion.” She then sang a song to Milarepa describing her many faults. The basic meaning of the song was that she would sincerely practice the Dharma and ask Milarepa to please give her a practice that is simple to understand and easy to do. Milarepa, pleased with her, replied with a song saying that to truly wish to practice the Dharma, it is not enough to give up worldly activities; one must follow my example and practice without distraction.

Paldarbum then described in a song what her normal life is like with, “In the day there is never-ending work. In the night I am fast asleep. Morning and evening I am a slave to food and clothes. I have never had the chance to practice the Dharma.” In reply, Milarepa sang to her a song on the four aspects of renunciation necessary for true Dharma practice:

The next life is far away from this life.

Have you prepared for this long journey with food and clothes?

The way to prepare for that journey is to practice generosity.

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In order to receive food, clothes, and wealth in future lives, you should give them away in this lifetime.

An obstacle that prevents this generosity in future lives is miserliness. Miserliness or hoarding may seem beneficial in this lifetime in that one accrues food and clothes and other possessions, but in the long run it harms you because miserliness causes poverty in the next lifetime. Therefore, you must recognize that miserliness is an enemy and leave it behind.

The next lifetime will be darker than this lifetime. Therefore, you must prepare a torch to illuminate that darkness. This is done by meditation on the fundamental clarity of the mind. Ignorance is the obstacle and the enemy of clarity. Ignorance may seem pleasant and beneficial superficially, but actually it will be harmful and you must recognize it as an enemy and leave it behind you.

The next lifetime will be more frightening than this lifetime, so you must find a guard that will protect you. This guard is the practice of the Dharma. Relatives who dissuade you from Dharma practice are the enemy. They may be helping and loving towards you, but ultimately, they are harming you. Therefore, you must recognize these relatives as an obstacle and leave them behind you.

The next lifetime will be a longer and a more desolate road than this lifetime, so you will need a horse to travel along it

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easily. That horse is diligence. The enemy of diligence is laziness that deceives you into thinking taking it easy is beneficial when ultimately it is harmful. Recognize laziness as an enemy and leave it behind you.

After Milarepa had sung this spiritual song, Paldarbum felt great faith in Milarepa. He told her, “You don’t have to change your name or cut off your hair.”³¹ A person can have hair and also accomplish buddhahood.” Then Milarepa taught her how to practice through a song of four analogies and five meanings:

*O young lady, Paldarbum, listen wealthy lady, endowed with faith.
Look up into the sky, and practice meditation
free from fringe and center.
Look up at the sun and moon, and practice
meditation free from bright and dim.
Look over at the mountains, and practice meditation
free from departing and changing.
Look down at the lake, and practice meditation free from waves.
Look here at your mind, and practice meditation free from
discursive thought.*

31. This refers to the shaving off one’s hair and getting a new Dharma name when becoming a nun.

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Then Milarepa instructed her in the physical and mental practices and sent her to meditate. When she returned some time later, she sang of her experiences and doubts:

*O Jetsun Rinpoche, O supreme yogi,
I am able to meditate on the sky,
But when clouds arise, how should I meditate?
I am able to meditate on the sun and moon,
But when heavenly bodies move, how should I meditate?
I am able to meditate on the mountains,
But when trees and shrubbery blossom, how should I meditate?
I am able to meditate on the lake,
But when waves arise, how should I meditate?
I am able to meditate on the mind,
But when discursive thoughts occur, how should I meditate?*

The meaning of Paldarbum's song is that she can look at the mind, but she is disturbed by the thoughts arising within it. Milarepa replied with another song to further her understanding and clear up her doubts:

*O young lady, Paldarbum, listen wealthy lady endowed with faith.
If you are able to meditate on the sky, clouds
are manifestations of the sky.
— Just rest in the nature of the sky itself.³²*

32. The "nature" here refers to the essence of the sky in daytime and at night. The es-

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*If you are able to meditate on the sun and moon, the stars
and planets are manifestations of the sun and moon.*

— Just rest in the nature of the sun and moon itself.

*If you are able to meditate on the mountains, the trees
and shrubbery are manifestations of the mountain.*

— Just rest in the nature of the mountain itself.

*If you are able to meditate on the lake, the
waves are manifestations of the lake.*

— Just rest in the nature of the lake.

*If you are able to meditate on your mind, discursive
thoughts are manifestations of your mind.*

— Just rest in the nature of your mind.

This means that if you see your own mind, then you see that the mind's essence has the nature of emptiness. When you see that, you also see that the nature of whatever thought arises in the mind is also emptiness. When this is experienced directly, then these thoughts dissolve in their own place, right there. Thoughts are not driven out or sent somewhere else; they do not go away, they simply dissolve naturally because they are directly seen.³³

sence of water is that it is liquid and flowing, while its external appearances can be hard as in ice or hot as in steam, or flowing as in a stream.

33. By saying the thoughts are "seen" what is meant is that they are directly perceived without any conceptuality or duality or evaluation.



Gampopa Receiving Instructions from Tilopa.

Tilopa in the sky rising from a stupa and teaching Gampopa. Tilopa is in the meditation position of a yogi. He is holding a fish because the first time Naropa met Tilopa was when he was frying fish and then snapping his fingers with the consciousness of the fish going to a higher reincarnation. Gampopa sitting on a lotus throne and moon disk is dressed as a monk because he promised his Kadampa teacher that he would never give up his ordination. He is sitting in full lotus meditation position with hands in the proper meditation pose. *Drawing courtesy of Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal.*

7. The Encounter with Naro Bönchung at Mount Kailash

Many Westerners now go to visit Mount Kailash. This is where Milarepa practiced and performed miracles, leaving his handprints on the rocks and so on.³⁴ The twenty-second chapter of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* describes Milarepa's experience at Mount Kailash.

There is a slight disagreement about where Mount Kailash is located. In the *abhidharma*, written soon after the Buddha lived, it is said that it is north of Bodhgaya, and is beyond nine dark mountain ranges in a snow mountain range with the mountain Gandhamadana and the lake Anavatapta.³⁵ On the other hand, the Sakya Pandita believed

34. The display of miracles, such as leaving imprints in rocks, arises from the samadhi recognizing that all phenomena are uncreated and are, in fact, illusory. Whatever is required to benefit beings can be manifested out of the samadhi of realizing this emptiness. — Thrangu Rinpoche

35. Gandhamadana is described in the *Abhidharma* as being at the source of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and that at this site is a wish-fulfilling jambu tree.

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that Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar were not Gandhamadana and Anavatapta. However, the eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje, and many other Kagyu masters have stated Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar are Gandhamadana and Anavatapta.

Milarepa believed Mount Kailash to be Gandhamadana and the nearby Lake Mansarovar to be Anavatapta. Marpa told Milarepa that if he practiced at Lachi and Kailash mountains, he would gain exceptional experiences and realizations and would develop the great qualities that would benefit his students. So, to fulfill his guru's instructions, Milarepa went to Mount Kailash. The local deities of Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar greeted him on his arrival, prostrating to him and making offerings to him. They offered the mountain and the lake as places for Milarepa and all his students to practice. The deities also promised to help them when they practiced there, by increasing the auspicious conditions that were conducive to their practice.

Naro Bönchung was in residence there at this time. He was an excellent practitioner of the Bön tradition³⁶ and had thereby attained some miraculous powers and clairvoyance. He had heard that Milarepa possessed inconceivable miraculous powers and clairvoyance, so he came to welcome Milarepa and his students as they arrived at the shore of Mansarovar. Though he knew who Milarepa was, he

36. The Bön religion was the main religion of Tibet before the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century CE and it has continued to develop as a religion to the present time.

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pretended he didn't and asked, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" Milarepa answered, "We are going to Mount Kailash to practice meditation."

Naro Bönchung then asked, "And who are you?" and Milarepa answered, "I am Milarepa." Naro Bönchung then said, "Kailash and Mansarovar are very famous, but when you actually see them, they're not anything special. You're the same — very famous, but nothing special in person. But even if Kailash and Mansarovar and you are really wonderful, this area is under the control of my tradition. It is our land and our mountain. So those who stay here have to follow the Bön tradition.

Milarepa said, "This mountain and lake belong to the Buddhist tradition because the Buddha foretold of their existence. In particular, my guru Marpa told me that I must practice meditation here. I am not just following my own wishes. That you live here is very good. It will be better if you continue to live here and follow the Buddhist tradition. If you're not going to practice Buddhism it will be best that you go somewhere else."

The reason Milarepa and Naro Bönchung argued in this way was not due to sectarianism, but because it is best that people keep to their own particular tradition which is the best way to reach the final goal. But if they mix different traditions, their practice will not progress.

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The Bönpo said, “If it’s true that you have great miraculous powers, we should have a miracle contest. Whoever wins will be the master of Mount Kailash. Now I shall perform a miracle.” Naro Bönchung then straddled the lake with his left foot on the near shore and his right foot on the opposite shore. Standing thus he sang a spiritual song:

Mount Kailash is very famous, but when you see it, it’s just a snow-covered mountain peak. There’s nothing wonderful about it.

Lake Mansarovar is very famous, but it’s just a depression filled by river water. There’s nothing else there.

Milarepa is very famous, but he’s just a naked old man lying on the ground and singing. There’s nothing wonderful about him.

We Bönpo have an exceptionally superior teaching. There is the Bön Kaya, the Bön deity who is the great King of wrathful deities, who has nine heads and eighteen arms and many emanations. His sister is Sipay Gyalmo (Queen of Existence).

The Bön Dharma is superior. As a sign of that superiority, I will do this miracle.

Milarepa then performed a miracle. Without his body growing any larger or Lake Mansarovar becoming any smaller, he covered it entirely with his body and then sang this song:

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The Buddha Shakyamuni sits upon a lion throne on Gadharakuta³⁷ mountain. The Buddha's teachings are exceptionally superior. His body, inseparable from his wisdom, is the Dharmakaya Vajradhara.

The one who rests in the meditation united with that Dharmakaya is Tilopa, the nirmanakaya. His pupil is the great pandita Naropa, and Naropa's pupil is Marpa.

The blessing has been transmitted from Vajradhara through Tilopa, Naropa and Marpa to me. I have gained superior realizations and experiences. I am the famous Milarepa. In accordance with Marpa's command, I have come to meditate at Kailash.

Meditating here I will accomplish complete benefit for myself and for others. Mount Kailash is very famous. The snow-covered peak is a symbol of the purity of the Buddha's teachings. Mansarovar Lake is very famous, being filled with water is a symbol of the cessation of phenomena into a state of equanimity.

I am the famous Milarepa. An old man lying naked is a symbol of the abandonment of the concept of perceiver and perceived. I sing because all appearances appear to me as books, as teachings. Then I give these teachings in the form of songs. That is why Milarepa is famous.

In my realization and experience, outer appearances and the internal mind are inseparable. Thus, by gaining power over the

37. This is Vulture-peak mountain where the Buddha taught the Prajnaparamita sutras.

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mind I have gained power over external appearances and can perform miracles.

I have no need of miracles such as yours that depend upon the help of a deity. As my miracles are superior to yours, Mount Kailash belongs to me. If you practice the Buddha's Dharma, that will be beneficial to all. If not, and you are defeated by my miracles, you must go and live somewhere else.

Then Milarepa performed another miracle. He lifted up the entire Mansarovar lake upon his fingertip, without causing any harm to the creatures that lived in its waters. Naro Bönchung said, "This time your miracle is a little better than mine, but I was here first, therefore we should consider this a draw. You say that I should leave if I refuse to practice Buddhism, but I will never abandon the Bön tradition. Therefore, I will perform another miracle and if you can do a better one, I will leave this place and go and live somewhere else."

Then Naro Bönchung proceeded to circumambulate Mount Kailash counterclockwise,³⁸ while Milarepa circumambulated clockwise, until they eventually met each other. Naro Bönchung seized Milarepa's hand and said, "You must circumambulate counter clockwise." Milarepa answered, "No, you must go clockwise," and they pulled each other in opposite directions leaving their footprints on stone

38. Bön members circumambulates sacred places counterclockwise, while Buddhists go clockwise.

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as they did so. Due to the superiority of Milarepa's powers, Naro Bönchung was made to go around the mountain clockwise.

When they had nearly finished going around, Naro Bönchung said, "Now this next time we should go counter-clockwise," but Milarepa said, "Well, that depends entirely on how strong you are. If you pull me along, I'll have to go." So Naro Bönchung replied, "Well, we can find out which one of us is the strongest by seeing who can carry the biggest stone." Naro Bönchung carried a large stone to where they were, but Milarepa brought a bigger one and placed it on top. Naro Bönchung said, "You've defeated me twice, but twice is not conclusive. We must compete once more." Milarepa answered, "There is no real contest between us, it's just like a game for me. I am bound to win, but so that future generations of practitioners can see the superiority of the Dharma I'll do another miracle."

Naro Bönchung went to the eastern side of Kailash and Milarepa went to the western side. Milarepa extended his leg through and under the mountain and made a footprint in Naro Bönchung's retreat. Milarepa said, "Now you do the same thing back," but Naro Bönchung couldn't. Naro Bönchung insisted that they should have another contest, because a few miracles didn't prove anything.

Again, they circumambulated in opposite directions until they met. It then began to rain heavily so Milarepa said, "We should build ourselves a shelter." Milarepa gathered rocks by simply pointing at

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them, and then told Naro Bönchung to bring some, but he failed to bring any by miraculous powers. Milarepa, just by staring at rocks, placed one on the right, one on the left, one at the rear and one on top as a roof. He then decided it was too high so he climbed on top and pressed it down with his foot, leaving a footprint on the stone. After he had come down, he decided it was now too low, so he went inside and pushed it up with his hand leaving a handprint on the ceiling. This site is now called Zutrul Puk, “The Miraculous Cave,” and these hand prints can be seen even today.³⁹

After this miracle, Naro Bönchung conceded. Milarepa then sang a lengthy final song explaining how these miracles could be done by explaining it in terms of view, conduct, and fruition. He said, “The Buddhist view is free from extremes and transcends the intellect.”

The belief that things are real is the source of thoughts and defilements. There is also the view that things do not exist and that is also a delusion. One might think that if there is nothing that exists, that there must be nothing. But if the existence of things has no reality, then their non-existence has no reality either.

The true nature of phenomena transcends existence as well as non-existence. The view that transcends these extremes also transcends the intellect because a view gained by conceptual reasoning to de-

39. A temple has been built around this rock shelter. Zutrul Puk is on the southeastern side of Mount Kailash being on the final stage of the usual circumambulation of the mountain.

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termine the identity of something cannot be done, because it must be gained through the wisdom of meditation. This view is beyond the scope of the ordinary mind and therefore is a source of power to perform miracles.

There are two reasons why meditation is the source of miraculous power: non-distraction and realizing non-attachment. Meditation is developing the mind to habitually be in a state free of distraction. If in our meditation we have an object on which we are thinking, there will be attachment to it, and that will give rise to disturbing emotions, and this will then create the suffering of samsara. Therefore, Milarepa says, “I should rest in a state of meditation that has no object, in which I can directly see the true nature of phenomena. That meditation is a source of power to do miracles.” Conduct can also yield the power of miracles and clairvoyance. Here conduct means being free of the effort of rejecting or cultivating the various thoughts that arise in the mind. We should rest in the true nature of phenomena which Milarepa describes as an “uncontrived, relaxed, spontaneous manifestation of power to accomplish perfect miracles.”

The fruition, self-liberation, also brings powers which cause the continuity of compassion, wisdom, and ability to help others to never cease. This variety of qualities is free from worldly attachment and are self-liberating.

7. The Encounter with Naro Bönchung at Mount Kailash

This power of the fruition is derived from the direct recognition of our own true nature. It does not come from outside us. Ignorance and delusion are simply due to not realizing their true nature. The direct recognition of our own true nature brings freedom from extremes and conceptual elaborations and it is this that leads to the ability to do miracles.

The purity of vows or commitments (Skt. *samaya*) also brings the power to achieve miracles. This is due to the fulfilling the guru's instructions on meditation, having diligence, doing particular practices, and fulfilling our commitments, which frees us from any stain we might have.

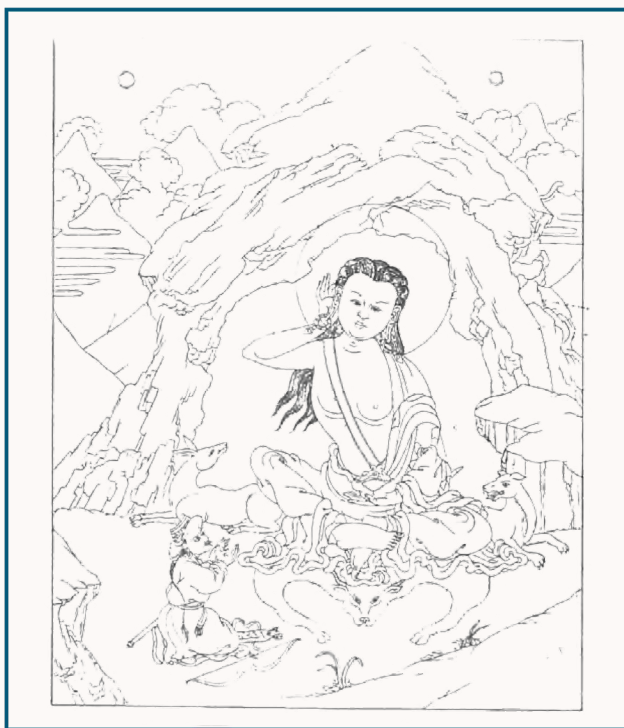
Practice is a source of the power to perform miracles because all appearances are made to aid the development of realizations and experiences. If circumstances conducive to meditation occur, they can then facilitate diligence in meditation without leading to pride. When deleterious circumstances or obstacles occur, they won't overpower or depress us, but themselves will become the basis for meditation. Therefore, difficult circumstances are preferable for the development of powerful meditation that has the power to perform miracles. Milarepa concludes:

I, the yogi Milarepa, have the power to do miracles. This is due to my diligence, dedication, and endurance.

7. The Encounter with Naro Bönchung at Mount Kailash

When there are difficulties, I do not feel afraid. My diligence does not last for just a month or year, but continues until the final goal is attained.

Due to my miraculous powers, the Buddha's teachings will prosper at Mount Kailash. This has happened due to the kindness of the buddhas.



This drawing depicts Milarepa meditating in his cave in Bhaktapur and teaching a hunter the Dharma. This story which is included in The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa shows the hunter putting down his bow and prostrating to Milarepa who is surrounded by deer that the hunter did not kill. *Drawing courtesy of Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal.*

8. The Invitation from the King of Mön

The next story happened about twenty miles outside Kathmandu near in the town of Baktaphur. An earthquake in 1909 destroyed the actual cave Milarepa was meditating in, but a shrine was later built on the spot.⁴⁰ In chapter twenty-seven of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, Milarepa was staying in solitude in this cave on Katya mountain in the Nyishang Gurta, in the area of Mön.⁴¹ He was staying there being silent and resting in a continuous stream of meditation.

During that time, some hunters came along and saw Milarepa, motionless and staring. They thought he was a demon, and ran away, but then summoning up their courage, they returned ready

40. The town of Bhaktapur is still standing, and the ancient parts of this town were used in the film *The Little Buddha*. Thrangu Rinpoche built Sekhar Retreat Center near the cave where Milarepa was staying in this spiritual song. Rinpoche used Milarepa's seven-story tower as a design for the center. (see www.druponrinpoche.org)

41. The area that is now called Mustang lies in the Nepalese district of Mustang.

8. The Invitation from the King of Mön

to shoot him with their poisoned arrows. They asked him, “Are you a human being or a demon?” but Milarepa did not respond at all. They fired their arrows at him but they could not pierce his body. They decided to throw him over a cliff, but they couldn’t lift his body. They stacked wood around him and set it on fire, but Milarepa didn’t burn. They carried him to a wide river and threw him in, but Milarepa rose up out of the water, perfectly dry, still in the vajra posture, and floated back up to his cave and onto his meditation seat.

The astounded hunters left the mountain and told the nearby inhabitants about this amazing yogi that was living there. Milarepa’s pupil, Khyra Repa, had only recently become his student when he was a hunter who had come across Milarepa on the mountain. He said, “That must be my Tibetan lama that you are talking about. He is a true siddha. He even taught the Dharma to my dog and the deer I was hunting, making them sit together and meditate.”

The reputation of Milarepa spread throughout Nepal. The King of Patan and Bhaktapur⁴² developed great faith and devotion for Milarepa. The king dreamt that the glorious Tara told him, “You have Benares cotton and a yellow myrobalan fruit.”⁴³ There is a great

42. The king of Bhaktapur and Patan is another name for the King of Mön.

43. This is the *arura* plant which the Medicine Buddha holds in his right hand and is the substrate for all Tibetan medicine. The yellow or chebulic myrobalan is the *Terminalia Chebula* plant.

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Tibetan yogi presently staying at the Katya cave. If you offer these things to him it will be of great benefit to you.”

The king sent a man who could speak Tibetan to find Milarepa. When he came to Milarepa's cave and saw how Milarepa had forsaken material life and remained in meditation all the time, he felt great faith and was certain that he had found Milarepa. Nevertheless, in order to avoid any mistake, he asked, “What is your name? Isn't it terrible to live like this without anything to eat or drink? Why have you given up all possessions?” Milarepa replied, “I am Milarepa, the yogi from Tibet. There is an important purpose of not having any possessions.” He then explained what he meant in a song:

*I have no desire for wealth or possessions, and so I have nothing.
I do not experience the initial suffering of having to accumulate
possessions, the intermediate suffering of having to protect and
keep possessions, nor the final suffering of losing these posses-
sions. This is a wonderful thing.*

*I have no desire for friends or relations. I do not experience
the initial suffering of forming a mental attachment, the inter-
mediate suffering of having a disagreement with them, nor the
final suffering of parting from them. Therefore, it is good to be
without friends and relations.*

*I have no desire for pleasant conversation. I do not experience
the initial suffering of seeking conversation, the intermediate*

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suffering of wondering whether it will continue, nor the final suffering of the conversation deteriorating. Therefore, I do not delight in pleasant conversation.

I have no desire for a homeland and have no fixed residence. I do not experience the initial suffering of partiality of thinking that, “This is my land and that place isn’t.” I do not experience the intermediate suffering of yearning for my land. And I do not experience the final suffering of having to protect my land. Therefore, it is better to have no fixed abode.

When Milarepa had sung this song, the man felt great faith in him and returned to the king and gave a detailed account of his meeting with Milarepa. The king said, “You must go back and invite Milarepa to come here. If he refuses, offer him this Benares cotton and yellow myrobalan from me. The king’s emissary returned to Milarepa and said to him, “A Dharma king is reigning in Kathmandu and Patan. He has sent me to invite you there. You must come.”

Milarepa replied, “I don’t go into towns and I don’t know anyone who lives there. I certainly don’t know any kings. I don’t like fine food or drinks and I don’t like having any possessions. I don’t know of any stories about Dharma practitioners who die of hunger or cold. A lama who stays with a king will become lost. In obedience to Marpa’s commands, I travel from place to place, practicing. It is best if you return to your king.”

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The emissary said, “He is a very great king. You’re just an ordinary lama, so he has only sent one man on foot to invite you. It would be better if you came back with me.” Milarepa replied, “No, that’s not how it is. I’m not an ordinary person, I am a great king, a world emperor, a *chakravartin*. There is no one who is my equal, no one who is as powerful as me.”

The king’s man said, “If you’re a world emperor, you must have the seven royal possessions of a *chakravartin*. So, where are they? If you’re such a king, you’ll have to show them to me.” In reply Milarepa sang a song that taught the seven aspects of enlightenment as the seven royal possessions of a *chakravartin*:

Your king and ministers yearn for happiness, but with a kingdom like mine, this life and all future lives are filled with bliss.

The first of the seven royal possessions is the precious wheel that can take the king anywhere swiftly and easily. I possess the precious wheel of faith. It takes me from samsara to nirvana. With faith and devotion, I can enter any virtuous activity easily, so that I am swiftly taken to nirvana.

The second royal possession is the precious wish-fulfilling jewel that spontaneously fulfills one’s own wishes and the wishes of others. My second royal possession is wisdom, the jewel of wisdom of ultimate and relative truth, which brings the attainment of buddhahood. By knowing the individual capabilities

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and aspirations of beings, I turn the wheel of Dharma⁴⁴ for them, fulfilling the hopes of all — the Foundation Vehicle for the lower practitioners, the pratyekabuddha teachings for those of medium capability, and the Mahayana teachings for those with superior capability.

The third royal possession is the precious queen who is very beautiful and adorned by a variety of jewelry. My third royal possession is the queen of good conduct. The Dharma practitioner who maintains perfect conduct is beautiful, because he or she is free of the stains of faults. Correct conduct develops all the good qualities, like being adorned by jewelry.

The fourth royal possession is the precious minister who maintains and improves the kingdom's wealth. I have the royal possession of meditation through which I gather the vast accumulations of merit and wisdom.

The fifth royal possession is the precious elephant that can carry the great burden of the emperor's wealth. I have my conscience, so that if someone benefits me, I know that I must not ignore them but repay their kindness. All beings have shown me kindness and so I must help them all. If I give them the Buddha's teachings, they will eventually reach buddhahood. Therefore,

44. The Buddha's teachings had three important phases, known as the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. First, the Foundation Vehicle teaches the practice the Four Noble Truths and selflessness. Second, the Mahayana vehicle teaches the emptiness of all phenomena and universal compassion. Third, the Vajrayana vehicle teaches buddha nature and its inherent qualities. See Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice*.

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I take upon myself the burden, the responsibility, of giving the Buddha's teachings to all beings.

The sixth royal possession is the precious horse, the emperor's mount which takes him easily to any land he wishes to go. I have the royal possession of diligence, which takes me from self-attachment and disturbing emotions to selflessness.

The seventh royal possession is the precious general, whose army destroys the enemies of the emperor. Some say that the precious general subdues enemies just through the power of his majesty. I have the royal possession of wisdom due to learning and contemplation. I have the wisdom gained from hearing the Buddha's words, the commentaries to them, and the wisdom gained from analyzing the teachings until certainty is achieved. This wisdom defeats incorrect views, which are the enemy.

Even if you are a king, you need these faultless qualities that benefit beings.

The king's messenger said, "It is marvelous. You truly follow the Dharma. The king told me to give you these offerings if you refused to come with me." He then gave Milarepa the cotton and the yellow myrobalan. Milarepa accepted the offering and recited a dedication and aspirational prayer.

Sometime later, Rechungpa and a pupil of Milarepa named Shengom Repa came searching for Milarepa to bring him back to Tibet. They

8. The Invitation from the King of Mön

couldn't find him until they met some hunters who said to them, "You're not real yogis. A yogi should be like Milarepa. Weapons can't pierce him, fire can't burn him, throw him in the water and he won't sink, throw him off a cliff and he'll float right back up. The king even invited him to court and he refused to go. That's what a real siddha is like." Rechungpa and Shengom Repa gave the hunters a gift and asked them where Milarepa was, and then went to him. When they arrived, Milarepa gave Rechungpa and Shengom Repa a teaching on the great importance of practice and then returned to Tibet with them.

9. Entering a Yak Horn

The 38th chapter of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, is entitled “Entering a Yak Horn.” This story is important because it teaches that the student must abandon pride and show respect to the guru. This may seem at first a strange thing to do, but respect for the guru is extremely important. Only if we believe in the guru will it be possible to gain all the benefits and results of Dharma practice. It can seem suspicious when a lama like myself, seated upon a throne, is teaching people that they must have faith and devotion for the lama. Nevertheless, that is how one gains the benefit of the Dharma.

This chapter tells us that Rechungpa had gone to India. He was said to be Milarepa’s moon-like disciple, which means the next most important disciple after Milarepa’s sun-like disciple, Gampopa. One day, Milarepa, in his meditation, realized that Rechungpa had returned from India and was coming to see him. But he also noticed that Rechungpa had become affected by pride. Rechungpa

9. Entering a Yak Horn

was thinking, “Of course, my guru is a special person, but I’ve been to India twice and I’ve met many special gurus and received profound instructions from them. I am no longer the same as I used to be. In the past I had to undergo many hardships in my Dharma practice, but now that I am a very special lama, I won’t have to do that anymore.”

Milarepa, being aware of Rechungpa’s state of mind,⁴⁵ miraculously transferred himself into the middle of the vast plain that Rechungpa was crossing and approached him. Rechungpa thought, “I am now someone who propagates the Buddha’s teachings and helps many beings. That was the reason I went to India. Now my guru has come to greet me. He has greater powers of blessing than I do, but I am more learned than he is. When I prostrate to him, I am sure that he will prostrate to me in turn.”

In India, Rechungpa had been given a staff by Tibupa to give to Milarepa. Tibupa had been Marpa’s son, Darmadode, in his previous lifetime. This story began when Darmadode had been practicing in retreat and he saw many people going to a festival. Due to the influence of the maras, Darmadode heard someone say, “Why is such an important person as Darmadode not going to the festival?” Darmadode then said to his parents, “Even old people are going to this festival, so I’m going too.”

45. Even to this day many students of realized lamas will tell you that their guru had read their mind in one or another situation.

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At the festival the maras caused him to have a fatal accident while he was riding a horse. Although Darmadode had received the instructions of the transference of one's consciousness into a dead body (Tib. *trong jug*) he couldn't find a human body to enter, so he entered a pigeon's body instead and flew to the Shitavana charnel ground in India. There he transferred his consciousness into the dead body of a young Brahmin, which he then reanimated. In that new body he became known as Tibupa, because *tibu* mean "pigeon." Tibupa possessed not only the instructions he had received as Darmadode, but also possessed many instructions that he had obtained in India. Due to this, he became known as "the trunk of the Mantrayana tree."⁴⁶

Rechungpa had met Darmadode in India and was receiving instructions from him, when one day Tibupa told him to go to the market place. Rechungpa met a yogi there who said, "How sad, you are such a handsome Tibetan, but you have only seven days to live!" Rechungpa was very frightened that he was about to die and told Tibupa what the yogi had said. Tibupa said, "Don't worry, go and see Ekamatrika Siddharajni (Tib. *Machik Drupe Gyalmo*). She's a hundred and fifteen years old, but looks as if she's only sixteen. She will give you the instructions for gaining a long life."

46. Mantrayana is another name for the Vajrayana.

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Rechungpa went to this yogini and received the instructions from her and practiced for seven days. Then the Amitayus Buddha appeared to him and asked. “How long do you want to live?” “As long as I wish!” Rechungpa answered. “You can’t do that,” said Amitayus, “but you’re in your forty-fourth year now and you can live until your eighty-first year,” which was exactly how long Rechungpa lived.

Returning to our story, Rechungpa had brought Tibupa’s staff to Tibet and gave it to Milarepa when they met and then prostrated to him. Milarepa, however, did not prostrate to Rechungpa, contrary to Rechungpa’s expectation. Rechungpa asked, “What have you been doing while I was in India? How are the other yogis?” Milarepa, noticing signs of pride in Rechungpa, smiled and sang a song of realization in which he said:

I am very well, because I am free from the sickness of the five disturbing emotions that I had suffered since beginningless samsara. Abandoning distractions, I dwell alone, independent, without attachment to anyone.

I am well and happy because I live in uninhabited places that are free of worldly activities. I am well and happy because I am free of the worries of scholarship, fame, and composing texts, and can accumulate any merit I wish.

In answer to that song, Rechungpa sang of his journey to India in which he said, “The way to India was long and dangerous. Neverthe-

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less, I underwent that hardship and achieved success. I met Tibupa and Siddharajni. Also, a *yidam* appeared to me and I received the Nine Dharmas of the Formless Dakinis⁴⁷ from Tibupa, and therefore I am very happy. Now that I have met my guru again, I can offer him these Nine Dharmas of the Formless Dakinis, and so I am very happy. To dispel Rechungpa's pride, Milarepa replied with a song:

Do not boast so much. I will sing you a song, and if you think it's any good, keep it in mind.

These dharmas of the formless dakinis are the property of the dakinis. You must not go around saying that you have them; their possession should be kept a secret and passed on only to a worthy disciple.

If you teach these dharmas indiscriminately, the dakinis will be upset. Don't think your instructions are so special. If you do, your mind will turn bad.

If you give many high teachings, you will encounter an obstacle to your meditation. It is the arrogance of thinking, "I have accomplished so much" and it will result in abandoning a guru for a new one. Don't be like that.

Then Milarepa used his miraculous powers to run off at great speed, taking Tibupa's staff and Rechungpa's texts with him. Rechungpa,

47. Tilopa traveled to the heavenly realm of Uddiyana and received this practice directly from the formless wisdom dakinis in a spiritual song. See Nine Instructions of Formless Dakinis in Glossary.

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trying to catch up with him, soon became exhausted and called to him to stop by singing a song in which he said, “I have the teachings of the dakinis. Please read them. I have the deity meditation of Siddharajni, which I offer to you. I have many instructions for protection, health, and countering demons, which I offer to you. Accept them and stop for moment, I’m exhausted.” Milarepa stopped and sang a song in which he said:

For one who follows the path of the Dharma, the teachings of the formless dakinis brings neither benefit nor harm.

Tibupa has a greater connection with me than with you, and I am also a pupil of Siddharajni.

I have been many times to Tibupa’s dwelling place to take part in his feast celebrations.

What you have to tell me is of no importance.

What we need to do now is go to a solitary place in the mountains and meditate.

Rechungpa began to have negative thoughts about Milarepa, thinking, “If this had been any other lama, I would have had a great welcome party on my return from India. What kind of welcome is one old man in a cotton robe? I’m going to go back to India! My meditation practice should now be conjoined with the enjoyment of sensory pleasures.”

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Milarepa, being aware of Rechungpa's thoughts, pointed to a yak horn lying nearby and said, "Bring me that yak horn." Rechungpa thought, "My guru always says that he doesn't need anything, that he has no attachment for anything, but now he desires to possess this yak horn." He then said aloud to Milarepa, "What is the point of carrying such a useless thing? You can't eat it or wear it." Milarepa answered, "I have no attachment to it, but if I keep it, it will prove useful sometime."

They then continued walking across the great plain of Tibet that was known as Palmo Paltang. While they were in the middle of it, black clouds gathered and they were caught in a severe hailstorm. As the hailstones began to strike Rechungpa, without looking to see what Milarepa was doing, he hid under his cotton robe. As the hail began to lessen, he wondered, "What happened to my guru?" and peeked out. There was no sign of Milarepa anywhere. "Where has he gone?" Rechungpa wondered, looking all around. Then he heard Milarepa singing, but the sound of Milarepa's voice was coming from inside the yak horn. Rechungpa thought, "This is the yak horn Milarepa was carrying," and tried to pick it up, but it was so heavy he could not move it. He looked inside and saw that Milarepa was sitting inside, singing. However, Milarepa's body had not become any smaller and the yak horn had not become any larger. Milarepa sang a song:

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Rechungpa's view is like a vulture. Sometimes it's high up and sometimes it's low. Don't run about so, your robe will be soaked. You should come inside this yak horn with me. It's very nice in here.

Rechungpa is like the sun and moon, sometimes clear, and sometimes obscured. Rechungpa's conduct is like the wind, it's sometimes gentle, and sometimes brisk. Don't run around out there, come inside this yak horn. It's very nice in here.

I've never been to India. I'm just an old man, so I sit in the back end of the narrow tip of the yak horn. You've been to India and you are a great scholar, so you should sit in the wide mouth of the yak horn.

Rechungpa thought, "Well, who knows? There might be room for me in there," but no matter how hard he tried, he could not even get his hand in. Rechungpa started shivering with cold and sang into the yak horn a song in which he said, "It is true what you say about the lack of stability in my view, meditation, and conduct. But whether my robe is dry or soaked, you are my root guru, and I pray to you." At this, Milarepa came out from the yak horn and looked up into the sky. The clouds parted and the sun shone, drying Rechungpa's robe.

After sitting in this place for a little while, Milarepa said, "You didn't need to learn sorcery in India. I know how to do that. As for the Dharma, I did not go to India because I have the Six Dharmas of

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Naropa which are so profound that I am perfectly satisfied by having just them. But it is very good that you went to India and obtained the Dharmas of the Formless Dakinis since they will be needed by people in the future.

10. The Story of Gampopa

Milarepa's principal disciple, Gampopa, was known as Milarepa's sun-like pupil. The account of how Gampopa met, learned from, and practiced under Milarepa serves as an example for us all. If we can practice in the same way, we can become like Gampopa. This story is found in the 41st chapter in *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. Marpa Lotsawa had a dream that Milarepa would be one of the four "pillars," that is, one of the four main students who would preserve and transmit Marpa's lineage. Marpa also prophesied that Milarepa would have an unrivaled student who would make Marpa's lineage flourish for a long time and would benefit countless beings. Milarepa also received a prophecy from Vajrayogini, who said that he would have three pupils that would be like the sun, the moon, and the stars and that the pupil who was like the sun (closest to him) would be Gampopa. Gampopa was also prophesied by the Shakyamuni Buddha in the *King of Samadhi* sutra, in the *White Lotus of Compassion* sutra, and in other sutras where the Buddha said that there would be a physician monk in

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the land of the Himalayas who would follow the Mahayana, benefit the Buddhist teachings, and help many beings. Gampopa is also known as Dagpo Lharje in Tibetan, which means the “Physician from Dagpo.”

Gampopa combined the teachings of the Kadampa tradition — one of the eight lineages of Tibetan Buddhism — with the teachings of Milarepa. So Gampopa’s lineage, called the Dagpo Kagyu, contains both an introductory path for beginners from the Kadampa tradition and the profound path of the Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa for more advanced practitioners. From this lineage of vast and profound instructions there have been many exceptional siddhas.

From about the age of fifteen, Gampopa learned many practices. Since his father was a doctor, Gampopa also studied medicine. He married a beautiful woman, but she became very sick. Even though his examination of her indicated that her vital physical elements were exhausted, she still did not die, clinging onto life. Gampopa decided that she must be clinging onto life simply out of attachment to something and said to her, “There is nowhere that is free of death. Give up your attachment to this life. If you are attached to the land, I will offer it to a temple. If you are attached to possessions, I will use them to sponsor virtuous activities.”

She answered, “I don’t have any attachment to land or possessions because the things of samsara have no essence, but instead I want

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you to practice the Dharma diligently.” He promised her that he would, and his wife died. In accordance with his promise, he left home to follow the Dharma. He first went to Penpo, a place east of Lhasa, where there were many masters of the Kadampa tradition. There he took monastic ordination and received the name Sonam Rinchen (precious merit). He studied many sutra teachings, such as the *Mahayana Sutra Lamkara* and the *Prajnaparamita*. He studied many tantras such as the Guhyasamaja tantra. He also received the general Kadampa teachings on impermanence, bodhichitta, Sending and Receiving Practice (Tib. *tonglen*), and many other instructions from numerous lamas.

He practiced these instructions and developed great wisdom, compassion, faith, and diligence. He was able to reduced his disturbing emotions and became an excellent monk. During the day, he received teachings and contemplated them, and during the night he meditated and attained many good signs. For example, he had no insects on his body, and he could spend four or five days in a state of bliss in which he did not eat and felt no hunger.

One day Gampopa had a vision in his meditation of a dark-skinned yogi dressed in a cotton robe who put his hand on his head and spat upon him, and then his meditation and insight improved. He told the other monks of his experience but they said, “You are a good monk, so a vision of a yogi must be the manifestation of a gyalpo

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spirit.⁴⁸ You must go to the abbot and request the empowerment of the protector Acala⁴⁹ so that Acala's blessing will remove this obstacle to your practice." Gampopa did as his friends advised and recited mantras and prayers, but nevertheless the visions of the yogi became more frequent. Gampopa thought, "Surely this can't be a delusion caused by demons."

At that time Milarepa was teaching his pupils in the Boto Chipuk Cave at Tramar. His older pupils said, "You are now quite old. If you leave us for a Buddha realm, we will need a regent to remove our obstacles and make our practice progress, and have someone our patrons can make offerings to so that they can accumulate merit. We need someone to whom you have transmitted the entirety of your instructions, otherwise our lineage will have no future."

Milarepa answered, "I will examine my dreams tonight and tomorrow morning you should have all my students assemble here." The next morning Milarepa told them, "There is an exceptional disciple who can take care of my students and spread the Buddha's teachings. He is a Kadampa monk who is coming from the west. I dreamt last night that this pupil brought an empty crystal vase and that I filled it to the brim with the entire contents of a golden vase. This is a

48. One of the eight kinds of heavenly spirits in samsara, with *gyalpo* meaning "king" in Tibetan. They can be malevolent or be converted to become protectors of the Dharma.

49. Acala means "immovable" and is a protector of the Dharma. He is usually depicted as holding a sword and a lasso.

10. The Story of Gampopa

good dream foretelling the future growth of the Buddha's teachings." Then Milarepa sang a song, which contains many poetical images, but the principal meaning is summarized in the final verse:

*We practice the teachings of Naropa and Maitripa.
You all know that they are very profound.
If they are not meditated upon, there will be no profound result.
But if we do meditate upon them, we can
gain the full profound result.
These profound instructions were obtained in
India by my root guru, Marpa Lotsawa.
They are the instructions that Milarepa practices. In the future I
will transmit these to one who is worthy.*

At this time, Gampopa was circumambulating the monastery and he saw three beggars who were, in fact, emanations of Milarepa. While Gampopa was wondering whether to speak to them, he heard one say, "If only we had good clothes and good food so that our stomachs were completely stuffed, we would be so happy."

Another of the beggars said, "It's not good to wish for food. If I could have my wish fulfilled, I would become like the Lord of Yogins, Milarepa, whose food is meditation, whose clothing is a single cotton robe, and who is warmed by the heat of tummo. He meditates day and night on Mahamudra and when he wants to go somewhere, he just flies through the sky. I wish I could be with him, abandoning

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all care for this life and practice just as he does. And if that is not possible, I would wish to just visit him sometime to practice the Dharma under him. That is the kind of wish you should make.”

Upon hearing this, Gampopa felt overwhelming faith in Milarepa and thought about him well into the night. When he woke the next morning, he prostrated himself in the direction of Milarepa and prayed to him. He then invited the beggars into his room and gave them good clothes, food, and drink. He said to them, “Yesterday you were talking about someone named Milarepa. If you can take me to him, I will give you half of all I own. And if you also practice the Dharma, it will be very beneficial for you.”

Two of the beggars said that they did not know where Milarepa was, but the older beggar said, “I know where he is. I can take you there.” Gampopa made offerings and recited prayers, and when he slept that night, he dreamt that he was blowing a long horn very loudly and as a result many humans and animals gathered around him. Then a woman came to him carrying a drum and a bowl of milk. She said, “Beat this drum for the humans and give this milk to the animals.” When Gampopa wondered, “How can I give milk to all these animals when I only have one bowl?” the woman said, “If you drink the milk, all these animals will get the milk in the future.”

The humans in the dream were the followers of the Foundation Vehicle who could not practice one-pointedly. Therefore, their minds

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must be trained through the gradual path of the Kadampas. The animals were the practitioners to whom he could transmit Milarepa's instructions on Mahamudra. In order to do so, he would have to first practice these instructions himself and then he would be able to transmit them to others, greatly benefiting them.

Gampopa, with the old beggar as his guide, set off to find Milarepa, but halfway through their journey the beggar fell ill and said, "I can't go on any further and anyway I don't know exactly where Milarepa is. Carry on by yourself and you are sure to find someone who will take you to him." Gampopa continued on his own, but when he had nearly reached his destination, he became too weak to go any further due to a lack of food. He could only pray, "May I meet Milarepa, if not in this life, then in the next!" That day a Kadampa monk happened to be passing by and came to Gampopa's aid. The monk asked him where he was going and Gampopa said, "I'm going to see Milarepa." The monk said, "I'm going to see him too." So, they travelled on together and reached the place where Milarepa was staying.

Gampopa met one of Milarepa's female patrons who said to him, "You must have come from central Tibet to meet Milarepa. I know this because Milarepa has already said that you are coming." Gampopa thought, "I must be a worthy pupil if he knows that I am coming," and became somewhat proud. But then Milarepa refused

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to see Gampopa for two weeks to eliminate his pride. At least, that is what is described in the text. But since Gampopa was a special being who was prophesied in the sutras by the Buddha, it is not possible that he could have been subject to pride. Gampopa must have manifested this pride in order to demonstrate to future generations that pride is something to be avoided on meeting the guru.

When Gampopa finally met Milarepa he offered him sixteen ounces of gold in a mandala offering. He also requested that Milarepa tell his life-story. Milarepa sat with his eyes half-closed for a little while and then took a pinch of gold from the center of the mandala offering and scattered it into the air, saying, “I offer this to you, Marpa Lotsawa.” Milarepa had been drinking beer from a skull cup. He handed this to Gampopa, saying, “Drink this.” Gampopa hesitated,⁵⁰ but Milarepa said, “Don’t think so much, drink!” Gampopa thought, “This lama is omniscient. He knows whatever is in my mind. So, this must be a very auspicious thing to do,” and he drank the beer to the last drop, which was indeed very auspicious. Milarepa said, “That you had faith in me and have come here is a wonderful thing, so I shall tell you the story of my life.” Milarepa then sang a song:

*Naropa and Maitripa’s instructions contain all that is taught by
the buddhas in the three times. Marpa possessed these instruc-*

50. Gampopa was a fully ordained monk and he would have broken his vows by drinking the alcohol.

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tions. I felt faith in him on just hearing his name and I received all these instructions from him.

Marpa told me, “This is the age of degeneration; life is short and uncertain. There are many causes of death, therefore do not make the error in believing the instructions are the mere acquisition of knowledge because practice is their essence.” Due to the kindness of the guru, that has been my view.

I meditated upon the fear of death; I meditated with diligence in caves; my meditation transformed my thoughts and wrong views into merit.

The three poisons of anger, desire, and ignorance appear to be the powerful causes for the accumulation of negative karma. But when their essence is seen to be emptiness, these poisons are recognized to be the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya.

The blessings, experiences, and realizations of Naropa and Maitripa are transmitted through the lineage to the worthy student. I shall give you their profound instructions. Practice them correctly and spread the Buddha’s teachings for the benefit beings.

I have no need for the gold you have offered me. Gold does not agree with this old man. If you want to practice the Dharma properly, observe my conduct and my practice, and do as I do.

The monk who had accompanied Gampopa had come to receive a blessing from Milarepa. Milarepa asked the monk to offer him

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everything that he had in order to receive a blessing. The monk said that he didn't have anything to give. But Milarepa said, "You have a lot of gold concealed about your body, so your statement that you don't have anything is truly wonderful. If you have no faith, you are incapable of receiving a blessing. If you have no faith, the instructions that you receive will not benefit you. Your inner thoughts are to go to Nepal to do business, so that is the best thing for you to do. I will pray that you meet no obstacles."

Gampopa thought, "This lama knows what people think. It is impossible to deceive him. I will have to have good control over my mind and think carefully before I ask him anything. He truly is a buddha." Milarepa asked Gampopa, "Have you received any empowerments? What instructions have you been given? What practices have you done?" Gampopa answered all of Milarepa's questions and described his success in meditation, but Milarepa just laughed and said, "You can't get oil by grinding sand; you have to use mustard seeds. These empowerments you have received are useless for seeing the true nature of your mind. If you meditate on my Subtle Heat instructions, you will see the true nature of your mind." Milarepa then gave Gampopa the Vajrayogini empowerment, using a *sindhura*⁵¹ mandala.

51. *Sindhura* (Skt.) is a red or deep orange substance often used in tantric rituals.

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Gampopa had good experiences and realizations, and had many questions about the view, meditation, and conduct. He asked Milarepa to explain them, and in answer, Milarepa sang a spiritual song describing the view, meditation, conduct, commitment and result, in terms of the true nature of phenomena as the basis of the path.

In the first verse Milarepa said, “The ultimate view is to look at your own mind.” What does Milarepa mean by this? If we have never practiced, that may seem a simple thing to do, but here Milarepa means the ultimate view in Vajrayana practice. The sutra tradition teaches emptiness and selflessness that is developed through careful logical analysis of searching vainly for the self from the crown of the head to one’s toenails. This conceptual reasoning develops conviction that the body and all phenomena have no reality, and this becomes the understanding of emptiness. In the sutra path this is called “the path of inference.” The Vajrayana path, however, does not use deduction, but uses the direct perception of emptiness to perceive the true nature of phenomena. So, it is called “the path of direct experience.”

The true nature cannot be seen directly in outer phenomena, but it can be seen by looking⁵² into our own mind and finding that the mind cannot be found and therefore is empty. The mind is the embodiment of the essence of emptiness, but throughout beginningless

52. The word “looking” is used here to mean direct, non-conceptual examination of mind. It contrasts with analyzing or examining mind using logic.

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time we have never looked at our own mind. The emptiness of the mind is not just a voidness, it has luminous clarity.

It is a mistake to try to find emptiness outside the mind. To illustrate this, there is a story of a man who had a jewel inset into his forehead. Whenever he was tired, the skin on his head sagged. One day when he was very exhausted, the skin sagged and completely covered the jewel. The man felt his forehead and thought he had lost the jewel, and ran around anxiously trying to find it, only becoming more tired in the process, making the jewel become even more deeply hidden. In the same way, Milarepa says, “To search for the true nature anywhere other than our own mind is like a blind monster looking for gold.”

Milarepa next described meditation to Gampopa in a single line of the song, “The ultimate practice is not to consider mental dullness and mental excitement as faults.”⁵³ A beginner of meditation, of course, does need to work on eliminating dullness and excitability in meditation, but the nature of lethargy and excitability is the nature of the mind, and this nature never changes. If we perceive these two qualities of mind as obstacles or faults, we will not be able to perceive the essence of the mind. Therefore, we should not

53. The two main obstacles to meditation, especially Shamatha meditation, is when the mind has a great number of thoughts and feelings rising up called “excitement” (Tib. *gōpa*) or the mind is sluggish, dull, sleepy-like, which is called “dullness” or “torpor” (Tib. *jingwa*).

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attempt to eliminate them, because this would be, as Milarepa says, “as pointless as lighting a candle in daylight.”

Milarepa described conduct in one line, “The ultimate action is to cease to accept and reject.” The usual instruction on Buddhist conduct is to accept what is positive and to reject what is negative. In terms of the true nature there should be no adoption of good actions or abandonment of negative actions. Whatever arises in the mind has the ultimate nature of the luminous clarity and emptiness, so we should not think, “This is good and has to be cultivated” or, “this is bad and has to be rejected.” If we attempt to adopt and reject, we will be like “a fly struggling in a cobweb,” which only binds itself tighter the more it struggles.

Milarepa then describes commitment in one line, “The ultimate discipline is to rest in the ultimate view.” Discipline is usually made by promising to keep all our commitments and vows. But remaining in the realization of the true nature of our mind is truly keeping the commitment. If we strive to maintain a commitment that is other than working with the mind, we will always fail. It is just as Milarepa says, “We can’t stop water’s natural propensity to flow downward.”

Next Milarepa describes the accomplishment or result of our practice. “The ultimate accomplishment is full conviction in our mind.” The ultimate result is the true nature of the mind manifesting. If

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we seek a result that does not already exist, that would be like, as Milarepa says, “a frog jumping up into the sky,” inevitably it will fall back to the ground. In summary, the result can only be found in the mind itself.

The Buddha’s wisdom is described as “the sudden result,” even in the sutra tradition, because the wisdom spontaneously appears as soon as the disturbing emotions are eliminated. In the Vajrayana tradition, the result is described as the manifestation of the true nature of the mind. This nature is primordially present but unrecognized by ordinary beings. Once the nature of the mind is recognized, the ultimate result is attained.

In the final verse Milarepa describes the guru, “The ultimate guru is one’s mind.” On the relative level we follow the root guru’s instructions. On the ultimate level the guru is our mind. If we can look at and question our own mind, we will receive the instructions from the ultimate guru. If we seek a guru that is outside of our mind, it is as Milarepa says, “trying to leave one’s mind,” which is impossible. All appearances are nothing other than our mind, so there is no greater guru than the true nature of the mind.

On hearing this song, Gampopa felt great faith. He then meditated with diligence, practicing Subtle Heat meditation. On the first night, his body filled with warmth and bliss. At dawn he fell asleep briefly and when he woke up his body was cold as stone. After seven days

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of meditation, he had a vision of all five buddhas of the five buddha families. He thought this was very important and told Milarepa. Milarepa said, “If you look at the moon and you press on your eyes, you see two moons. In the same way, the particular movement of subtle winds in your body caused your experience, which was neither good nor bad. So just carry on with your meditation.”

11. The Song of Victory Over the Four Maras

The 60th chapter of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* describes Milarepa's victory over the maras. The Buddha taught that there were four maras: the divine mara, the disturbing emotion mara, the aggregate mara, and the mara of the Lord of Death. The maras cause obstacles to our practice, bringing us suffering and preventing us from attaining liberation.

The first divine mara is traditionally portrayed as a beautiful and attractive woman. This mara represents the attachment to the sensory pleasures of samsara, which seem very beautiful at the time they are experienced, but from the ultimate point of view, these attachments lead us astray and create an obstacle to our liberation. Therefore, it is called the divine mara.

The second mara of defilement is the attachment to a self which leads to the three major disturbing emotions of ignorance, anger,

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and desire. When these emotions appear in our mind, they cause the accumulation of negative karma, which results in future suffering. This mara is traditionally portrayed as an old, weak Brahmin who doesn't have long to live, because disturbing emotions are delusion without any solid basis and therefore easy to eliminate. As soon as the truth of how things are is realized, these delusions cease to exist.

The third mara is the five aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*) of form, sensation, recognition, mental events, and consciousnesses which are the mental processes that help create samsara. Until the true nature of these aggregates is realized, we suffer. This mara is traditionally portrayed as a physically strong person, because the skandhas can be actually seen, but their true nature is more difficult to realize than the disturbing emotions.

The fourth mara is death itself. At death we must leave the multitude of activities and attachments of our life, and this is usually very frightening. So, death will be a cause of suffering for as long as we remain in samsara. This mara is traditionally portrayed as black and terrifying because it creates great fear of impermanence.

The way to eliminate these four maras is to practice the Dharma and to realize the true nature of phenomena. In this chapter Milarepa sings of his own victory over the maras, beginning with a spiritual song that describes the need to escape from samsara. After that, Milarepa was actually blown over a precipice by a gust of wind and

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impaled below on a tree. His pupils were mortified until Milarepa showed them he was unharmed, without any wound at all. Milarepa then sang them a song of realization:

*The wind made me fall,
and an inanimate tree harmed my body
causing unendurable agony.
However, the dakinis healed me from all injury.*

Another time, Milarepa's pupils were with him on top of a very high rock when he fell off. They thought he must have died and passed into nirvana, so they went down to recover his body. But, when they reached the bottom, Milarepa was still alive and laughing at them. When they asked him what had happened, Milarepa replied with a song that uses the image of a vulture spreading its wings.

*When the vulture of the union of emptiness and luminous clarity
spreads its wings, it does not fly using only one of them.*

*When we meditate on the wisdom of the emptiness of phe-
nomena alone, that is not enough.*

*When we meditate on the wisdom of clarity alone, that is not
enough to cause the realization of the true nature of phenomena.*

*The essence of luminous clarity is emptiness. Emptiness, the
unreality of phenomena, is not a voidness but has luminous
clarity. This then is "the union of empty space and wisdom."*

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*The realization of this union will enable us to reach liberation
from samsara.*

*The flight from the peak of Tramar (red rock) and the landing
in the ravine below was a joke I played upon you, my followers.*

Milarepa explained that this joke demonstrated the mara of death. The wings of the union of wisdom and emptiness realizes the true nature of phenomena so that there is freedom from the obscurations caused by the disturbing emotions and the obscurations to knowledge. When liberation from both samsara and nirvana occurs, there is the peace of the emptiness united with perfect bliss.

Another time, Milarepa and his disciples were at the foot of a rocky cliff. One of his disciples said to him, “You shouldn’t stand here, it’s too dangerous.” But Milarepa did stay, and a little later there was a rock slide. Milarepa stared and pointed at the falling rocks and they immediately scattered into different directions without harming him. His pupils returned, certain that Milarepa had been injured. When they arrived, he sang them a song:

This yogi’s body is like a flower.

*The avalanche of rocks was like a murderer
wanting to kill a flower.*

*A dakini appeared on my right and left so
that the rocks did not fall upon me.*

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I am not afraid of the maras, they could never cause an obstacle to me.

The pupils asked, “You have been in an avalanche, fallen off a precipice, and been impaled upon a tree, without being harmed. How is this possible?” Milarepa replied:

My realization of the true nature of phenomena has made my body as insubstantial as a rainbow and has transformed my defilements into wisdoms.

My certain knowledge that all phenomena is unborn has blown away the eight worldly dharmas.⁵⁴

This is a sign that the four maras are ashamed, have lost their confidence, and are powerless.

His pupils then asked, “Does this mean that you have conquered the four maras?” and Milarepa replied, “Yes, I have had a victory over the maras. For the next thirteen succession members of my lineage, the maras will not be able to cause any obstacles to its practitioners.”

An advanced tantric pupil arrived from central Tibet and Seben Repa, Milarepa’s disciple, asked him what siddhas were in that region. The tantrika replied, “There are many siddhas there and they are

54. The eight worldly dharmas are being concerned with gain and loss, happiness and suffering, praise and criticism, and fame and obscurity.

11. The Song of Victory Over the Four Maras

served by non-human beings.” Milarepa said, “That doesn’t make anyone a siddha.” Seben Repa then asked Milarepa, “Do non-human beings serve you?” Milarepa replied that they did, and sang a song:

The food of samadhi served to me is inexhaustible, like the treasury of space.

I am free of thoughts and feelings of hunger and thirst.

This is a service rendered to me by dakinis, but I do not think of it as a siddhi.

It is only an experience within meditation, not the ultimate siddhi⁵⁵ of realizing the true nature of phenomena.

The tantrika said that there were masters in the central region that had seen the face of the yidam (the meditational deity). But Milarepa said, “Just seeing the yidam’s face is of no benefit.” Then he sang:

*Due to my meditation on the instructions
that I have received from Marpa,
I have seen the nature of the mind. This dispelled
the darkness of ignorance from my mind.
All the dakinis revealed their faces to me, but there are no faces*

55. The ultimate or supreme siddhi is the stable realization of the radiant clarity or clear light nature of mind and all reality, which we know as complete and perfect enlightenment or buddhahood. The relative siddhis are such qualities as loving kindness, compassion, intelligence, the wisdom of insight, spiritual power, protection, the removal of obstacles, good health, longevity, wealth, and magnetism, and so on. — Thrangu Rinpoche

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*in the true nature, which contains no objects of perception.
I have seen the yidam's face, but only the
root guru's teachings are important.
I have attained the general siddhis, but the realization of the true
nature transcends them.*

The tantrika then asked, “Can you give me an example of what you mean by “Seeing the nature of the mind?” Milarepa replied with a song:

*The mind has no true reality and therefore
is unborn and unceasing.
In every instant the mind gives birth to thoughts.
But if you see the nature of the mind, you know that
it has no reality and has never been born.
You cannot find the mind's location and so it is unborn.
There is no example that can be given to depict the
unborn mind, because nothing resembles it. It has no birth
or cessation. Only what is born comes to an end.
When you realize the nature of the mind, you know that nothing
can serve as an example for it, except for the mind itself.
Then the example and the meaning will be the same.*

Milarepa is saying that you can't describe the nature of the mind in the way that you can describe an outer object as being white or red. You can't say that the nature of the mind exists or that it

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doesn't exist. The mind is inconceivable, being beyond deduction and beyond the scope of speech. But, due to the blessing of the root and lineage gurus, you can perceive it for yourself.

Questions

Rinpoche, my mother is quite old and I don't think she will live much longer. She isn't a Buddhist and I'm wondering if there is anything I can say or do that would help her to go through the experience of dying.

It is beneficial to have good thoughts and be in a good state of mind just before dying. People dying can be depressed and sad thinking, "Why is this terrible thing happening to me?" But we should not think like that. Rather we should think that this happens to everyone, to all living beings. It's like being on a large highway that everyone is on and thinking that I and all beings are going to die and so I should accept being on this highway. So, it is very good and beneficial to help create a stable and calm mind at the time of death.

We should think this ourselves and we should also advise others to think this way. We should say to that person, "It is time to be calm and steady, to keep a positive outlook, and not to become sad and depressed. Think that this happens to everyone and so you should have a good outlook in this process." That should help the person not to be sad and depressed.

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Also, reciting prayers can be good whether you recite the prayers verbally or not. If there is a fear of death, whether the person is a Buddhist or not, it is good to do a prayer like Buddhists pray to the Three Jewels or Christians pray to Jesus, depending on the religion of dying person.

Part Two:

MILAREPA'S THIRTY
INSTRUCTIONS

Editor's Introduction to Part Two

*Whatever joy there is in this world
All comes from desiring others to be happy.
And whatever suffering there is in this world
All comes from desiring myself to be happy.*

*But what need is there to say much more?
Ordinary beings work for their own benefit and
The buddhas work for the benefit of others.
Just look at the difference between them!*

— *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (verses 129-130)

The second section of Milarepa's *Wisdom* is a commentary on a single spiritual song called "The Thirty Instructions of Dharma Practice" that Milarepa gave to his student Rechungpa. These thirty points are direct instructions that every Buddhist should follow. This teaching also comes from *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*.

In this spiritual song Milarepa gives direct advice to Rechungpa on how to correct his behavior and lead the life of a yogi.

Thrangu Rinpoche has published a biography *Rechungpa: A Biography of Milarepa's Disciple*. This biography is quite interesting because three times Rechungpa did the very opposite of what his root guru, Milarepa, told him to do. Even with this defiant behavior, he was still able to achieve enlightenment. While Milarepa's other close student, Gampopa, maintained his vows and established the first Kagyu monastery and became a major Karma Kagyu lineage holder, Rechungpa's teachings were preserved by another Kagyu lineage and, as already mentioned, some of Milarepa's spiritual songs that did not make it into Tsang Nyön Heruka's collection but were persevered by followers of Rechungpa.

This particular teachings on the Thirty Instructions were given by Thrangu Rinpoche in Vancouver in 2015 with David Karma Choephel translating.



The cave that Milarepa was meditating in when the King of Mön sent his emissary to fetch Milarepa was standing until 1905, when an earthquake destroyed the cave. A small shrine was built next to the collapsed cave and this is a photo of the inside of the shrine taken in 1986. Since then Thrangu Rinpoche has bought the land where the cave stood and has erected the large Sekhar Retreat Center, including a modern building modeled after the nine-story Milarepa tower with each floor having a three-dimensional mandala of an important practice.

Photo courtesy of Clark Johnson.

The Root Text: The Thirty Instructions of Milarepa

1. Son, for reliance, the jewels are excellent, he said.
2. Rely on faith as your friend, he said.
3. Concepts are great demons, he said.
4. Pride is a great mara, he said.
5. Slander is a great negative action, he said.
6. Jealousy is harmful on the path, he said.
7. Liquor brings one to ruin, he said.
8. If you don't confess misdeeds through the four powers,
You'll wander among the six realms of beings, he said.
9. If you don't make efforts in the accumulation of merit,
You won't attain the happiness of liberation, he said.

10. If you don't abandon the ten unvirtuous behaviors,
You will experience the sufferings of the lower realms, he said.
11. If you don't meditate on emptiness and compassion,
You won't attain ultimate buddhahood, he said.
12. If you want to attain buddhahood in this lifetime,
Look at your mind without distraction, he said
13. For the ultimate condensed meaning of the tantras,
Meditate on the Six Dharmas, he said.
14. For the ultimate condensed meaning of the instructions,
Meditate on Secret Mantra, the path of means, he said.
15. If you wish for respect, renown, and wealth,
You'll be delivered to the mouth of Mara, he said.
16. If you praise yourself and disparage others,
You will fall off a frightful precipice, he said.
17. If you don't tame the elephant of mind,
Then you'll be deceived by the key instruction's words, he said.
18. To rouse bodhichitta is the greatest harvest, he said.
19. The view of birthlessness is excellent, he said.
20. For practice, the path of means is profound, he said.
21. Apply it with the nadis and pranas, he said.

22. Recognize coemergence, he said.
 23. Rely upon a genuine lord, he said.
 24. Don't let your life be carried away by distraction, he said.
 25. Look at the unborn nature of your mind, he said.
 26. Don't hope for happiness in samsara, he said.
 27. Don't see suffering as a fault, he said.
 28. If you realize the mind, that is buddhahood, he said.
 29. There is no need for many elaborations, he said.
 30. There are no more profound points than these, he said.
- Put them into practice, he said.

12. Introduction to the Thirty Instructions

The topic of this chapter is a song of realization by Milarepa who was speaking to his student Rechungpa, giving him instructions on how to increase and improve his realization. The instructions that Milarepa gave Rechungpa were instructions that Milarepa had received from his own lama, Marpa the Translator. Milarepa begins by saying, “What are these instructions that I teach? They’re the ones that Marpa taught me.” He emphasizes this by saying “he said” at the end of each of these thirty instructions.

There are two major texts about Milarepa: *The Life of Milarepa* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. *The Life of Milarepa* primarily discusses the activities that Milarepa engaged in over the course of his life. And *The Hundred Thousand Songs* is a collection of the spiritual songs of Milarepa. Milarepa went to many different places and taught many different students. For his teachings to be easily understood by students, he taught them in spiritual songs which

12. Introduction to the Thirty Instructions

were in verse, and he sang them with melodies. Milarepa's name was originally Töpaḡa or "Joy to Hear" which referred to the lovely voice he had and the beautiful songs he sang. Milarepa taught the Dharma in these songs and they were all collected in *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* which contains sixty-one chapters, with each chapter containing about a dozen spiritual songs.

Now, this particular spiritual song was sung in the Drakya Dorje Dzong, or Drakya Dorje Fortress. Milarepa meditated in many places and visited Drakya Dorje Fortress twice in his life. The first time he went to Drakya Dorje Fortress he met Rechungpa. During this first visit, Milarepa was practicing Vajrayogini, his yidam. That night he had a dream in which a dakini came to him and told him that he would have one major disciple who was like the sun and a second major disciple who was like the moon. Additionally, he would have twenty-three more disciples who were like the stars, making up the twenty-five main disciples of Milarepa. He would also have a hundred disciples who would achieve the mental state "beyond return"⁵⁶ and many more who would also accomplish the practice of Subtle Heat. There would be a thousand more disciples who would enter the Buddhist path, and there would be untold numbers who will have turned away from the lower realms. This prophecy was made during his first visit to Drakya Dorje Fortress.

56. "Beyond return" means the practitioners who have achieved such a high state of realization along the bodhisattva levels, that they did not have to return to the samsaric world unless they wanted to.

12. Introduction to the Thirty Instructions

The first time Milarepa visited Drakya Dorje Fortress he met Rechungpa and accepted him as his student. The second time he visited Drakya Dorje Fortress he gave Rechungpa these Thirty Instructions. The reason for giving him these instructions was that Milarepa had previously given Rechungpa some instructions to practice and said to him, “You need to practice these and practice these completely.” And so Rechungpa practiced the instructions that Milarepa had given him and developed realization. He then told Milarepa, “Oh, I developed good realization. I practiced well and I realized everything completely.” Milarepa replied, “You still need to be careful in your practice.” So, he sang him a spiritual song and Rechungpa replied, “You have many wonderful instructions. Please teach them all to me.” In reply, Milarepa said, “There are thirty direct instructions that my own root lama, Marpa, had taught me. When I practiced them, I achieved a very good result. And if you practice these thirty instructions, you will also achieve a good result.” And so, he sang this particular song of realization to Rechungpa on the Thirty Instructions.

If we follow these thirty instructions, it will allow our practice to go well and be productive. Milarepa thought, “These instructions were very beneficial to me, so if I teach them to my students, they will also be beneficial to them.” Milarepa then compiled the instructions and taught them to Rechungpa so that his Dharma practice would go properly. Thinking that, he also taught them to his other students.

13. The Foundation of Virtuous Behavior

The life of Rechungpa⁵⁷

Rechungpa was born in 1084 CE in the town of Rala in the region of Gungthang, and was named Dorje Drak. When he was quite young, his father died. His mother then married his uncle, as was the custom in Tibet. This was economically very hard on the family so Rechungpa, being quite skilled in reading puja texts, would go around reciting texts for people and receive offerings in return. He would then give these offerings to his mother and uncle to supplement the family income.

In his first encounter with Milarepa when Rechungpa was eleven years old, he noticed many people gathered outside a cave in the valley. Rechungpa went to this cave and heard Milarepa inside sing-

57. We have taken a few paragraphs from Thrangu Rinpoche's *Rechungpa: A Biography of Milarepa's Disciple* to give some background on Rechungpa.

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ing a spiritual song. Just hearing this song caused such a change in him that he spontaneously felt great faith in Milarepa. Rechungpa entered the cave and Milarepa was very delighted to see him and began teaching him the Dharma right away. Milarepa also made a prophecy that in the future Rechungpa would become a great meditator. Hearing this, people said to him, “Oh, how good it would be if you could stay with Milarepa.”

Rechungpa then began telling Milarepa about all the hardships he was undergoing and Milarepa replied, “Actually, it seems like you suffered just a little bit. I personally experienced much greater suffering than that, but I was finally able to meet the great teacher Marpa and receive the oral instructions from him. I then performed great austerities in my practice and finally I was able to free myself from all suffering. You too could receive these teachings and practice them, and by practicing them, you will be able to attain complete fruition.” Rechungpa did not return to his mother and uncle, but stayed with Milarepa receiving the *upasaka* (lay vows), the bodhisattva vows, and the Vajrayogini empowerments. He then began practicing these and had a very positive experience.

Rechungpa’s uncle and mother became extremely angry because he had stayed with Milarepa instead of returning to them. They kidnapped Rechungpa by tying him up and taking him away. They told him, “If you are not going to work reciting for people, then

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you must work in the fields.” So, Rechungpa worked in the fields doing very hard manual labor, and through this work he contracted leprosy, a disease of the nagas.⁵⁸ At that point, Rechungpa’s other maternal uncle took great pity on him and said, “Previously, you were like the son of a king, but now you have this great affliction. I will take care of you and supply you with food and clothing.” His mother and stepfather, however, said to him, “You shouldn’t stay here at all. In fact, why don’t you just leave the country and go somewhere else.” So, Rechungpa went to stay with Milarepa who was living in a cave. While staying there some Indian yogis saw his leprosy and said, “We were planning to go to the Five Peaked Mountain in China. But instead, we will return to India and help you find a very special guru who will be able to cure you of this illness.” When Rechungpa asked Milarepa for permission to go to India, Milarepa was preparing for a strict retreat. Milarepa gave Rechungpa permission to go. Before leaving, Rechungpa helped Milarepa build a wall across the opening of his retreat cave to seal him in for his retreat.

The thirty instructions of Milarepa

Rechungpa was eventually cured of leprosy and now returning to his second visit to Milarepa, he asked Milarepa, “Please give me the

58. Even today Tibetans believe that nagas, who are spirits who are very territorial, will punish people who violate their space by usually giving them skin diseases.

instructions of your guru Marpa,” Milarepa then gave him these thirty instructions.

Instruction 1

Son, for reliance, the jewels are excellent, he said.

The reason Milarepa considered Marpa so important, and why he was so kind to Rechungpa, is in the song itself: “Son, for reliance the jewels are excellent.” Marpa tells Rechungpa that the jewels are excellent to rely upon, or we could say, be a support to practice. They are a good foundation for us to have faith and devotion in, objects for us to pray to, supplicate, and make aspirations towards. This line begins with “son” because he is speaking directly to Rechungpa and the other students who were present. Milarepa is speaking not only to those who are directly present, but also indirectly to those of us who were not actually present by saying “son,”⁵⁹ or you could say “child.”

Now, what is meant by the word “jewels?” Many different religions have a “jewel” or someone they worship, like God for the Christians, or the various Indian religions at the time of the Buddha with the jewels being Brahma, Indra, and various other gods. Many religions consider that these beings created the world. But in Buddhism, we

59. Thrangu Rinpoche has said many times that this word “son” should be translated as “son or daughter” because there is no difference between the mind of a man and the mind of a woman.

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don't talk about a god like that. Instead, we talk about the Three Jewels, which did not create the world. Rather they teach us the appropriate way so that we can progress down the true path. For that reason, the Three Jewels have power and are a support for us. These Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha. If we rely upon them, that is very good. So, the first line tells us to rely on these Three Jewels.

Generally, in Buddhism we talk about the Three Jewels, but in the Vajrayana path, we talk about the six sources of refuge. The six refuges are the Three Jewels and the three roots — the guru who is the root of blessings, the yidam who is the root of activity, and the Dharma protectors who are the root of protection.

Now, we can't actually meet the Buddha face-to-face, so we can't receive blessings from him directly. We might then think that we are not very fortunate because we are unable to meet the Buddha and receive instructions directly from him. This is not so, because through the kindness of the root and the lineage gurus, we can practice the Dharma just the same as if we had met the Buddha and heard the instructions directly from him. Because we are able to receive the blessings of the Dharma from the gurus and practice the Dharma, these gurus are the root of the blessings.

It is said that there are 84,000 different Dharma teachings. Do we need to practice all 84,000? No, because if we receive the instruc-

tion for doing a meditation on a single yidam deity and practice the creation stage and the completion stage of that deity, we will be able to achieve the full result of that practice. Because of this, we go for refuge to the root of accomplishment, the yidam deities.

When we practice, we normally go for refuge to the sangha. But the sangha comprises those we can meet directly and also those we are not able to meet directly, namely, those who are in non-human form — the *dakinis* and the various Dharma protectors. If we supplicate and make offerings to them, whether we are doing Dharma practice or worldly activities, they will gather all the necessary materials that we need and dispel all of the adversity. Thus, we have six sources of refuge — the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. We should take these six supports and go for refuge in them, and as Milarepa said, “Son, for reliance, the jewels are excellent,” our practice will go very well.

Instruction 2

Rely on faith as your friend, he said.

The second instruction says, “Rely on faith as your friend” because to receive help from the Three Jewels, we primarily need to have faith. There are three different kinds of faith: sincere faith, faith of longing, and faith of belief. If we have confidence and believe that the Three Roots and the Three Jewels will free us from samsara, and

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that they are unfailing and will not deceive us, then this is sincere faith and faith of longing. The third faith of belief, is believing and having confidence that the Three Jewels will not deceive us. This is the faith that we must also have. The reason we should have faith is that faith is one of the five pure mental faculties. The five pure mental faculties are mentioned in the Prayer for Rebirth in Sukhavati (Tib. *Dewachen*) which ends with the mantra TAY YA TA PEN TSEN DRI YA A WA BO DHA NAYA SO HA The Sanskrit phrase PEN TSEN DRI YA refers the five faculties, with Sanskrit word *pensen* meaning “five,” and *driya* meaning “faculties.” Because of the power of these five pure faculties, we should be able to accomplish a high aspiration, such as being reborn in the pure realm of Sukhavati.

In order to achieve the ultimate result of buddhahood, we need to rely upon these five pure faculties. In our impure world, we have the five sensory faculties — the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body sensations. It is because of these sense faculties that we are able to use our bodies to do worldly activities. But, to achieve liberation, we need to use the five pure faculties of faith, diligence, mindfulness, samadhi, and prajna. Because of faith, we will have diligence, and that will help us to develop our mindfulness. With good mindfulness, we will be able to develop one-pointed (samadhi) meditation. Because of samadhi, we are able to develop wisdom (Skt. *prajna*). So, Milarepa says, “For a friend , we need to rely on faith” and apply it in our practice.

Instruction 3

Concepts are great demons, he said.

The third instruction is that we need to eliminate concepts, which are “great demons.” Normally we think of a demon as being someone or something outside of us that causes us harm. We also normally believe that most of the harm that we experience comes from outside of us, but that is not how it actually is. What really prevents us from practicing the Dharma is inside our mind — all the various different thoughts and beliefs that appear in our mind. Because we have so many different thoughts, we develop the disturbing emotions and that is what distracts our mind away from the Dharma. As the great master Shantideva said, “Those who are distracted in their thoughts have many disturbing emotions.” Once we are distracted, the disturbing emotions such as greed, hatred, and desire arise. Because we have so many disturbing emotions, we commit many misdeeds and unvirtuous actions. This happens because we have too many thoughts. So, we need to eliminate negative thoughts and also decrease the actual number of our thoughts.

I once had a student who was sharing his experiences of doing the Preliminary Practices (Tib. *Ngöndro*). The student said that when he was doing Shamatha, his mind was very relaxed and it was really good. But when he started doing physical prostrations, it was really difficult. He started getting very angry — feeling a lot

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of hate and anger. He asked, “Why is this happening?” Well, when he first asked this question I thought, “How can he be getting so angry when doing prostrations?” Later when I thought about it, it occurred to me that what was probably happening was that when he was doing Shamatha meditation, he was applying mindfulness and alertness⁶⁰ in his mind. But when he was prostrating, he was working hard with his body and was forgetting about the mind. Because of this, he was chasing after thoughts of the past and anticipating the future, and so he started worry a lot. Because he was worrying so much, he became angry. Then, in the next session of prostrations, his worrying would become more and more. This is why it is said that thoughts and concepts are a great demon. If we think about an individual thought, there is no great problem with it. But when we start to follow thoughts and are led by them, we just produce more and more thoughts; this is how thoughts become a great impediment, or as Milarepa says, “a demon.” For that reason, we need to pacify, to subdue, our thoughts.

60. Mindfulness (Tib. *drenpa*) means “recollection” or “remembering” and refers to continually remembering that we will not be distracted and should go back to the meditation. Alertness (Tib. *sheshin*) is to know exactly where the mind is resting, what it is focusing on, and so on. — Thrangu Rinpoche

Instruction 4

Pride is a great mara, he said.

Traditionally, a mara or demon is someone who actually harms us. But maras do not come from outside, rather they can be the result of our own mind when we have pride. There are different kinds of pride: we can think to ourselves, “I am really highly educated,” or “I am really intelligent,” or “I am beautiful,” or “I have such good conduct.” We can be proud about many different things, and these just expand our ego. Being prideful can then impede us from having the motivation to properly practice the path, and this is why pride is a great mara. Instead, we need to develop a good motivation, eliminate our pride, and then adopt a humble position. When we are humble, we will think to ourselves, “Oh, I need to practice the Dharma and I need to eliminate the disturbing emotions. I need to refrain from doing misdeeds and negative acts.” That is why it says, “Pride is a great mara.”

Instruction 5

Slander is a great negative action, he said.

The next instruction is that we need to eliminate our wrong or offensive speech. We might slander the Buddha; we might slander the Dharma; we might slander our root guru and the lineage gurus. We might slander our Dharma friends who are our companions

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in practicing the Dharma. And if we slander others, then this will harm them, and it will also cause us to commit unvirtuous acts. For that reason, slander is a grave negative action. We must eliminate slander, which is an offense of speech.

Instruction 6

Jealousy is harmful on the path, he said.

Pride prevents us from developing positive qualities. When we are on the path to enlightenment, we must constantly have loving kindness and compassion. What impedes and harms our loving kindness and compassion? It is that we have a lot of mental competitiveness and envy or jealousy. If we feel that we must be better than others, we will not be able to develop true loving kindness, compassion, or bodhichitta. For that reason, when we practice the Dharma properly, we must develop loving kindness and compassion so that the Dharma will become our path and we will be able to benefit ourselves and other sentient beings.

We must always examine our mind to determine if we have any competitiveness or any envy of others. If we have these negative qualities, we must apply loving kindness as the antidote for them. If we find that we have jealousy or competitiveness, we need to develop humbleness. We must be mindful, apply the antidote, and develop loving kindness. This is the method to eliminate these obstacles.

Instruction 7

Liquor brings one to ruin, he said.

The next instruction describes conduct related to our body. It says, “Liquor brings one to ruin” with “ruin,” meaning great difficulties and hardships. Being intoxicated can make us do unvirtuous things. Even if we don’t do unvirtuous actions, abusing alcohol can cause us great difficulties. In modern times there are many different intoxicating drugs and substances. If we use these, they can be harmful to our bodies, harmful to the people and environment around us, and sometimes harmful to our prosperity. So, we should give up all these harmful substances.

As the Sakya Pandita said, “We enjoy alcohol because we think it is happiness. But that is merely thinking that craziness is happiness.” People who do not understand this think the feeling of being drunk is a pleasant feeling, but this is merely believing that this feeling of drunkenness or “craziness” is a pleasant feeling. But it is not actually pleasurable and that is why intoxicating substances can bring us to ruin. It is best to give up alcohol, but if we cannot give up alcohol, then it is possible to just drink very, very moderately. But we should not drink out of craving for the effects it might have.

Questions

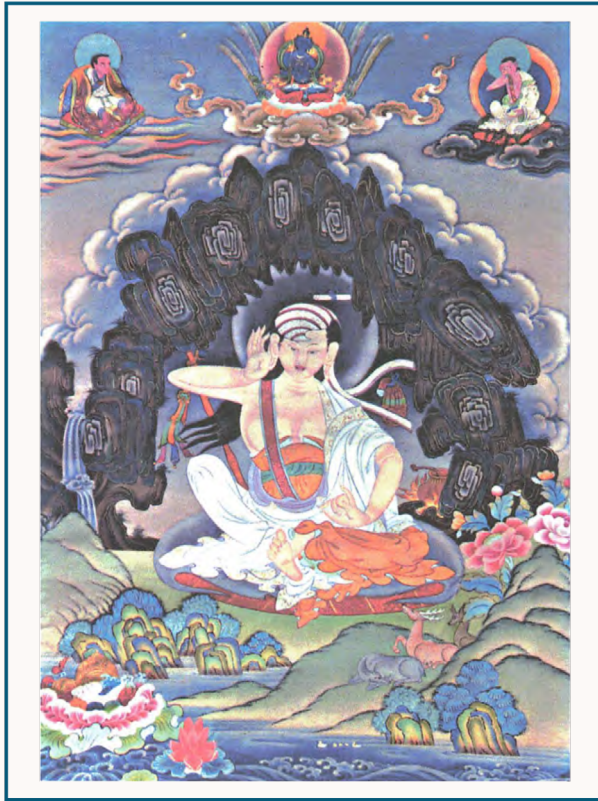
I have a strong aspiration to be born somewhere where there are suffering beings and also to be near my teachers. So, when I am singing the Dewachen song, I am not certain that I want to do what it says. Is there some reason why I ought to have the aspiration to be reborn in Dewachen, rather than near suffering beings and my teachers?

Rinpoche: The Buddha was aware of all the different kinds of beings and therefore he gave many different kinds of teachings for these different kinds of beings. The Buddha gave practices for some persons who were not able to meditate. The Buddha did not say, “You cannot practice.” Instead, he would say, “you should say this prayer and it is possible you will be reborn in Dewachen (Sukhavati).” Someone reciting the Dewachen prayer with strong intention and mental clarity can be reborn in Dewachen, and being in Dewachen they can then gradually begin to meditate and practice.

If you have a great motivation to be reborn in a place where you can dispel the suffering of beings, you can make that prayer. You don’t have to pray to be born in Dewachen. Instead, you can pray to be reborn as a person who can dispel the suffering of beings and to be born in a place where you can do that. This aspiration is a sign of great love and compassion. This also applies to being reborn where your root teacher is. You can pray to be reborn near your teacher

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instead of praying to be reborn in Dewachen. So, making these aspirations is not a bad way of thinking. In fact, it is a sign of great bodhichitta and motivation, something that is greatly encouraged in the Mahayana. So, instead of praying to be reborn in Dewachen, you can pray to be reborn in the presence of your lama and to be reborn so that you can dispel the suffering of many beings.



Rechungpa

In this painting, Rechungpa is in a cave in the same meditation posture and meditation belt as Milarepa. Rechungpa wears a very distinctive hat which identifies him easily. Above him is Vajradhara (the Sambhogakaya form of the Buddha) and Marpa and Milarepa.

Painting by Ngawang Zangpo.

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Instruction 8

*If you don't confess misdeeds through the four powers,
You'll wander among the six realms of beings, he said.*

The next instruction is taught in two lines. The first line reads, “If you don’t confess misdeeds through the four powers.”⁶¹ We all have engaged in misdeeds and unvirtuous acts in this lifetime. There are also misdeeds and unvirtuous acts that we may not have done in this lifetime, but that we have done in other lifetimes since beginningless samsara.

Four types of karma

This instruction involves understanding karma, and there are four types of karma. The first kind of karma is the “visibly experienced

61. See [Appendix H](#) for what constitutes a negative karmic action.

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karma” meaning that it is an act that we have done in this lifetime, whether it is virtuous or unvirtuous, that then ripens in this lifetime. For example, we rob a bank and end up spending many years in prison.

The second kind of karma are actions that don’t ripen in this lifetime, but ripens in a future lifetime. Whether it is a virtuous action or an unvirtuous action, the deed is not strong enough to ripen in this lifetime. But, as soon as we take our next birth, the result of the action can then ripen in that lifetime. And so, these are called “actions that ripen upon birth.”

The third kind of karma are “actions that ripen in another lifetime.” These are actions that do not ripen in this lifetime, nor do they ripen in the next lifetime, but ripen sometime in the future when the right causes and conditions have come together.

The fourth kind of karma involves “actions that are not definitely experienced.” These are very minor negative actions that we have done and, if we feel genuine regret for having done them and we confess them, then the karma will not ripen. So, when we do very minor negative things, we do not know whether that karma will ripen or not.

The karma that ripens in other lifetimes and the karma that is not definitely experienced might ripen at any time. They might ripen as being reborn in the lower realms of samsara, but we do not

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know when that is going to occur. If we do a significant misdeed, it might ripen as being reborn in one of the three lower realms — the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, or the animal realm. Or, if our actions are extremely virtuous, our karma might ripen as being born into the three higher realms — the human realm, jealous god realm, or a god realm. So, any deed can ripen as rebirth in one of the six realms of samsara. If the negative karma does not ripen as rebirth in the lower or the higher realms, then the karma may ripen as misfortune in our lifetime such as getting sick frequently, having many unfortunate things happening to us, and so forth. The method to make sure that these negative things don't happen to us is to confess our misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors using the four powers of confession.

Four powers of confession

The first power of confession is that we must feel remorse. Remorse means that we think that we did an unvirtuous act, recognize that it was a mistake, and regret having done it. If we have real regret, then we will be able to confess and purify the act. Without regret, such as thinking to ourselves, “that was just a small, unimportant thing I did,” we will not be able to confess the act. It is like the great master Karma Chagme said, “Without regret we cannot confess our misdeeds.” If we do not really regret the action, then, when we recite the words of a confession, we are not actually confessing the

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action, and the confession will not purify the misdeed. Instead, we should view the misdeed as if we have swallowed poison. When we swallow poison, we immediately think, “This is really bad, I need to get rid of it, I need to get an antidote,” and we feel urgent regret for having swallowed the poison. Likewise, if we have done a bad act, and if we regret it and think that it was bad, then we will be able to purify it. So, the first power of regret of a negative action prevents our misdeeds and obscurations from becoming stronger and stronger.

The second power of confession is the power of resolve. We might think to ourselves that the misdeeds we have done in the past are really terrible and regret them. But, if we continue doing them, we will not be able to purify the misdeeds. If we cannot stop doing a negative action that is a sign that we developed an attachment to that misdeed. Because we have that attachment, it will result in the negative karma of that misdeed ripening. The result of a misdeed that is not fully resolved by just by stopping the misdeed, could cause the negative karma to still ripen in our next rebirth. For example, the misdeed could cause us to fall into the animal realm where we will experience all the suffering that animals have. To make sure that does not occur, we need to apply the second power of resolve. As Karma Chagme said, “From now, even at the cost of my life, I shall not do this misdeed again.” First, we recognize that this is a

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mistake and is wrong. Then we need to make a firm promise — even at the cost of my own life — that we will never do it again.

The actual method for confessing these misdeeds is done with the third and fourth powers of confession. The third power of confession is the power of support, meaning that we need to have someone that we place our hopes in, someone that we regard as a source of refuge. As previously described, this reliance should be the Three Jewels. So, we need to pray to the Three Jewels, asking that they will help us purify our past misdeeds and obscurations.

Finally, we need the fourth power, which is the power of applying the antidote. This means that we don't just pray and supplicate the Three Jewels to purify the misdeed, but we also do something that is virtuous. We need to gather the roots of virtue in which we think, "I am doing this positive act in order to purify my misdeeds. I am doing this in order to cleanse my misdeeds and obscurations." This is the fourth power of applying the antidote.

In summary, we have all done many misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors. The results may ripen in this lifetime or they may ripen in the next lifetime. When they ripen, they will be in the form of unpleasant suffering. The way to prevent this from happening is to purify that karma by employing the four powers of confession.

Four powers applied with Vajrasattva practice

In order to confess our misdeeds and obscurations, we apply the four powers. The great lamas of the past have developed a specific method to do this — the practice of Vajrasattva. When we do Vajrasattva practice, we recite the hundred syllable mantra either a hundred thousand, or ten thousand, or a thousand, or a hundred times. All four powers of confession are present in complete form within the Vajrasattva practice.

To begin, we have to have the motivation for purifying our misdeeds and obscurations; we need to see our misdeeds and obscurations as being wrong and to regret them. That is the first power of remorse. Then, we think to ourselves that we will not do the misdeeds again. This is the second power of resolve.

The third power is the power of support. We are taking Vajrasattva as our support in this practice by understanding that Vajrasattva is the essence of all of the yidams. We take him as the support to purify our misdeeds and obscurations.

The fourth power of applying the antidote in Vajrasattva practice is to recite the hundred syllable Vajrasattva mantra with our speech while mentally visualizing Vajrasattva on the crown of our head with the flow of amrita from his heart into our body purifying us of all

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the misdeeds and obscurations. And so, this becomes the method for us to purify negative actions.

In the Vajrayana it is especially important that we purify our misdeeds and obscurations through Vajrasattva practice. This is because Vajrasattva meditation is not merely a tradition, but it is actually a powerful method for purifying our misdeeds and obscurations. There are some students here who may not have done the Vajrasattva practice yet, and they should begin it. There are some here who may have started this practice, and they should be diligent in their practice. While we are doing the practice, our mind should not become distracted by anything else. We should have a pure motivation, and if we are diligent about doing the practice, it will be very beneficial. As Milarepa said, “If you don’t confess misdeeds with the four powers, you will wander among the six realms of samsara.”

Instruction 9

*If you don't make efforts in the accumulation of merit,
You won't attain the happiness of liberation, he said.*

It is important that we not be reborn in the lower realms and thus experience the great suffering of these realms. To prevent this from happening we confess our misdeeds and obscurations through the four powers. This ensures that we will not to be born in the lower realms, but that is not enough — we need to be reborn in the higher

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realms of humans and gods. But even being born in a higher realm is not enough because we need to experience happiness that is free of any difficulties or problems. The only way to do this is to gather a large accumulation of merit.

Gathering merit by means of the six paramitas

How do we gather merit? In the sutras the Buddha taught that we gather merit with the practice of the Six Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*).

The first paramita is transcendent **generosity**. Normally, we think of generosity as the giving of material gifts to those who have little. But we can say that there are three types of giving: good giving, great giving, and difficult giving. If we were to give food and clothing and so forth to those who need it, this would be good giving. If we give wealth and significant money and so forth, this would be called great giving. Difficult giving should be understood as the giving our own body. It is actually very difficult to give our own body and we might wonder, “Is it okay if I don’t actually give away my own body?” The answer is yes because Shantideva said, “Those who do not have pure compassion should not practice difficult giving.” So, if we really have reached the point where we have such strong compassion that we can give away our body without any regret, then we can give our body. Until we reach this high point of realization, we should not give away our body. Instead, the way we should give our body is to take care of it and using it while always

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thinking, “I am using my body to benefit other sentient beings. I am giving my body by gathering the roots of virtue.” If you truly think and act with this motivation, then this would also be qualified as difficult giving. So, this is the practice of the paramita of generosity.

The second paramita is transcendent **discipline** and it also has three types. The first kind of discipline is that we give up unvirtuous actions of our body, speech, and mind. We think to ourselves that, even at the cost of our lives, we will not do these negative actions again. The second discipline is developing all the virtuous qualities and dedicating our body, speech, and mind to gathering the roots of virtue. If we think that what we are doing is benefiting not just ourselves, but all sentient beings, then we are practicing the paramita of discipline. When we practice helping others to develop freedom from fear and harm, that is the discipline of benefiting other beings.

We need to gather the accumulation of merit through the paramitas of generosity and discipline. But to do this we need to practice the third paramita of patience. Shantideva said, “There is no misdeed like hatred; there is no austerity like patience.” In other words, there is no stronger unvirtuous act than those acts motivated by hatred. Likewise, there is no greater virtue than patience to eliminate the misdeed of hatred. In general, patience involves not doing anything negative when other people are doing harmful things to us out of

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their anger or ignorance. By practicing patience, we are able to accumulate great roots of virtue and gather the accumulation of merit.

The fourth paramita is **diligence**. Diligence allows us to gather merit through generosity, discipline, and patience. If we have diligence, we will be able to practice all of these qualities. But, if we don't have diligence, we won't be able to practice any of them. For that reason, we need to increase our diligence. There are three different types of laziness that impede our diligence.

The first kind of laziness is attachment to negative actions. This occurs when we're attached, or fixated, on our misdeeds and unvirtuous thoughts. It also occurs when we are fixated on worldly activities, because this prevents us from practicing the Dharma. This first type of laziness is the laziness of attachment to negative actions.

The second kind of laziness is self-deprecating laziness. This is thinking to ourselves, "Other people can do that, but I can't do it. I'm not skilled enough and don't have the ability to do that." This type of thinking causes us to become really discouraged and makes us lazy. Actually, there is no reason for anyone to experience the laziness of self-deprecation because any person can practice the paramitas and accumulate merit. If other people can do it, so can we. If great beings have been able to do this, then so can we. To counter this kind of laziness, we can develop confidence and overcome self-deprecating laziness. Finally, the third kind of laziness

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ness is slothfulness which is just lying around doing nothing. We need to have fortitude to overcome laziness and use our diligence as a method to gather the accumulation of merit.

The fifth paramita is **meditative concentration** (Skt. *samadhi*). Samadhi occurs when we have reached a level where our mind is resting, unmoving, and stable. This is extremely important because, as the third instruction said, “Thoughts are great demons” and really cause us many difficulties. There are happy thoughts and there are unhappy thoughts, and generally we have more unhappy thoughts and worries. Having many different thoughts can cause the disturbing emotions to increase. Because of these disturbing emotions, we can then harm other people. If we feel malice or envy towards others, we begin to develop grudges, and this will create many long endless streams of negative thoughts. It is these thoughts that are the root of our suffering.

All the different thoughts we have can be classified into either virtuous or unvirtuous thoughts. We almost always find that the thoughts of misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors are the most numerous. For this reason, if we are able to apply our mindfulness and alertness and also engage in meditation, it will be very beneficial for us. Of course, we do have happy thoughts, but we have many more worrisome thoughts, and these make us and others uncomfortable and unhappy. For that reason, it is important that we apply our

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mindfulness and alertness when we are in samadhi meditation. So, we can gather the accumulation of merit by developing the fifth paramita of samadhi.

The sixth paramita is transcendent **intelligence** (Skt. *prajna*). We experience much suffering and do many misdeeds because of ignorance. To eliminate this, we need to increase our intelligence by employing three types of intelligence: the three knowledges or *prajnas* of listening, contemplating, and meditating.

The *prajna* of listening is listening to the words of the Buddha. We can either hear them in a teaching or we can read them in the sutras and the works of the great Buddhist scholars who came after the Buddha. Nowadays, we can also listen to gurus who have had great spiritual training and experience this through the internet. So first, we need to listen to or encounter the teachings. Then we need to contemplate them by thinking over and over again about what we have learned. We need to contemplate the Dharma until we have real certainty about our understanding and this knowledge has become really stable within us and thus increases our intelligence. Once we have that certainty, we need to meditate on the meaning of the teachings. So, this is the intelligence that comes from listening, meditating, and contemplating the teachings, and this is how we can practice transcendent knowledge, particularly the Prajnaparamita teachings on emptiness.

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In summary, we gather the accumulation of merit through the practice of the six paramitas. If we practice the paramitas, then in the next lifetime we will be able to be reborn in a higher realm. Even if we are born in the higher realms, we will want to make sure that we do not continue to have the experience suffering or unwanted difficulties.⁶² To keep that from occurring, we need to gather the accumulation of merit and also to purify our misdeeds and obscurations. This is why it is so important that we gather the accumulation of merit explained in the ninth instruction of Milarepa.

Instruction 10

*If you don't abandon the ten unvirtuous behaviors,
You will experience the sufferings of the lower realms, he said.*

The tenth instruction concerns giving up misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors. We need to give up the misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors we have done in the past and give up those negative things that we will do in the future. We need to confess those done in the past because there is no other method to purify them. For those negative deeds we may do in the future, we need to simply give them up. We might think, “Oh, I can do this negative thing because I can just confess it.” No, that won’t work. It is important

62. All six realms including the higher three realms (human, jealous god, and god realms) are still part of samsara and therefore will have the experience of suffering.

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that we give up misdeeds and unvirtuous behaviors otherwise our suffering will continue in future lifetimes.

The ten unvirtuous behaviors

There are many different kinds of unvirtuous behaviors, but to make it easy to give them up, they are classified as the ten unvirtuous behaviors. These are explained in the sutras as being the “three unvirtuous behaviors involving the body, four of speech, and three of the mind.”

The unvirtuous activities involving the body are doing harm to another's life, harm to another's possessions, and harm to another's mind. The first unvirtuous behavior is **killing**, the taking of another's life. In developed countries there isn't so much murder of persons, but we do kill many small animals such as bugs or insects. With karma it doesn't matter if the animal is big or small. All sentient beings⁶³ cherish their own life the same, no matter how small or large they are. For that reason, we need to give up killing and instead we should engage in the positive deed of protecting life. We should give humans and animals the protection of freedom from fear and practice our patience by not hurting them, whether they are harming us or not.

63. A sentient being is any being with a mind and this would include animals and beings without a body such as hungry ghosts, demons, protectors of the land, Dharma protectors, and worldly gods.

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The second unvirtuous deed is **harming others' possessions or livelihood**. This could mean stealing, robbing, or swindling them, and destroying or taking away their possessions. The reason this is wrong is that it can cause harm to the person's livelihood, cause harm to their possessions, and cause harm to their mind by creating many difficulties and suffering for them.

The third unvirtuous deed is **sexual misconduct**. This means having sexual intercourse with someone who is not your spouse or partner. This will cause others great mental suffering and jealousy. Sexual misconduct is the root of a lot of suffering. We must give up all three of these misdeeds of the body.

The second set of behaviors are the four misdeeds of speech. These are easy to commit because they just slip out before we have realized it. To counter these, it is really important to apply our mindfulness and alertness to keep from using inappropriate speech that will cause harm.

The fourth unvirtuous deed is **lying**. Actually, lying is extremely harmful to ourselves and to others, and like the Sakya Pandita said, "At first we lie to deceive others but, in the end, we deceive ourselves." The reason for this is that first we lie to someone and we fool them and get a short-term gain. Then if we keep doing this, it will be discovered that we are not truthful and people are never going to believe what we say again thinking, "No, we can't trust

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them.” Then, even if we are saying something that is completely true, they will not believe us. So, in the end, we have deceived ourselves.

The fifth unvirtuous behavior is divisive speech. Divisive speech is trying to say things to divide other people. Divisive speech pits one person or group against another, which actually causes a lot suffering for others. It is a very grave harm, so we must give up divisive speech.

The sixth unvirtuous behavior is **insulting** others or using **harsh speech**. This is saying things that are harmful to others. While what is said may not cause physical harm, it can cause a great deal of mental suffering and in turn cause them to turn on us and also harm us. As is said, “Although words are not weapons, they can strike you in the heart.” So, when you hit someone with the right word, you can hurt them just like you had physically struck them. This misdeed is very harmful and should be given up.

The seventh unvirtuous behavior is engaging in a lot of **idle chatter**. Chatter is just talking about anything that is pointless. In particular, when we gossip, we will often say things out of our anger, or greed, or ignorance. If we talk about these negative things, it will just increase our envy, jealousy, or anger, causing us and many others difficulties and problems. So, it is important that we give up chatter.

The next set of misdeeds are those of the mind. In general, we don’t have much control over our mind, so we might think it will

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be difficult to give up these misdeeds. However, if we apply our mindfulness and alertness, we will be able to eliminate these negative thoughts. The three main mental attitudes that we need to give up are covetousness or jealousy, malice, and wrong views.

The eighth unvirtuous behavior is **covetousness** which occurs when we see other people who are prosperous or very happy or who have possessions that we would like to have and we are not able to have them. We think, “If only I had that; if only I could do that.” Because we are not able to accept that others have these things and we do not, this covetousness is a type of desire, a type of fixation.

The ninth unvirtuous deed is **malice**. Malice occurs when we see persons whom we don’t like or are our enemies, and we therefore want to harm them, take things from them, or destroy their situation. The essence of this is hatred and it causes a motivation to harm others. Actually, malice will harm the others and therefore cause harm to us — so it harms both ourselves and others and therefore it is an important attitude we must give up.

The tenth unvirtuous deed is having the **wrong view**. In this case, “wrong view” is that we deny karmic cause and effect and the value of the Three Jewels, or we repudiate the Dharma and so forth. This mental attitude comes from not understanding the true nature of phenomena. Because we hold onto the false dualistic view of “I” and “other,” we develop wrong views and beliefs about the world.

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We could say that there are two different types of wrong view: one of exaggeration, and one of denial. “Exaggeration” here means that when there is something that does not have a fault, or has a very small fault, we make it up to be a big fault. Denial is when there is something that has a good quality, but we deny that positive quality thinking, “It is that good.”

So, these are the ten unvirtuous behaviors that Milarepa refers to in the tenth instruction: “If we do not give them up, then we will be born in the lower realms and we will experience great suffering.” In order for this not to occur, we must give up these ten unvirtuous behaviors in this lifetime and instead apply our mindfulness and alertness. If we do this, we will naturally avoid the three lower realms.

Questions

What is unmoving karma?

If we practice Shamatha meditation alone without Vipashyana meditation this is called “unmoving karma.” Unmoving karma is an action or a meditation that ripens only as a result of a rebirth in the form realm.⁶⁴ But when lamas give instructions on Shamatha meditation, they say that we should rest within the experience of the nature of the mind. The resting within that experience is the

64. The form realm is part of the god realm so named because these individuals have achieved the four meditative states and also no longer desire pleasure, but they still have a human form.

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experience of the union of Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. As the Vipashyana aspect of the meditation increases, we are able to eliminate the disturbing emotions. So, when we are doing the meditation of the perfection of wisdom properly, it will be the union of our Vipashyana and Shamatha meditation. If we also include the highest wisdom (*prajna*) at the same time, then we will have excellent meditation. On the other hand, if we just achieve Shamatha meditation, then it will result in unmoving karma.

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Instruction 11

*If you don't meditate on emptiness and compassion,
You won't attain ultimate buddhahood, he said.*

Meditation on emptiness

We need to practice the Dharma to free ourselves from the suffering of samsara and ultimately achieve buddhahood. Are we going to achieve buddhahood immediately? No, we must practice, and gradually in the future we will achieve buddhahood. To do this, we need to know the main cause for achieving buddhahood and what prevents us from achieving it. The answer is that we haven't achieved buddhahood because we have disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*) that are so strong within us that they prevent us from achieving buddhahood. We cannot eliminate our disturbing emotions and thoughts just by thinking "I will stop them." Instead, if we realize the nature or essence of the disturbing emotions, which

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is that they are empty, they will naturally disappear. To have this realization, we must meditate upon emptiness. In general, there are two methods that we can use for realizing emptiness: the sutra approach, using logical reasoning as the path, or the Vajrayana approach, using direct perception as the path.

If we follow the path of the sutras, taking inference as the path, we examine the mind, asking questions such as, “What is the mind like? Is it a thing? Is it real?” We examine what external things are like, and by methodically examining them, we are able to realize logically that they do not truly exist, and from this we develop real certainty in this fact. Developing a real confidence in our conceptual examination is the vast path of the sutras.

Although the practice of the path of the sutras is very clear and very stable, it is a very long path. The profound path of the Vajrayana is a little different because we look directly at the nature of the mind. We meditate upon the nature of our own mind through Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. By meditating directly upon the mind, or “looking” at the mind we can perceive that mind does not actually exist, that it is insubstantial or empty of inherent existence. When we reach the level of perceiving this emptiness, we see that it is not merely a voidness, but rather that the mind also has the quality of luminous clarity which is the uninterrupted knowing quality of

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mind. This is called taking direct perception as the path, and it is the main instruction of Mahamudra meditation.

Meditating on compassion

Is it enough to only meditate on emptiness? No, because if we meditate upon emptiness, it will be beneficial for us, but it will not be beneficial for anyone else. To benefit others, we also need to meditate on compassion. When we meditate on compassion, we might think, “Well, if everything is empty and everyone is empty, why bother meditating on compassion?” But actually, it is necessary to meditate upon compassion because sentient beings have many different perceptions, so that things appear differently to them.

*The nature of beings is always buddhahood,
but not realizing that, they wander in endless samsara.
May I have overwhelming compassion
for beings in limitless, endless suffering.*

— *Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra, Verse 22*

The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje in his *Aspiration Prayer of Mahamudra*, says that the nature of all sentient beings has always been buddhahood, but they suffer because they have not recognized it. For that reason, we need to have compassion for them. The nature of all outer phenomena also has the nature of emptiness. As Rangjung Dorje says, “Because they have not realized this, they experience

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the suffering of samsara.” Not knowing their nature, they wander in samsara and experience all the suffering of samsara. Enduring such endless suffering, they are worthy of our compassion. So we, as practitioners, need to meditate upon emptiness, but this meditation on emptiness must be unified with compassion. So, the eleventh instruction of Milarepa song says that we need to meditate on both emptiness and compassion.

Questions

These days it is really easy to study Buddhism. You can read Buddhist texts anywhere and sometimes I have this feeling that the value of Buddhism has decreased because I can just Google it. So, how can we really develop an appreciation of the value of the Dharma?

When Milarepa first entered into the Dharma and started practicing, he went to see Marpa and said, “Please give me food, clothing, and the Dharma. Please give me the instructions that will lead to buddhahood in a single lifetime.” And Marpa said, “How’s that going to work? How am I going to do that? You can either have food and clothing or you can have the Dharma. Take your pick. And as far as instructions on gaining buddhahood in one lifetime, that’s not up to me, it’s entirely up to you. If you put the effort into it, you’ll achieve buddhahood in one lifetime. If you don’t put the effort in, you won’t achieve buddhahood in one lifetime.”



A modern yogi standing in front of Milarepa's Nine Story Tower (top far right). He is dressed in monk's clothes, has long uncombed hair, and is holding a practice text. *Photo courtesy of Klaus-Dieter Mathes.*

16. The Instructions of the Actual Practice

Instruction 12

*If you want to attain buddhahood in this lifetime,
Look at your mind without distraction, he said.*

The reason we enter the gate of the Dharma is usually because we want to achieve buddhahood, and we want to achieve buddhahood quickly. To achieve buddhahood quickly requires that we look at our mind without distraction. Rather than continually looking outward at phenomena, we need to continuously look at the nature of our mind.

There are actually two instructions that discuss looking at the mind. The twelfth instruction, “Look at your mind without distraction,” and the twenty-fifth instruction that we will discuss later: “Look at the unborn nature of your mind.” The twelfth instruction, to look at our mind without distraction, is primarily concerned with look-

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ing at the mind in the context of Shamatha and post-meditation. It tells us not to fall under the power of the disturbing emotions or thoughts and to make sure that we apply our mindfulness and alertness. The twenty-fifth instruction says that we should look at the unborn nature of our mind and this instruction is in the context of Vipashyana meditation. So, we need to understand the difference between these two types of meditation.

When the twelfth instruction says, “Look at your mind without distraction,” this does not apply just when we are on the meditation cushion, but also during post-meditation when we are engaged in our daily life. In ordinary activities, we must not let ourselves be influenced by disturbing emotions or thoughts; to avoid this we need to apply mindfulness and alertness all the time. As Shantideva said in *A Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva*, “Tie the crazed elephant of your mind to the post of mindfulness.” Shantideva is comparing our ordinary mind to a crazed elephant. This analogy, of course, comes from before there was any danger of car or train accidents. In Shantideva’s day, the most dangerous thing around was a crazed elephant that would come by and destroy houses and kill people; they were extremely dangerous. Our mind is like those crazed elephants and we need to tie them to a post of mindfulness to keep them from wreaking havoc. We also need to make sure to have faith, devotion, and confidence in order to control the crazy elephant of our mind.

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If we do control our mind, then we will have no fear and no suffering. It is as the great master Shantideva says, “All the tigers, lions, spirits, and demons all come from the mind.” If we can’t tie down the mind, then all of these negative forces will be loosed. But, if we can subdue the mind, then these forces also will also be subdued. If we are able to take control of our mind, we will not experience any such fears. However, if we follow after our desires without any control, our aggression, our pride, our jealousy, or our ignorant delusions will arise and we will have many problems, many different dangers, many enemies, and so forth. So, just taking control of our mind will allow us to have power over all of these dangers.

When Milarepa says, “Look at your mind without distraction,” he means that we should look at the situations around us and ask, “What’s going on in my mind? What is my mind doing? Is there any real danger now?”

Instruction 13

*For the ultimate condensed meaning of the tantras,
Meditate on the Six Dharmas, he said.*

After we have received meditation instructions, we need to practice them gradually because there are many profound instructions that we need to follow. In the Buddha’s teachings there are the sutras and the tantras. The tantras can be classified into the father tantras,

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the mother tantras, and the non-dual tantras. The ultimate meaning of all of these tantras is in the Six Dharmas of Naropa. By the way, there are two different sets of the Six Dharmas: The Six Dharmas of the Kalachakra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa. This instruction by Milarepa refers to the Six Dharmas of Naropa which originated with Tilopa, who then taught these yogic practices to Naropa, who then taught them to Marpa, with Marpa finally bringing them from India to Tibet where they are widely practice even today.

The reason we need to practice the Six Dharmas of Naropa is that they condense the ultimate meaning of all the tantras. But whether we meditate on the Six Dharmas of Naropa or the Six Dharmas of the Kalachakra we won't be able to develop their full potential immediately. Instead, we need to take our time and begin by first practicing the preliminaries. It has been said, "The preliminaries are more profound than the actual practice." If we want to have a good outcome in our meditation, we need to first establish a firm foundation. If we have a firm foundation, then we will be able to have a good outcome in our practice. Without a firm foundation we will be unable to achieve our goal. And so, we should make sure that we meditate properly on bodhichitta, on the special and common preliminaries, and do Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. After this, we should then practice the Six Dharmas. If we are able to do this, then the Six Dharmas will be extraordinary practices that contain everything in the ultimate meaning of the tantras.

Instruction 14

*For the ultimate condensed meaning of the instructions,
Meditate on the Secret Mantra, the path of means, he said.*

Meditating upon the Six Dharmas of Naropa is meditating on the highest instructions of the Vajrayana path of means. The secret mantra is another word for the Vajrayana. The path of means here is the practice of Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*), and the practices manipulating the subtle channels (Skt. *nadis*) and subtle winds (Skt. *pranas*). These will be of great benefit to us and will make our practice very stable.

Instruction 15

*If you wish for respect, renown, and wealth,
You'll be delivered to the mouth of Mara, he said.*

Sometimes difficulties and obstacles occur when we are practicing the instructions, and when these occur, we need to apply our mindfulness and alertness. The primary obstacles we face are a desire for respect, for wanting to be renown, and wishing to live very comfortably. Instruction fifteen warns us about this with, “If you wish for respect, renown, and wealth, you’ll be delivered to the mouth of Mara.” If you are practicing and think, “I need to get something out of this. I should receive something for all this hard work,” that is a desire for gain. Or you might think, “I am practicing

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really well now. Other people should respect me because I practice so well.” Or you might think, “I should be popular because I practice so hard. Everyone should like me for being so diligent.” This kind of motivation is a definite obstacle. Once we develop that motivation, our Dharma practice will not be true Dharma practice, and we will come under the influence of “the eight worldly concerns.”

These concerns are: (1) being pleased when you gain something and (2) not being pleased when you don’t gain it; (3) being pleased when you have happiness and (4) displeased when you have unhappiness or pain; (5) being pleased when you are respected and (6) displeased when you are not respected; (7) being pleased when you are popular and (8) not pleased when you are unpopular. Any of these eight motivations can prevent us from practicing the Dharma properly, so metaphorically we will be delivered into the mouth of Mara.

Instruction 16

*If you praise yourself and disparage others,
You will fall off a frightful precipice, he said.*

The actual reason for practicing the Dharma is not for gain, respect, and admiration, but to achieve liberation and omniscience. The reason we practice the Dharma is to eliminate the disturbing emotions and our negative karma, and thus free ourselves from

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samsara. If we have attachment to gain or respect or fame, we need to decrease these attachments, because if we don't, they will gradually increase. Milarepa says, "If you praise yourself and disparage others, you will fall off a frightful precipice." In other words, if you praise yourself and disparage others because you desire respect and gain for yourself, this will lead you to commit unvirtuous actions, and you will metaphorically fall off a frightful precipice. So, we should continuously try to protect our mind or, as Milarepa said in the twelfth instruction, "Look at our mind without distraction." When examining our mind, we should ask, "Do I still have a pure motivation here? Am I maintaining this pure motivation or have I gone off course?" Doing this, we will always protect and maintain our positive motivation.

Instruction 17

*If you don't tame the elephant of mind,
Then you'll be deceived by the key instructions' words, he said.*

To eliminate attachment to gain and respect, and eliminate self-cherishing ourselves and criticizing others, we need to tame our mind, or as Milarepa says, "If you don't tame the elephant of your mind, then you'll be deceived by the key instructions' words." If we tame our mind by applying mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness, then these problems will not happen. And if we do not tame our mind, then great difficulties will occur.

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Now, respect and fame are not necessarily bad of themselves. For example, Milarepa was quite popular. But if we are practicing well and then later start thinking that Dharma practice is not so important, but what's important are material things, then that is not taming the elephant of our mind. Rather we need to not be attached to respect and fame, and we should not praise ourselves or criticize others. If we do these negative things, we will not be practicing the Dharma properly. Instead, we need to make sure that these thirty key instructions will not be just mere words, but that they will be put into practice.

Instruction 18

To rouse bodhichitta is the greatest harvest, he said.

Up to this point, we have talked a quite a bit on what needs to be eliminated in our practice. The third instruction says that, “concepts are great demons,” and the fourth instruction says, “pride is a great mara.” The antidote for these is that we need to meditate on emptiness and compassion, as mentioned in the eleventh instruction, “If you don’t meditate on emptiness and compassion, then you won’t attain ultimate buddhahood.” But what creates obstacles to this practice? The fifteenth instruction tells us, “If you wish for respect, renown, and wealth, you’ll be delivered to the mouth of mara.” In order to prevent the obstacles in our practice, we need

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to tame the elephant of the mind. “If you don’t tame the elephant of mind, then you’ll be deceived by the key instructions’ words.”

However, when we begin to practice, we first need to have the motivation of bodhichitta. As this eighteenth instruction says, “To rouse bodhichitta is the greatest harvest.” Or you could say, “The best farming is bodhichitta.” The reason for saying this is that we first need to have a good motivation — not the selfish motivation of wanting to gain something for ourselves. Also we shouldn’t have the motivation of the shravakas, of wanting to liberate just ourselves, nor should we have an unvirtuous motivation. We need to have the motivation of bodhichitta, that is, compassion for all sentient beings, for all of our mothers who are as limitless as space.⁶⁵ We need to give up our greed, hatred, and desire, and instead practice with the aspiration to lead all sentient beings to the state of buddhahood.

The motivation of bodhichitta is like farming: if you farm well, you get a good crop as a result. Likewise, if you have bodhichitta, then you will obtain a good result from your practice. Now, if you have little motivation, then you’ll have little result. If you have great motivation, then you will have a great result. In discussing how we need to gather great virtue, Shantideva said, “Other virtues are like the banana tree. They give their fruit only a single time.” There are many other virtuous things we can do and they are all excellent

65. “All mothers” refers to the fact that through many eons and cycles of rebirth almost every being has been, at one time or another, our mother.

things to do. But they only give the result one single time and then they are exhausted. But as Shantideva said, “The tree of bodhichitta always produces fruit until the end of samsara and it is never exhausted.” So, bodhichitta is like an apple tree that has a crop every single year. Acting with bodhichitta always brings us rewards. Not only that, bodhichitta will become stronger and stronger, and our virtues will grow stronger and stronger, and this motivation will never run out until samsara has been emptied.

Instruction 19

The view of birthlessness is excellent, he said.

Once we have developed the aspiration to engage in bodhichitta, we then need to practice the view, meditation, and conduct of this motivation. The view is explained in the nineteenth instruction: “The view of birthlessness (or being unborn) is excellent.” When we practice, we need to have the view that the nature of all phenomena is primordially unborn. “Unborn” means it was never created, or “born,” because its nature is empty. So, we first need to have the view that everything is unborn and non-arising. We need to realize the meaning of this and gain certainty in this view.⁶⁶

66. All external phenomena in our world is created (or born) through causes and conditions so that it gradually develops into something and eventually it disintegrates going back to its elements. When we say something is “without birth” or “unborn” we are referring to the fact that all phenomena we perceive as being real and solid are actually insubstantial or empty in their true nature.

Instruction 20

For practice, the path of means is profound, he said.

Instruction 21

Apply it with the nadis and pranas, he said.

Once we have the view of unborn arising, how do we practice this? This practice is described in the 20th and the 21st instructions. The 20th instruction says, “For practice, the path of means is profound” refers here to the path of means (Skt. *upaya*) of the practice of the Six Dharmas of Naropa. Milarepa is saying that we need to employ this path of means, which is to do the advanced practice of manipulating the subtle body, the subtle channels, and subtle winds.

The *nadis* are the subtle channels and the *pranas* are the subtle winds in the body. If we know where the subtle channels and winds are in our body and how to manipulate them, we can practice using them. There are many different ways of describing the subtle channels and winds. An easy and relaxed way to practice with them is to sit in the meditation posture of the Seven Points of Vairochana, which has the direction to “sit with your body straight.” The reason for this is that if the body is straight, then the subtle channels will be straight; if the channels are straight, then the subtle winds will move through them easily. So, this is a way to actually put this instruction of Milarepa into practice, or as the instruction says,

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“Apply it with the nadis and pranas.” The rest of these practices are fairly advanced, and if we aren’t able to do these difficult practices at this time, we will, with continued practice, gradually be able to practice them. It is important to get proper instructions in the subtle channels and winds practice so that we are able to practice in a way that we don’t disturb the subtle channels and the subtle winds incorrectly.⁶⁷

Milarepa is repeating the importance of doing the subtle winds and channels practices. In the thirteenth instruction we discussed the practice of the Six Dharmas of Naropa. The reason we need to practice these is because they are a condensation of the ultimate instructions of the tantras. In particular, we need to do the practice of Subtle Heat. This is the greatest of all instructions and it is very beneficial for meditation. The practices with the subtle channels and subtle winds are profound and very beneficial so Milarepa advises, “Apply it with the nadis and pranas.”

Instruction 22

Recognize coemergence, he said.

67. These practices are usually taught at the end of a three-year retreat, and involve special postures, movements, and visualizations. If the subtle energies (Skt. *prana*) move to the wrong place, it could cause a mental disturbance. See [Appendix E](#) for a further explanation.

Instruction 23

Rely upon a genuine lord, he said.

When we practice applying the subtle winds and subtle channels, the result will be that we will recognize the coemergent wisdom which is the nature of the mind as it truly is. The 22nd instruction therefore says, “Recognize coemergence, he said.” So, we need to recognize the coemergence wisdom,⁶⁸ and the method to do so is described in the 23rd instruction, “Rely upon a genuine teacher.” This means that we need to receive the instructions from our root guru and practice them as they are taught. If we practice them diligently, we will be able to recognize the coemergent wisdom and we will be able to apply this wisdom to the practices. It is said in the Mahamudra Lineage Prayer, “In all my births may I never be separated from the perfect guru, enjoying the splendor of the Dharma.” This tells us that we should never be separated from our perfect guru, even in lifetime after lifetime. But when we say “never separated,” that does not mean that we should always have meals or conversations with the guru. Rather it means that we should enjoy the splendor of Dharma by spending our lifetime listening, contemplating, and meditating upon the Dharma so that we can

68. “Coemergence” (Tib. *lhengche*) refers to two things coming together, such as two tributaries flowing together to make a river. In this context, it refers to external phenomena, which are empty, joining with their external appearances.

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gradually progress along the stages of the path and eventually recognize coemergence.

Instruction 24

Don't let your life be carried away by distraction, he said.

We need to practice the Dharma, but we may get distracted by worldly things that we need to do, and then we won't have any opportunity to practice the Dharma. So, we must not let that happen.

I've been reading the biography of a lama from Amdo. This may not have been a real problem that happened to him, but he gave the following example — that for the first twenty years of his life, he did not think of the Dharma at all. For the next twenty years, he thought, "I need to practice the Dharma." And then he spent twenty years thinking, "Now, I have to practice the Dharma." So, another twenty years passed, and by then he was already 60 years old. So, please, "Do not let your life be carried away by distractions."

Instruction 25

Look at the unborn nature of your mind, he said.

Instruction 26

Don't hope for happiness in samsara, he said.

Instruction 27.

Don't see suffering as a fault, he said.

Instruction 28.

If you realize the mind, that is buddhahood, he said.

Instruction 29.

There is no need for many elaborations, he said.

Instruction 30.

There are no more profound points than these, he said.

Put them into practice, he said.

When we practice, we must look at the unborn nature of our mind without being distracted. So, the 25th instruction says, “Look at the unborn nature of your mind.” This is similar to the nineteenth instruction, “The view of birthlessness is excellent, he said.”

Now, when we are practicing, sometimes we wish for happiness in samsara. The 26th instruction is, “Don't hope for happiness in samsara.” There are pleasures in samsara but these are not great or lasting pleasures.

Sometimes there are difficulties in practicing. So, the 27th instruction is, “Don't see suffering as a fault.” If you think of pain that is

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incurred while practicing the dharma as a fault, that becomes an impediment to your practice. Instead, you should look at that as a hardship you are undergoing and see the suffering as a quality, not as a fault to your practice.

And then, once we have practiced in this way, the ultimate result is that we achieve is buddhahood. The 28th instruction says, “If you realize the mind, that is buddhahood, he said.” We first need to realize what the nature of the mind truly is. When we realize the mind as it is, we then need to meditate upon it as it is. The ultimate result of this is that we achieve buddhahood.

In the 29th instruction Milarepa says, “There is no need for many elaborations, he said.” The reason one doesn’t need to elaborate further is the 30th and last instruction which says that “There are no more profound points than these.” “These,” of course, refer to the 30 instructions that we have been discussing, and there is nothing more profound than them.

Finally, the last line is “Put them into practice.” So, we have these the thirty instructions that were given to Rechungpa by Milarepa, who had received them from his guru Marpa. We need to put these thirty instructions into practice.

Part Three:

THE PERFECT DESCRIPTION
OF THE MIDDLE WAY

Editor's Introduction to Part Three

*I have my conscience, so that if someone benefits me I know
that I must not ignore them, but repay their kindness.
All beings have shown me kindness and so I must help them all.
If I give them the Buddha's teachings, they
will eventually reach Buddhahood.
Therefore, I take upon myself the burden of giving the Buddha's
teachings to all beings.*

— Milarepa

In this third section Thrangu Rinpoche teaches a spiritual song called “The Perfect Description of the Middle Way” from *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. The Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*) is the second of the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma by the Buddha and is mainly concerned with emptiness, bodhichitta, and the six perfections.

We often envision Milarepa as an ascetic meditating in a cave with his great realization coming only from the direct experience of his powerful practice. While that image is accurate, this teaching on the Middle Way demonstrates Milarepa's understanding of Buddhist philosophy as well. Milarepa studied under ten Buddhist teachers before meeting Marpa, and then spent many years under his guru, Marpa the Translator, who was one of the great scholars and translators in Tibet.

Thrangu Rinpoche has taught the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma many times, and begins this commentary on Milarepa's song with a brief review of the three turnings. A short overview of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma, the three basic types of Buddhist teachings as expounded in Tibetan Buddhism might help.

When the Buddha passed away his teachings were collected and preserved as the sutras. Since the Buddha was teaching individuals who had never heard the Buddhist teachings before, he taught mostly that the world was solid and real. The Buddha also taught that individuals were not separate solid, real, entities but were actually a mental construct which is now called "selflessness." These became the first turning teachings and became known later as the Foundation Vehicle. The Buddha also taught in the sutras that the world was a dream, a mirage, an illusion.

About five hundred years later, the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*) school was founded by Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna is said to have received the vast Prajnaparamita sutras from the nagas. These teachings, thousands of pages long, dealt mainly with how not only was the self insubstantial or empty of inherent existence, but also all external phenomena — trees, mountains, houses — were also empty of inherent existence. Nagarjuna wrote a number of commentaries on the Prajnaparamita using a new method of logic to prove everything is empty. This became known as the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. This view was adopted by the many Tibetan monastic colleges (Tib. *shedras*) and taught in monasteries all over Tibet.

Several hundred years later in India Asanga, who received Buddhist teachings from the Maitreya Buddha, published and wrote his own commentary on these teachings and thus founded the Yogacara School. These became known as the third turning of the wheel of Dharma.

The traditional story that is usually told is that in the fifteenth century, about 300 years after Milarepa was alive, the Jonang master Mikyo Dorje,⁶⁹ and especially the great scholar and practitioner of the Jonang lineage, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen, developed a new view of emptiness which was called the Shentong (or Zhentong) view meaning “other emptiness.” This Shentong view, to greatly simplify,

69. Not to be confused with the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje.

is that in addition to the emptiness of phenomena described in the second turning, there is an additional quality of this emptiness called *tathagatagarbha*, or buddha nature. This aspect is the knowing, or luminous clarity, aspect of emptiness.

The Shentong view is explained in much more detail by Thrangu Rinpoche in this teaching, demonstrating that the Shentong view was well known and practiced by Milarepa much earlier than Dolpopa. Duff (2011) has greatly expanded this argument by saying that the Shentong view was held by the Mahasiddha Maitripa who lived in India at the time of Marpa and Milarepa. It was Maitripa who pulled a copy of the *Uttaratantra* by the Maitreya Buddha out of a stupa which had been hidden since the time of Asanga in the fourth century. The *Uttaratantra*, a long treatise of 404 verses on buddha nature has become a major text of the Shentong view. Milarepa's own teacher, Marpa, studied under Maitripa.

The view that the Shentong approach was known in the Kagyu lineage before the word "Shentong" was first used was championed by Pema Karpo (1527-1592) the fourth Drukchen Rinpoche of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. Thrangu Rinpoche refers to Pema Karpo's commentary in teaching Milarepa's song on the Middle Way. This spiritual song by Milarepa shows that he had a good grasp of the Rangtong and the Shentong view of emptiness. The translation of

this spiritual song is by Tony Duff and to indicate that it is the root text, it is indented.

These teachings were given in Vancouver at Karma Thekchen Choling in 2000, with Peter Roberts translating.



In 1988, Thrangu Rinpoche took students from his yearly Namo Buddha Seminar in Nepal to Pharping to give a teaching at the vihara that Marpa had practiced at a thousand years before while he was acclimating himself for the Indian hot weather and learning some of its many languages. The back cover of this book shows small detail of Rinpoche in color.

Photo courtesy of Clark Johnson.

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There are two different ways to understand the Middle Way: the inferential approach using logical reasoning, and the direct perception approach using meditation. While there are some differences between these two approaches, the ultimate goal of enlightenment in both of these approaches is exactly the same. Milarepa followed the approach of direct perception through the practice of Mahamudra meditation that was passed down to him from Tilopa, to Naropa, and then to his root guru Marpa.

The Middle Way refers to taking the middle ground of not falling into either the extreme view of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism.⁷⁰ Before the Buddha was born, there were wise practitioners and philosophers in India who attempted to discover the true nature of phenomena. While some used logic and reasoning and others used meditation, they were unable to realize the true nature of re-

70. Eternalism is the belief that all outer phenomena are solid and real. Nihilism is the belief that there is no karma, cause and effect, so one can do anything one wants without fearing any karmic consequences.

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ality. At that time the two main religious schools in India believed in eternalism, which held that the creation of the world was due to the *atman* which was an unchanging, eternal, permanent self. The other school believed that a great deity, Maheshvari or Shiva, created this world that we live in. On the other hand, there were others who did not believe in reincarnation or in karmic cause and results. These latter individuals fell into the extreme view of nihilism.

When the Buddha began teaching in the Prajnaparamita sutras, he said we should practice the Middle Way, which does not fall into the extreme of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism. He taught that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness and so the belief in a solid existence of our external world was incorrect. However, he also taught that on the conventional level of reality there is dependent origination. This means that all that happens to us is dependent on our previous actions and lifetimes because of karmic cause and effect. If we understand karma, we should avoid the extreme of nihilism that believes that everything is empty.

The Buddha taught the Middle Way in the Prajnaparamita sutras. He gave these teachings in two different ways: one was “the direct teaching of emptiness” and the other was called “the hidden meaning through the Buddhist paths and bodhisattva levels.” In the direct teaching of emptiness the Buddha, for example, gave the teaching in the Heart Sutra stating that there is “no form, no

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sound, no smell, no taste” and so on. And likewise, in terms of the aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*) he taught that there is “no aggregate of form, no aggregate of sensation” and so on. These direct teachings on emptiness in the Prajnaparamita are called the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. These direct teaching on emptiness could only be understood by the arhats, the highly realized students of the Buddha. But, ordinary people hearing these teachings were often unable to understand them or realize their importance and would wonder how it was possible that all phenomena are empty. Not understanding this, they might not develop any confidence in the Middle Way teachings.

Nagarjuna expanded on these Middle Way teachings using logical arguments to show that the nature of phenomena is empty. His texts follow the teachings of the Buddha and elucidate them clearly making them easy to understand. Because of this, there was a change in understanding the concept of emptiness. Before Nagarjuna, scholars trying to understand it developed many ways to think about emptiness. Because of Nagarjuna’s clear, powerful logic and reasoning, Buddhist students adopted his method of reasoning. In fact, both non-Buddhists and Buddhists scholars in India followed the example of Nagarjuna and his method of reasoning.

Nagarjuna’s main pupil, Aryadeva, and later great masters and scholars such as Chandrakirti and Shantideva, progressively made Nagar-

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juna's view clearer and clearer. They explained that we experience pleasurable objects of the senses, such as a beautiful image, pleasant sound, delicious taste, pleasant touch, or fragrant smell, and these things seem to give us happiness. We then develop an attachment to these objects and treat them as having a real existence. We also perceive that there are pleasant places and favorable conditions and we form a great attachment to them, thinking them also to be real. In this way, the appearances of our life seem pleasant and happy. But if we examine more closely, we see that the appearances of this life are impermanent and that they all involve birth, sickness, aging, and death. When we contemplate this, we become saddened and terrified of these conditions. We wish to transcend this situation and reach some state of complete peace and happiness.

The purpose for teaching emptiness is that when we truly realize the emptiness or the insubstantiality of all those phenomena we are attached to, understanding this emptiness causes our attachment to them to diminish, and the result is that we can then develop a true state of peace and joy. Similarly, by recognizing that the things such as birth, old age, sickness, and death cause us anger, sadness, and fear, actually have no real existence, our fear and mental pain is greatly diminished. We begin to realize that everything is an illusion so there is no reason to be afraid. We can then achieve a state of peace, and this is the reason for teaching emptiness.

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If we have the ultimate view of the emptiness of phenomena, and the relative view of phenomena arising through dependent origination, we can understand this ultimate viewpoint of phenomena. But there is a difficulty in bringing this view into our meditation. While we can be convinced about the teachings on the emptiness of phenomena, we need to develop this certainty again and again and again. We can try to bring this understanding of emptiness into our practice of meditation, but this takes a very long time. This approach of the Middle Way sutras uses the inferential method of understanding emptiness.

The Buddha also taught the hidden meaning of emptiness as a way to explain emptiness in the *Ornament of Clear Realization* (Skt. *Abhisamayalankara*). This text by Maitreya Buddha given to Asanga is an exposition of the five paths and the ten bodhisattva levels in terms of their relative reality. The Buddha thus gave a teaching on emptiness by giving the hidden meaning of emptiness in relation to the five paths and the ten bodhisattva levels.

In the Land of Snows (Tibet) the Vajrayana is the main Buddhist practice and in the Kagyu lineage the main practice is to meditate on the nature of the mind. This contrasts to the analytical approach because one directly “looks” into one’s mind. These are the instructions of Mahamudra that came down from the lineage of Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa and so on to today. The Middle

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Way teachings came from Shakyamuni Buddha and began with Nagarjuna, who lived in the first century CE. He received the Middle Way teachings from the naga world and wrote many explanations of these teachings. While these seem to be two different lineages, in fact, they are not different lineages because the Buddha has the three bodies (Skt. *kayas*).

When the Buddha Shakyamuni was born, abandoned his home, attained enlightenment, turned the wheel of Dharma, and then passed away at Kushinagar, this was called the nirmanakaya emanation of the Buddha because he had a physical body that did these activities. But, the Buddha's mind knew the true nature of phenomena, had compassion for all beings, and also had the power to carry out his wisdom. So when the Buddha's body or "emanation body" (Skt. *nirmanakaya*) passed away at Kushinagar, his mind did not pass into nirvana but went into the dharmakaya.

Many of the Buddha's students were able to see him while he was alive, and his more realized followers were able to see the second "enjoyment body" (Skt. *sambhogakaya*) of the Buddha. The sambhogakaya is the form of the Buddha that resides only in pure realms. Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*), with a blue body and wearing sambhogakaya adornments, is the sambhogakaya form of the Buddha.

Even more advanced students of the Buddha, the higher level bodhisattvas and the great mahasiddhas, were sometimes able to

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see the sambhogakaya form of the Buddha. Those bodhisattvas and mahasiddhas would encounter this sambhogakaya form of the Buddha in the same way that Tilopa was able to meet the Buddha's sambhogakaya form, Vajradhara, and receive the teachings on Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas of Naropa from him and then was able to pass these teachings on.

Introduction to the song, title, and homage

Having developed renunciation, Milarepa went into the mountains in the northern Himalayas to meditate. He was living in different caves without any connection to other human beings. One time he was in the Mt. Everest area where there are five peaks named after the Five Tseringma Sisters including the main Tseringma goddess, Miyo Lozang. The five goddesses watched Milarepa and developed faith in him, and therefore appeared to him in human form. They expressed their faith and asked to receive instructions from him and become his pupils. Milarepa gave them teachings and sang songs of realization to them and that is how this particular song, The Perfect Description of the Middle Way, came about.

Milarepa was skilled in composing songs of realization and he taught the Middle Way in a spiritual song that was very beautiful. A scholar would find these verses to be excellent in content, and an ordinary person would find them easy to understand. Milarepa's songs of realization were teachings for his human and also his non-human

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students. Milarepa's principle human pupils were Gampopa and Rechungpa. The five Tseringma sisters were among his non-human students. The Perfect Description of the Middle Way is from the group of songs that were addressed to his non-human pupils, particularly, the five Tseringma sisters.⁷¹

I (Thrangu Rinpoche) am using a commentary on this song that was composed by Drukpa Pema Karpo. His commentary entitled *The Union of the Teaching of Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, and Milarepa* was included in a larger commentary, but that commentary did not survive in its complete form. There is another commentary that is complete that does survive. In Tibet, the Karma Kagyu have three important sites: the seat of the body, the seat of the speech, and the seat of the mind of Chakrasamvara. Tsurphu Monastery, the main monastery of the Karmapas, is said to be the seat of the mind of Chakrasamvara. Further east in Kham, a place called Kampogangara is the seat of the body of Chakrasamvara. Finally, there is Karma Gon Monastery, which is the seat of the speech of Chakrasamvara. These three seats were established by the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. In later times, the Khenpo of Karma Gon Monastery, Rinchen Dargye, a pupil of Jamgon Kongtrul, was a great scholar and composed many texts. Because these teaching were not printed on wooden blocks these texts did not reach India when the Tibetans

71. *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* has four chapters about Milarepa's encounters with the Tseringma sisters.

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left Tibet for India in 1959 during the Cultural Revolution when many texts were scattered or burned in Tibet. Recently, Karma Gon Monastery has been collecting surviving writings of Rinpoche Dargye from all over. Most of the works have now been collected, including Pema Karpo's commentary on this song of Milarepa. In the year 2000, a copy of this text came out of Tibet to India and so I thought this would be a good commentary to give a teaching on.

In his commentary on Milarepa's song, the great master and scholar, Pema Karpo added a title, a homage, and an offering to Milarepa's song. In his commentary Pema Karpo gave the song a title in both Tibetan and Sanskrit which is not found in Nyön Heruka's *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. In doing this, Pema Karpo was following the convention of translators who translated texts that came from India by giving this song the title in Sanskrit. The practice of giving Sanskrit titles was done for three reasons. First, it allows one to recognize and identify the source of the text as being from India. India was important because it was the place where the Buddha, all the great scholars, and the eighty-four great mahasiddhas taught the Vajrayana. Thus, India was the source of Milarepa's great, valid teachings. Placing the name in Sanskrit shows that this is not a teaching that originated in Tibet, nor was it created anew and mixed with the Bönpo religion of Tibet. So, he gave the origin of the text as coming from India by giving it the title in Sanskrit.

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The second reason for adding the title in Sanskrit is that although this song by Milarepa is not a translation of any Indian text, the contents of the song are in accord with the teachings given by the Buddha; it contains nothing that was not taught by the Buddha. It is based the lineage of instructions that came from India. Therefore, the title is first given as *Madhyamaka Sangiti* or *The Perfect Description of the Middle Way*.

Third, this title given by Pema Karpo also indicates that it is in accord with the view of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, and the great masters of the Middle Way teachings in India. The title including “the perfect description,” shows this song of Milarepa also teaches that emptiness is not just a voidness like empty space. While all phenomena are empty on the ultimate level of reality, phenomena do appear to us on the relative level of reality because of dependent origination. This dependent origination occurs without contradicting the ultimate truth, or reality, that phenomena are empty of inherent nature. So, that is why the title is “The Perfect Description of the Middle Way View.”

Traditionally, after the title comes the homage. The homage at the beginning of a text may be written either by the author or the translator. The homage asks that the text will be completed and that it will benefit many sentient beings. The homage also tells the reader which of the three divisions of the teachings this text belongs to: the

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vinaya, the training of conduct; the sutras, the training in meditation; or the abhidharma, the training in wisdom. Each of these three divisions have a different homage indicating which division the text belongs to. The Perfect Description of the Middle Way belongs to the abhidharma because it concerns developing one's wisdom, mainly by focusing on the level of ultimate truth. The homage of the text belongs to the Abhidharma and Pema Karpo therefore says, "I pay homage to Manjushri Kumarabhuta ("the youthful Manjushri") because Manjushri is the bodhisattva of wisdom.

The commentary begins with an introduction that says, "Thus have I heard," meaning that this teaching was given under the conditions of the five perfections. The first perfection is the perfect teacher, the great venerable one, the glorious Shepa Dorje. "Shepa Dorje" is the name given to Milarepa when he received the Chakrasamvara empowerment. With great faith and devotion at this empowerment, Milarepa had a direct vision of the Chakrasamvara mandala with all its deities, who then gave him his secret name, Shepa Dorje or "Laughing Vajra." Milarepa's mantra is OM AH GURU HASA VAJRA HUM.⁷² The words *hasa vajra* are Sanskrit for "Shepa Dorje." But the name by which he is most well known is "Milarepa," with *mila* being his surname, and *repa* referring to the cotton robe he wore. Milarepa actually began the tradition of Tibetan yogis wearing a

72. Tibetans say OM AH GURU HASA BENZRA HUNG" because they pronounce VAJRA as "BENZRA" and HUM as "HUNG."

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cotton robe. Tibet has very cold weather, with snowy mountains of bare rock. If you were going to be in the mountains, you would need to dress warmly by wearing animal skins. But Milarepa, whether in the snow or in a cave, wore only a cotton robe. Other people would not be able to survive that way, but Milarepa had a special quality developed through his practice that allowed him to stay warm in these cold snowy places wearing only a cotton robe. Some of his students, such as Rechungpa, who through their practice, were also able to stay in the mountains wearing only a cotton robe, became known as *repas*. So, in this text, when it refers to Shepa Dorje, Lord of Yogins, it means Milarepa.

The second perfection is the perfect place. This story takes place in Lachi Chuwar, or the “Palace of the Nirmanakaya” within the mandala of great bliss of body, speech, and mind. As noted earlier, we initially see outer illusory experiences as being pleasant and making us happy. Then, we become aware of old age, sickness, and death and we see our illusory experiences as a terrifying place full of suffering, making us want to transcend that experience of suffering and fear. And through our practice we can develop a place of peace and bliss. Milarepa first practiced sorcery, then he became sad and frightened of the consequences of killing his relatives, so he then went to Marpa to receive Dharma instructions. He didn’t just receive the instructions, he put them into practice until he attained a state of great bliss. Milarepa did not need to wear a sheepskin

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to keep warm because through the power of his practice of Subtle Heat, his body remained warm and his mind was in a state of bliss. He saw the dharmata, the true nature of phenomena, and this freed him from all suffering and sadness. He then stayed in a state of bliss and peace and was free from all conceptual complications. With his mind and body both in great bliss, he expressed these feelings through his spiritual songs. So, Milarepa resided in a state of great bliss, which was the perfect location for this teaching.

The third perfection is the perfect retinue. On the ultimate level, the retinue is indivisible from the wisdom of Milarepa's mind. But, on the relative level, Milarepa dwelt in mountains and caves where there are many non-human spirits, deities, and demons. These non-human beings would sometimes show themselves to him. For example, one time the non-human beings manifested to Milarepa as seven Indian sadhus, each of whom was only the size of his thumb. These seven also caused various other things to appear, as described in another spiritual song.

In this particular song of realization, these non-humans came in the illusory appearance of worldly dakinis who appeared in the form of beautiful women who wore magnificent clothing, wearing all kinds of precious jewelry, and were surrounded by their own retinue. They appeared in the sky before Milarepa and caused a rain of flowers to fall, the smell of incense to pervade, and the sound of

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music to be heard. They made all kinds of offerings to him, such as a delicious main dish and many side dishes of food. They requested Milarepa to explain to them the realization he had and to describe to them exactly what that realization was. They then asked him to give the teachings on the final goal of the path of liberation. They asked him to teach them his ultimate realization, the definitive meaning. These five Tseringma sisters and other goddesses became the perfect retinue.

The fourth perfection is the perfect time. This teaching occurred in the year of the female water horse, 1113, in the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar, on the eleventh day of that month, which was in the middle summer. So that was the perfect time.

The fifth perfection is the perfect teaching. The perfect teaching was the teaching that Milarepa had received from Marpa, and practiced, and having practiced, gained his realization. The teaching was on the ultimate view of the true nature of phenomena. This teaching was not a provisional meaning, but was solely of the definitive, ultimate meaning, making it the perfect teaching.

Questions

Rinpoche, previously you talked about three qualities of the dharma-kaya: wisdom, compassion, and power. I had some understanding of wisdom as associated with ultimate truth and emptiness, and

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also of compassion as associated with relative truth and luminosity. But I am wondering if you would say more about the power aspect.

The dharmakaya has the three qualities of wisdom, compassion, and power. These three qualities lead to the perfect benefit for one's self and others. To help others we have to understand and know ourselves. But then, sometimes we know something, but we do not teach it to someone else because we have a lot of pride of knowing something and being stingy with our knowledge. This problem is overcome by the second quality, the compassion of wanting to help others, of wanting to teach them what we know, of wanting to help other beings achieve their potential. We may want to help and benefit others, but we may not have the third ability, the power to do so. The classic example is a mother without her arms seeing her child being carried away by a river. She has the great desire to save her child, but not having any arms, she can't do anything to save the child. The Buddha is not like that because he has the power to help others and can use whatever method is necessary to teach any type of being. As well as having the wisdom and the compassion, the Buddha has the power to be able to benefit other beings and can do so because he has these three qualities of wisdom, compassion, and power.

Where do these non-human entities, like the five Tsering sisters, come from? They appear in many different forms and they seem

pretty important. Do we attain a certain level in our own mind and then we project these beings to help ourselves on the path, or are these non-human beings really out there?

From our perception there are lots of different kinds of beings, many different kinds of forms, and different types of minds that we can perceive. There are a vast number of beings that we can see. But there are also many beings that we cannot see — like demons and spirits and deities and so on. We may think, “this is my house, this is my food, this is where I live, and so on,” but there are also other beings all around us that we cannot see, and they are also thinking, “This is my house, this is my food, this is where I live,” and so on. Sometimes, people with clairvoyance will see them and sometimes people, like Milarepa, will have these beings appear to them in a certain form.

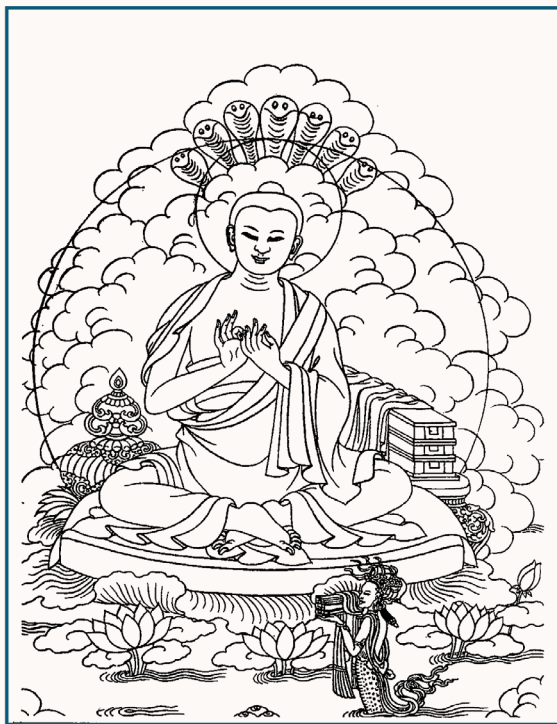
I am unclear why there is so much emphasis on the practitioner experiencing bliss. How does bliss help us along the path?

There are different methods of getting out of samsara. The other day, I said we should not think of bliss as being like getting drunk. When we look at ordinary appearances in our life, they usually look pleasant and make us happy. Then when we become aware of old age, sickness, death, and our rebirth, that can be frightening and we will want to escape from samsara. But where can we escape to? We can escape to a mental state of bliss — peace, calmness,

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and stability. To be able to do this, we have to contemplate this life and our fear of suffering. We begin to carefully observe the laws of karma and develop the desire to attain liberation from samsara. But simply contemplating suffering will not lead to liberation. We need to transcend all of samsara, and that is achieved by realizing the true nature of phenomena. This realization creates a state of bliss and peace where we are not afraid of anything. So, in practical terms, we need to receive continuous teachings of all the things we are afraid of — impermanence, death, suffering and so on. But that in itself is not liberation; we also need to be liberated from this state of bliss, of joy, and the absence of fear.

Milarepa stayed in the mountains in the snow and the cold, but he was in a state of bliss and peace. Even though he endured these harsh conditions, he was not afraid of that or anything else. Whereas, if we were to go up into the snow mountains wearing just a cotton robe, we would get there, sit down, and become afraid thinking, “Oh no, what is going to happen to me now? I am going to be frozen solid. Look, I am beginning to shake.” Milarepa was beyond that fear and remained in this state of joy and peace. So that is what is meant by “the mandala of the bliss of body, speech, and mind.”



Nagarjuna

Here Nagarjuna is in the teaching mudra with a treasure vase on his right and the Prajnaparamita teachings on his left. Below is a naga coming out of the water and offering him the Prajnaparamita teachings. Over his head is the naga protector snake which is often depicted as shading the Buddha when he sat under the bodhi tree. *Drawing Courtesy of Zhyisil Chokyi*

Ghatsal Publications.

18. The Circumstances for this Song on the Middle Way

*At the border of the countries of Nepal and Tibet,
There is the very wondrous place of Dingma Drin
Whose markets have merchandise fulfilling the nine desires.⁷³
The medicinal lady, a virtuous practitioner who brings on glory,
Dwells here as the queen of the splendid snowy tracts,
With her tresses of hair that hold the swastika of long life;⁷⁴
Her name pleasing to the ear is Tashi Tseringma.
In the mountains the mists gather to the left
Swirling around the snowy peak of Dogma — Yanggang
Isn't this the medicinal valley of Chubar?⁷⁵*

73. Counting three types of beings in each of the three realms of samsara, one gets nine kinds of beings, each with their own desires. Thus, “the nine desires” is a way of saying “every possible desire beings can have.”

74. Tashi Tseringma or “Auspicious Long-Life Lady” was the leading sister of five spirits who lived in the area and who had become Milarepa’s consorts in his practice of karmamudra. He calls her “medicinal lady” because of her capacity to give the energy of longevity.

75. In this third part of *Milarepa’s Wisdom*, the indented verses are a translation of the

18. The Circumstances for this Song on the Middle Way

This song of realization begins by describing the circumstances in which this song was given, followed by the actual teaching of the song itself, and concludes with a summary of the essence of the teaching. This song was sung on the border between Tibet and Nepal. This is a special place that Milarepa stayed where he met Tseringma and other worldly goddesses. When we say that it was on the border between Tibet and Nepal, we mean that if we go to the North, we are in Tibet and if we go to the South, we are in Nepal. So, it's not like an actual border line that we have nowadays between two countries. The histories say that Dampa Sangye spent a lot of time in a place called Dingri and that Milarepa spent a lot of time at a place called Nyenyön and also a place called Drin. This place is somewhere between Dingri and Drin and is literally named “neither Dingri nor Drin,” or *Dingma Drin* in Tibetan. People would gather there to sell a few things, so it was a place where people could go to buy the basics like clothing and food.

At Dingma Drin there is a local deity called “mentsunmo.” The title “*men*” comes from a class of deities called *men*⁷⁶ like a *menpa*, or “healer” who is naturally good and helps and aids other beings. The rest of the deity's name is *tsun* or “noble,” because this goddess will

spiritual song by Duff (See [Bibliography](#))

76. *Men* are a class of local Bin deities and Tashi Tseringma is depicted as holding a swastika, a Bön implement. This spiritual song shows that at the time of Milarepa Bön and Buddhism were interacting and sharing teachings with each other in contrast to the song about Milarepa's fight over Mount Kailash.

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aid and remove obstacles for people so that their work turns out well. The last syllable *mo* indicates that she is female. People residing in this blessed place enjoyed good physical complexion, good fortune, and they were able to accomplish the goals they wished to achieve. All goes well for those people living near the goddess, so she is called “the noble *men* goddess who brings prosperity.”

Near Dingma Drin is a glorious snow mountain which is home to this goddess who is particularly able to help beings to live a long life. She is said to have a stable and enduring life, wears various adornments, and has a very beautiful name. Because she brings prosperity and good fortune to beings, she has the name of good fortune, *tashi* in Tibetan, and because she brings long life, she is also called, Tseringma which means long life. So her full name is Tashi Tseringma.

Tashi Tseringma became a student of Milarepa and a protector of the Dharma. For that reason, even in present times, Tibetan monasteries do a supplication practice with a tormo offering to this goddess. In the Tibetan paintings she appears as a goddess seated on a snow lion. In her right hand, she holds a vajra, and in her left hand, she holds a vase. The vajra is a symbol of assisting beings to have a long life. The vase symbolizes the increase of prosperity, possessions, and good fortune. In my monastery we do the practice of Tseringma by making offering, and supplications to her, and

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often have a painting of her for the purpose of summoning a long life and good fortune to the monastery.

Milarepa met Tseringma at her mountain where there is often rain and snow, and great mists gather around the mountain so that it is completely obscured in fog. This mist is like the adornments of the mountain. To the left of this mountain is Menlung Chuwar — an unpopulated valley that is very favorable for grazing herds, and this is where Milarepa met Tashi Tseringma. In Milarepa's song it says, "Tsn't that Menlung Chuwar there?" meaning that he could look over from where he was staying and see Menlung Chuwar.

According to the *Life Story of Milarepa* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, Milarepa sometimes practiced at Lachi Snow Mountain and at other times at Menlung Chuwar. In the beginning of these retreats he underwent great hardships but continued practicing one-pointedly in these two places until he eventually gained great accomplishment there. After he had completed his practice, he was able to do miracles, such as being able to fly into the sky and sing spiritual songs to invisible beings, and to take care of and guide these beings.

Some people asked Milarepa, "You underwent hardships and practiced diligently and gained realization in these solitary places, but when it comes to teaching other beings, wouldn't it be better if you went somewhere that was nearer to other people so that you could

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teach and guide them?” Milarepa replied that he had endured great hardship, practiced, and gained accomplishment in the mountains there, and although it is not necessary to endure great hardship, he is a yogi, and is was like a sign of a hero or warrior that he remain amongst the snow mountains practicing like a yogi. And so, he stays there when guiding beings and teaching his pupils saying, “It is in such a place that the one who is practicing one-pointedly is himself, the one who is called the yogi Mila.”

*At the time of the early winter months,
Five mind-ravishingly beautiful girls
Aroused the mind for supreme unsurpassed enlightenment
And swore to give whichever siddhis were desired,
Then, flying off into the sky out of sight, disappeared.*

*Once again you amazing five have appeared
In the winter night's brilliant moonlight
As ladies so excellent as to be manifestations,
Having assumed a charming form of dance,
With robes fluttering in the wind,
And beautified by the Doshal necklace.*

*Leading lady you flattered me
Then the haughty spirits of the eight classes
Accompanied by their armies, regiments, soldiers,
And retinues of the same type made offerings*

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*Of clouds of offerings filling the sky,
Of food with hundreds of flavors, and
Of various kinds of music,
And then petitioned me for the definitive understanding.
You are the troublesome gods and ghosts of
apparent existence, aren't you?
If you are the ones who spoke such words, then you are to listen
here!*

Milarepa said that in the past when he was on retreat, the non-human beings would try to create obstacles for him, and mock and laugh at him saying things like, “Look what kind of a seat you’ve got, look what kind of meditation you have, look at what kind of clothes you are wearing,” and so on. Milarepa says that these worldly deities and spirits⁷⁷ are very proud and very short tempered. These non-human beings came to spy on him to see what he was doing and what they could do to frighten him, or if there were any obstacles that they could create for him. Milarepa said to Tashi Tseringma and her sisters, “Now you are gathered here today, weren’t you those beings who came to spy on me?”

In the previous month, five beautiful, enchanting women, had come to Milarepa and had developed supreme bodhichitta and made the

77. There is a distinction between sambhogakaya deities such as Chenrezig and Tara and the worldly spirits and beings that guard and belong to the land (Skt. *lokapalas*). These worldly spirits are still part of six realms of samsara and haven't reached enlightenment.

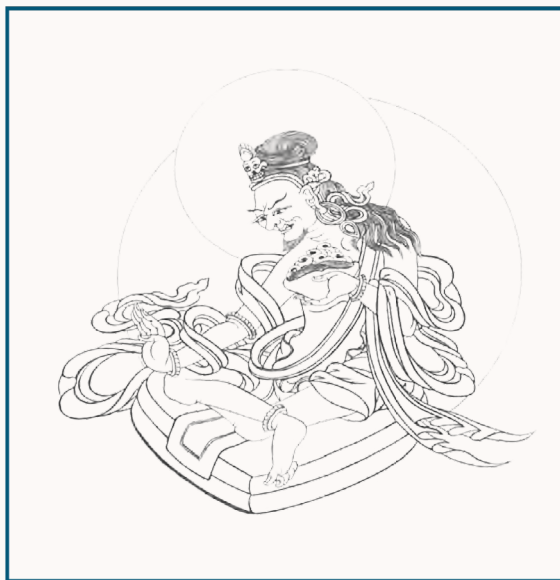
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promise that they would grant whatever siddhis he wished for. Then they flew up into space and disappeared. These five marvelous beings were Tseringma and her sisters.

On the evening when the Song of the Middle Way was first sung by Milarepa, they had come during a night with very bright moonlight. They had come in the form of beautiful women dancing, wearing very beautiful clothes of flowing silks and adorned with necklaces and bracelets. Tseringma, the principal goddess, made an offering on this evening and requested that Milarepa give them a teaching. Tashi Tseringma and her sisters had with them a retinue of the deities and spirits of the eight classes of non-human beings.⁷⁸ Great masses of these beings filled the sky with a cloud of offerings — food of a hundred flavors, many kinds of music with cymbals and flutes, and so on. With all these offerings they made a request for a teaching that gives the view of the definitive meaning.⁷⁹ Milarepa said, “You deities and spirits have made this request.” Milarepa accepted the request of this spiritual song. He asked everyone to be quiet and listen, and then he sang this song that was very beautiful and pleasing to the ear. So those are the circumstances for this song of realization.

78. There eight classes of worldly invisible beings who can either help or harm persons. These eight classes are the *ging*, *mara*, *tsen*, *yaksha*, *rakshasa*, *mamo*, *rahula*, and *naga* spirits.

79. The definitive meaning is the complete and accurate teaching that contrasts with the provisional teaching, which is simplified and leaves out information that might confuse or mislead a person. The title has also been translated as the *The Song of the Definitive Meaning*.



Naropa

Marpa's guru, Naropa, was an one of the main teachers at Nalanda, the largest Buddhist university in India at the time, and therefore thoroughly knew the Middle Way teachings. However, when Marpa met Naropa, he was living in the forest and a practicing mahasiddha. What Naropa transmitted to Marpa were the Mahamudra teachings and the Six Dharmas of Naropa — both requiring no academic study. With these practices Marpa was able to achieve enlightenment, he then transmitted them to Milarepa. Milarepa shares his realization from his direct experience in the Song of the Middle Way. *Drawing by Jamyong Singhe.*

19. The Presentation of Milarepa's View

The refutation of other's views

*Generally, the sentient beings of three realms of samsara
Have various kinds of enlightenment that they assert.
There are dualistic views that grasp at an "I."
There are the various ways of behavior that go with them;
There are very many ways of viewing a self indeed.*

After setting the stage, we now come to the actual teaching on the Middle Way which has two parts. The first part refutes the incorrect views by scholars. This refutation of the views of others is not done with any malice or anger, but is presented to remove any false ideas that prevent us from completely realizing the true nature of phenomena.

Milarepa begins this teaching by saying that beings in the three realms of samsara desire various kinds of enlightenment, have

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differing views of ego clinging, different kinds of behavior, and differing views of the self. The three realms of samsara are the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. Within these realms of samsara are many different kinds of beings, all having their own beliefs thinking, “Well, things seem to be like this,” or “Things seem to be like that.” And in terms of the goal — whether we call it enlightenment or buddhahood — they also have different ideas. Some say, “The goal I want to achieve is like this,” others say, “The goal I want to achieve is like that.”

There are also different views on what is meant by a “self.” In India, for example, there were many nonBuddhist such as the Samkhyas who held the view that there is a self or consciousness — mountains, places, and people. That principle or consciousness, becomes distracted by emanations (material things). Later on, by meditating on the self, they become ashamed and realize what has happened. Then gradually, all that was emanated is withdrawn back into this principle, so that there is only the self that remains, and this is called the “original self.”

The Samkhyas believed that the nature of the self is knowing. Later this view was contested by the Vaisheshika tradition, who said that “knowing” is a quality of the self, that it is not the self. They said that the self itself was a solid real thing through which the self then becomes connected with the rest of samsara.

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Contemporary to the Buddha, the Jain religion held the view that by meditating one attains an enlightened state that is like a parasol laid flat — extremely white, pure, and bright — and this is the final goal to be achieved. Finally, there were the Charvakas, who denied the existence of enlightenment entirely.

In the same way that there were many different kinds of desires and goals to be aspired to, there were also many different kinds of conduct. Charvakas, for example, would say that we should concentrate on the happiness in this life and not think about any life after that. The Jains would say the opposite, that even the very subtlest negative actions ripen, so that even if we were in an unpopulated place with a river, we shouldn't drink from the water unless there is a person there who gives permission, otherwise we would be stealing (taking what is not being given). Jains would wear bells around their feet, so that as they walked, they would frighten away the insects because stepping on an insect was committing murder (taking a life). So, the Jains had to very minutely observed their behavior. In contrast, Charvakas did not believe that they needed to pay attention to their behavior because they did not believe in karma, cause and effect.

In summary, people have many different kinds of conduct based on their different beliefs, such as those who believe that there is no negative karma incurred by going to war and killing the enemy.

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There are also different views of the self. We don't need to go through each one refuting it in detail, but it is important to understand that holding the view that there is a permanent self impedes us from reaching the goal of enlightenment.

Presentation of Milarepa's view

Milarepa next presents his own tradition in three parts — the teaching of the view, meditation, and the goal or result. The view describes the true nature of the ground, or we could say the foundation of phenomena. The view of phenomena can be divided into has two parts: the way that phenomena appear to us, and the way phenomena truly are. The way that phenomena appear to us is on the conventional level of reality. The way that phenomena really are is on the ultimate level of reality.

Let us begin with an example of the way things appear to us. For instance, a person can be dreaming and in that dream, he sees a house and family and friends. Some say that these things exist because he is perceiving them. It's true that he is perceiving these people and the house. So, we can say this dream did exist. However, the people and the house in the dream were only a temporary reality, so on the ultimate level everything in the dream did not exist. Therefore, dreams exist only on the relative level of reality. In Tibetan, relative reality is *kunzop* which literally means “completely false truth.” In terms of relative reality, these people and places appeared, but in

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terms of their true nature on the ultimate level, the house and people don't exist because there was no person or house in the bedroom while the person was dreaming. In the same way, all the appearances of this world are relative appearances of phenomenon. But in terms of their true nature, there is no self, objects like an arm or leg, or relative concepts such as good or bad, big or small, and so on. To become enlightened, the ultimate level of phenomena has to be realized, and to do this, we have to free ourselves from the illusion of relative reality.

Complying with their type of mind, to those of lesser mental ability, the all-knowing Buddha did teach that "everything exists."

Milarepa's song says that the omniscient Buddha taught that everything is solid and real and exists. But this was only for the students who were just beginning or at a lesser level of attainment. Milarepa explains that the Buddha first gave the teaching of the Four Noble Truths to the Shravakas, who were new to the teaching. It would not have been appropriate for the Buddha to have given his first teachings using sophisticated concepts such as selflessness and emptiness. So, when he first turned the wheel of the Dharma at the Deer Park in Sarnath, he taught the Four Noble Truths to his first five pupils.

In this teaching, he taught that there was samsara and nirvana, and that the cause and effect causing suffering in samsara is known as

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the First Noble Truth of suffering. There are three main kinds of suffering within samsara. First is the “suffering of suffering,” which refers to all of the different kinds of sufferings that beings have. Beings do not experience this suffering continuously because they also experience some happiness. But the Buddha taught that this happiness is actually just an aspect of suffering because this happiness will eventually change to unhappiness, and that is the second kind of suffering called the “suffering of change.” For example, a child can bring a mother a great deal of happiness, but if she were to lose the child, this change would cause a great deal of suffering. Third, whether people are experiencing suffering or experiencing happiness, everything is impermanent, moment by moment; this is the third suffering, called the “all-pervading suffering.”

We all understand that there is suffering in samsara, but what is the cause of this suffering? To answer this question, the Buddha taught the Second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering. This suffering in samsara is the result of our actions, our karma. There are good actions and bad actions. Good actions, good thoughts, and good motivations lead to many kinds of happiness. The karma from bad actions and negative motivations give rise to all kinds of suffering. Therefore, karma is the origin of suffering. This karma arises from the disturbing emotions, and due to these negative thoughts, we do negative things. These actions accumulate negative karma, which

then give rise to a result. So, karma and the disturbing emotions are the origin of suffering.

In nirvana we become free of both the cause and the effect of suffering. Therefore nirvana is called the Third Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering. To eliminate suffering, we have to eliminate its causes, which are negative karma and the disturbing emotions. If disturbing emotions are eliminated, then the suffering in our life will automatically cease.

We may ask, “What is the cause or condition for attaining nirvana?” The cause for attaining nirvana is the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path. We must practice the path by gathering the accumulations of merit, meditating, and realizing the true nature of phenomena. To do this we must go through the five paths: the first path of accumulation where we accumulate merit, the second path of juncture where we practice meditation. Then we must achieve the third path of seeing through our practice of meditation when we begin to perceive the true nature of phenomena. On the fourth path of meditation, we develop and increase our realization so that we can finally attain the fifth path, which is the truth of cessation, the attainment of nirvana. To become free of suffering, we must eliminate its causes, which are the disturbing emotions and negative karma. This is done through practicing the five paths.

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The suffering in samsara arises from having disturbing emotions and the resulting karma and the disturbing emotions arise from the belief in a self. Our belief in self, and therefore in other, is what causes disturbing emotions such as desire, anger and jealousy to arise. When we see that “self” does not exist, the disturbing emotions naturally cease. Therefore, the Buddha also taught that it is very important to understand selflessness or egolessness.

To understand that there is no solid self, we can take the example of the “self” in our own body. Sometimes we think that our body as “me,” but then sometimes we think of our thoughts and feelings as “me” and our body as “mine.” Sometimes we think of our “self” as a single entity, but if we think of our body as “the self,” we find that the body is a composite of many different parts because the body is not a single entity but is made up of arms, legs, organs, and so on. Early Buddhist, the Shravakas, actually imagined dividing the body mentally into smaller and smaller parts until they came to a small indivisible part, the “partless particle.” But self as being our body cannot be a single entity, because our self is not the same as these millions of imaginary partless particles.

Also, we might think the self or “I” as being our consciousness believing, “I have a consciousness present from my birth to my death, I am this unchanging, single consciousness.” But that cannot be, because the consciousness of right now and not the consciousness

of the previous instant which is gone. And then the consciousness of “I” this instant will cease to exist in the next instant. Clearly, there is a continuous flow of consciousness which is like a river where at any point along the river the water is never the same. When we see it in this way, we see that our consciousness cannot be the “self” that we imagine as a single, permanent, lasting entity. By realizing selflessness that there is no “I” that we have to defend, to promote, to cherish makes it possible for us to eliminate the disturbing emotions and eliminate negative karma. Therefore, we meditate upon the path and through this we gain the realization of selflessness. So, this is the teaching that the Buddha gave to the Shravakas in the first turning of the wheel of Dharma.

The Mind Only view

The Mind Only (Skt. *Chittamatra*) School⁸⁰ furthered the view of the Shravakas belief of there not being a self, by going towards an understanding ultimate reality. The Shravakas believed that external phenomena was ultimately made up of real indivisible particles of matter. But the Mind Only view held that if we go from smaller to smaller to even smaller particles, we will reach the point where there is just one indivisible particle that does not have sides — north, south, east, west. A particle without sides cannot possibly

80. The term “mind only” was first used in the *Lankavatara Sutra* and posits that the external world does not exist independent of the mind. This view of the Chittamatrins was taken up by the Yogacara school.

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exist. No matter how small one divides things, one will not reach that particle. So, the Mind Only school presented the idea that an indivisible particle of matter is purely a fabrication of the mind and therefore conclude that all phenomena are just appearances that appear in the mind, and therefore all phenomena are solely mind.

We may think, “That cannot be. Phenomena are not just appearances to the mind, phenomena must exist externally to us. If external objects do not exist externally, they could not appear to the mind.” The Mind Only view counters this argument by saying that though things don’t exist, they can appear to the mind as if they do exist. For example, in a dream we can see mountains, houses, and people just as we see them when we are awake; we can even see the shapes of the stones, the color of rooms in the houses, and so on. A dreaming person is perceiving all these things, but they don’t really exist; they are merely appearances in that person’s mind. In the same way, while we are awake, these phenomena and all of their characteristics appear to us, but do so appearing in the mind without any true existence.

External phenomena that we experience are said to be relative or dependent appearances. They arise in dependence on each other. For example, I can say, “That apple is over there,” but if I go over to the apple, then “over there” becomes “here,” and where I was standing before becomes “over there.” So, “here and there” have

no reality in themselves — they just occur through dependence on each other. In the same way, there exist many things that are dependent on something else, such as long and short, young and old, beautiful and ugly, and self and others. These things appear only in dependence on something else, but without any reality of their own. In the Middle Way view, it is important to realize emptiness, but it is also very important to realize the dependent arising of relative phenomena, and the dependence of effects or results on the causes of our actions. Realizing this relative dependence of phenomena is of crucial importance.

Questions

What is the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*) view on merit? I have a difficulty with the concept of doing something that generates merit and then dedicating that merit, because if the merit is really worthwhile, I should keep it. And if merit is not worthwhile because I have no self, why do we dedicate it?

This teaching says there is selflessness, but that doesn't mean that the self is nothing, or a voidness. Relative phenomena arise through dependent origination. Through this relative dependence, there is a self, and there are others, and there is the accumulation of positive or negative actions, and there are the results of these actions. So, at this level of relative reality, there is merit, and one needs to accumulate merit by doing positive actions that are beneficial to

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ourselves. But if we think only of benefiting ourselves, then that is being self-centered or selfish. We might think, “I wish I had only happiness and didn’t have any suffering.” Everyone else also wishes to have happiness and to avoid suffering. So, if the accumulation of good karma is something that is beneficial for myself, and everyone else wants the same thing, I should therefore share that with everyone else, as well as accumulating it for myself.

Rinpoche, I was struck by a phrase, “The teaching of the selflessness of the individual.” I am not sure if there is some concept of the self versus individual, or if that’s just an artifact of translation.

Here selflessness means you have no real inherent existence. When it says “the selflessness of the individual,” “selflessness” in Tibetan is *dakme* (Skt. *anatman*) and “individual” translates as *gangzak*. There are two kinds of selflessness. There is the selflessness of phenomena, meaning all phenomena are insubstantial or empty. And then there is each individual person’s selflessness, the “I” that is not a solid existing thing.

When you were teaching about Tseringma, the role of protectors of the teachings came up in our discussion group. I was wondering if you could comment on protectors. Also, could tell us a little about the Mahakala chant that we do in the evening? Are there any particular instructions about relating to the protectors in the course of one’s daily practice?

19. The Presentation of Milarepa's View

We have the three refuges — the Buddha, and the Dharma, and the sangha. Then we also have the three roots, making up the six refuges. The three roots are the guru, the yidam, and the Dharma protectors.

The guru is the source of blessings, the yidam is the source of special abilities or siddhis, and the protector is the source of activity. The Buddha gave us the Dharma. But we receive these teachings directly from the guru. So, it is through the kindness of the guru that we receive these teachings of the Dharma. We therefore say the guru is the root of blessings.

We take refuge in the Dharma. There are the 84,000 different teachings of the Dharma. We aren't able to learn and practice all of 84,000 different teachings. Fortunately, we don't need to learn them all. Instead, we can do one practice, one particular aspect of the Dharma, which is the practice of a yidam deity. We then do that deity practice — such as Chenrezig, or Medicine Buddha, or Vajrayogini — which has a generation stage and a completion stage. Through this we gain the accomplishment of that practice. Because of this we say that the yidam is the source, or root, of accomplishment (Skt. *siddhi*).

We take refuge in the sangha, our supporters in the Dharma. They help us on the path by removing adverse conditions to our practice and establishing favorable conditions for us to increase our faith,

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devotion, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. So, the sangha supports our practice. A particular aspect of the sangha are the Dharma protectors. The sangha primarily consists of human beings, but there are also non-human beings who can help us on the path by establishing favorable conditions, eliminating unfavorable conditions, and aiding us to progress upon the path. Just like we can have ordinary friends, spiritual friends, and high-level bodhisattvas, we have three kinds of Dharma protectors: wisdom protectors, activity protectors, and world protectors. These different levels of protectors act as the source of the activity for establishing favorable conditions and eliminating negative conditions.

Among the protectors, we have Mahakala, who is wrathful, and we also have Tseringma, who is peaceful. Mahakala is depicted with flames of fire around him and a scary appearance. Does this mean that he is angry or malevolent? No, it doesn't. He actually has compassion, and through his compassion he appears in this wrathful form. For example, if a mother greatly loves her child and sees the child is going near a cliff, a fire, or a river, to save the child she will shout loudly and scold him. What she is feeling is not anger; she is feeling love and compassion for the child. In that same way, Mahakala has a wrathful appearance in order to prevent a pupil from going astray on a wrong path, but this is entirely through compassion. It is said that if we look at thangkas of Mahakala, our first impression is one of wrath or anger. But if we look carefully

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at the thangka, we'll see that he doesn't really look angry at all, he is laughing: he has a wrathful appearance, but he is acting out of compassion.



Thrangu Rinpoche painted this depiction of a dream that Marpa had predicting how Milarepa's lineage would expand vastly as is told in *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. The original painting is at Thrangu Monastery, Canada.

20. Milarepa's Analysis of the Middle Way

The ultimate truth

The previous chapter explained how appearances exist in terms of relative reality. In relative reality the Buddha taught that everything exists: there is karma, there is cause and result, there are the Four Noble Truths, there is buddhahood, and there is the attainment of buddhahood. He taught that all of these things exist in terms of dependent appearances. But, in this song of realization Milarepa now speaks about the ultimate truth or reality:

*From the standpoint of the ultimate truth,
There are no, let alone blockages, even buddhas themselves —
There are no meditators and no meditations,
No bodhisattva levels to be traversed and no signs of the path,
No fruition of the kayas and wisdoms,
Therefore, there is no nirvana,*

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They are just designations made with names and words.

The three realms with inanimate and animate

Are primordially not produced, they have no birth,

There is no base, no co-emergent birth,

There is no karma and no karmic maturation,

Therefore, samsara's name also does not exist;

That's how it is in the ultimate reality.

If someone is dreaming and they see houses, people, flowers, and so on, it is clear that these things do appear to that person. So, in terms of relative appearances, they exist. But in terms of ultimate truth, they do not exist. The way things truly are when we are asleep and dreaming of these things is that there are actually no houses or animals and so on in the bedroom. Similarly, we have relative appearances that we can experience while awake which can be pleasant at first, but when we become aware of impermanence, death, sickness, and suffering, we then find these relative appearances to be frightening.

However, in terms of ultimate truth, we can perceive something as being either pleasant or frightening, but in both cases these appearances are really just empty, or insubstantial, and therefore are nothing to be afraid of. So, in terms of the ultimate truth, when we can perceive the true nature, the obstacles we perceive don't have any reality. These obstacles are conceptual elaborations that

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prevent us from perceiving the true nature of reality. These obstacles are thoughts of existence, or non-existence, or both, and neither. These conceptualizations act as an obstacle to us, but actually these obstacles don't exist. As Milarepa says, "Not only are there no obstructions, there are not even buddhas."

When we are free of these thoughts and conceptualizations, we can reach the state of buddhahood, which is the realization of the true nature of phenomena. We must realize that buddhahood is not an entity that exists apart from the obstacles of thoughts and conceptualizations. It is not like, as described before, the Jain belief that enlightenment is like a white parasol that resides above everything else. Rather, as described in the *Three-hundred Verse Prajnaparamita Sutra*, buddhahood is the dharmakaya, the realization of the true nature of all phenomena. If someone has the view that buddhahood is a solid thing or that it is just emptiness, that person has not realized buddhahood. The *Prajnaparamita sutra* describes the realization of the true nature of phenomena as being inconceivable and inexpressible. It cannot be understood by conceptualization and it cannot be expressed in words. So, anyone holding only a conceptual idea of buddhahood will not be able to experience it.

The thoughts and conceptualizations that cause obstacles for us need to be eliminated. Therefore, in the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha taught emptiness to eliminate these thoughts

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and conceptualizations. The second turning teaches that everything from basic sensory perception of forms or images, sounds, smells, and tastes, the Four Noble Truths, the links of dependent origination right up to omniscient buddhahood all have no true existence. They don't exist as solid entities. That means that all of samsara and nirvana also do not have any reality.

Milarepa says that meditators and what is meditated on do not exist, and that the ten bodhisattva levels and the signs of realization don't exist. When it says there is no meditator, the commentary by Pema Karpo explains that the meditator is thinking, "I am meditating," and if there is no object of meditation, then there also can be no meditator. When Milarepa says there is no object of meditation, this is because an object implies "other." Since there is no "other" apart from ourself, this means we do not newly created the true nature in our meditation because the nature has always been empty. This empty nature has always been there, so our meditation is not giving rise to something else. Therefore, there is nothing to be meditated on.

We normally think that there is our self who is doing the meditation and there is something that we are meditating on, and that we wish to cause our delusion to cease. Then, through the practice of meditation we hope to progress through the ten bodhisattva levels and gain the positive signs and qualities of the paths. But in fact, this hope that we bring our delusions to an end does not accord

with the true nature of phenomena. The stages of the paths and the qualities of the levels are relative appearances merely due to dependent origination. What is really happening on the ultimate level is that we are just realizing the true nature of phenomena.

When Milarepa says, “No fruition of the kayas and wisdoms exist,” he means this in terms of the ultimate dharmakaya and the two form kayas. Although we may wish to attain these “things,” he says that the dharmakaya, the form kayas, and wisdom do not exist as solid things. The wisdom of the dharmakaya is the attainment that benefits us, and the form kayas (the nirmanakaya and the sambhogakaya), that appear to others also benefit us. For more pure or advanced students, there is the appearance of the sambhogakaya, and for the impure or ordinary students there is the appearance of the supreme nirmanakaya. But these kayas and wisdoms do not exist as states that are to be grasped and attained. Instead, they are just stages in realization of the true nature of phenomena. We have to eliminate all those karmic actions and disturbing emotions that prevent us from realizing the true nature of phenomena. So, we gradually eliminate them, and when they are completely eliminated, we have attained buddhahood.

The word “buddha” in Tibetan is made up of two syllables, *sang* and *gye*. The syllable *sang*, meaning “purified,” indicates that all of the obscurations and defilements have been eliminated or purified. Once

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all the obstacles of realizing the true nature have been eliminated, then all of the positive qualities develop. The second syllables *gye* in Tibetan, means “to develop” or to blossom like flowers bloom, or like trees grow. By having all of these obstacles and obscurations removed, there is the realization of the true nature of phenomena. When we have realized the true nature of phenomena, we look at all the other beings who do not have that realization and see that they are suffering. Yet, they are residing within the true nature also, so there is no need for them to continue to suffer. Knowing that, the realized person feels compassion for them, wishing to liberate them from their suffering by teaching them the realization of the true nature. So, we then have the ability to free beings from their suffering by helping them realize the true nature of phenomena. This is actually the attainment of buddhahood, the attainment of the three kayas, which are not solid entities that one acquires, but simply the realization of the true nature of phenomena.

It is said in the *King of Samadhi Sutra* that in a clear night sky an image of the moon will appear in a calm lake or sea. But that doesn't mean that the moon has fallen into the lake. In the same way, the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya appear to practitioners, but they don't have any solid existence. Similarly, we should understand all the activity of the Buddha comes from the dharmakaya to benefit beings without having any solid existence. That is how we should understand the nature of phenomena.

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The path, the result, the kayas, and so on also have no true existence and are just names or labels that are applied to the true nature of phenomena. We use these labels, such as the dharmakaya, to help benefit beings, but they don't exist as any kind of solid entities.

Milarepa then says, "Therefore, there is no nirvana." Nirvana is merely imputed words and names." Within the three realms of samsara, all beings that live there do appear and are perceived, but we must remember that they are actually no different from the reflection of the moon in a clear lake. We can see the moon in a calm lake, but the moon is not actually there. In the same way, all of the beings and things in samsara have no true existence, but are rather like a reflection of the moon in a lake.

So, on the ultimate level of reality, samsara and nirvana do not exist, but on the relative level there are good actions, bad actions, and the ripening of their karma. In this way, Milarepa described his understanding of emptiness.

The teachings on emptiness

When hearing the teaching on emptiness, we sometimes feel conviction and say, "Oh, I guess it's true that everything is empty." But sometimes we may wonder, "What is the reason for saying that all buddhas are empty, that samsara is empty, that everything is empty." If we do not understand this reasoning, then our medita-

tion cannot be complete because we do not understand emptiness. Therefore, the great scholars and siddhas who studied the Middle Way teachings developed a certainty in the teachings on emptiness. They then received meditation instructions from their teachers that enabled them to develop very strong meditation that was aided by the clarity of the knowledge they had gained.

It is beneficial to have an understanding of what is meant by emptiness. As described before, great masters such as Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti composed texts to explain the teachings of the Buddha. They provided very subtle logical arguments to prove that the nature of phenomena is empty. In particular, there are four different logical arguments for emptiness in the Middle Way summarized by Mipham.⁸¹ For example, Nagarjuna presents a logical reasoning of interdependence and Chandrakirti in his *Entering the Middle Way* (Skt. *Madhyamakavatara*) presents a logical reasoning for emptiness by examining the relationship between cause and effect. Shantarakshita also wrote a text on logical reasoning to explain emptiness that examines whether phenomena are single or multiple.

If we do not understand these logical arguments, then our meditation will not be complete because we will not understand empti-

81. These four arguments as described by Mipham are (1) the examination of cause and effect, often call the vajra splinters, (2) the examination of effects, (3) the examination of single and multiple, and (4) the examination of all sources. Thrangu Rinpoche has explained these reasonings in detail in his *The Open Door To Emptiness*.

ness. Therefore, it is beneficial to have an understanding of what is meant by emptiness.

The reasoning of interdependence

Nagarjuna's logical argument of interdependence simply means that any one thing is dependent on another thing. Without the other thing being there, then this thing cannot exist. So, I have a 4-inch incense stick which is called "the long one," and a 2-inch incense stick which is called "the short one." Because this incense stick is perceived as "short," it is dependent on the other one perceived as "long." However, we can then add this 6-inch stick to replace the 2-inch one and suddenly the "long" one is the "short" one. So, the qualities of "long" and "short" do not really exist, but are entirely dependent on something else. We can do the same for "near and far," "here and there," and "beautiful and ugly," because all of these things are just dependent on each other. One can't say that any of these qualities exist independently on their own.

So, this is the meaning of interdependence, that all phenomena exist in dependence upon something else, and that is the way they appear to our mind. Their appearances arise in our mind, but they do so only through their dependence upon each other. For that reason, Nagarjuna said that everything appears purely through interdependence and that there is nothing that exists outside of dependent

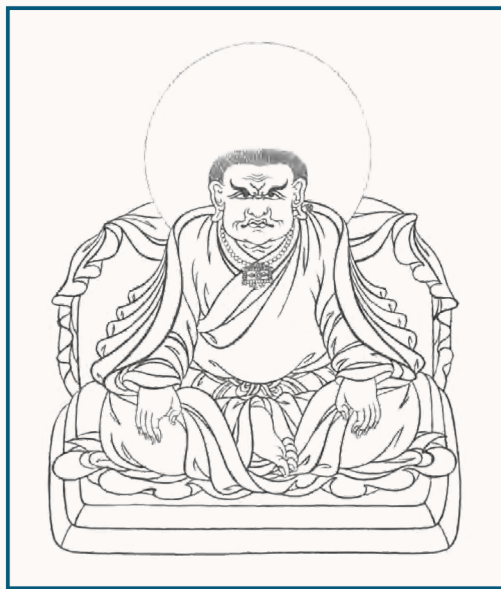
origination. So, we can say that as there is nothing solid and real, therefore everything is empty of inherent existence.

The reasoning on singularity and multiplicity

The second logical reasoning given by Shantarakshita in his text *The Adornment of the Middle Way* that demonstrates emptiness is based on how things are neither single nor multiple. The great Tibetan practitioner Ju Mipham wrote a commentary that makes this reasoning very clear. His reasoning begins with the assumption that for something to exist as an entity, it must be a single, indivisible thing. If we take something, for example, the thing we call our hand, then for our hand to exist as a single entity, it must be indivisible. However, when we examine it, our hand is composed of the skin, but the skin is not our hand. We don't point to our skin and say, "That is my hand." However, inside of the thing we call "our hand" there is flesh, but the flesh is not our hand either. There are bones in our hand, but the bones are not our hand. Inside the bones there is marrow. Is the marrow our hand? No, all these different things — skin, flesh, bones, marrow — are not our hand. We may ask, "Is there a hand apart from these flesh and bones?" We have to answer, "Well, all of these things are not our hand. Our hand must be something other than these parts." But this isn't true. So, using this logic we can see that our hand does not really exist, but is simply a name.

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This reasoning of single and multiple works not on the hand alone, but can be applied to any other part of the body and the body itself to show that it has no real existence. It can be applied to any phenomena. We can think of a house that is made up of a door and windows, floors and ceilings, but none of these themselves are the house. The house is just a composite of many different things that are put together with the name of “house.” We can then look at a part of a house, such as a door, and realize the door itself is made up of different things — a frame, hinges, and so on. In that way, we establish that all things are just aggregates that have been given names. Whether we look at external phenomena such as a house or tree, or at internal phenomena such as consciousness and the self, we find that each is an aggregate (Skt. *skandha*) or a heap, just like a pile of rice or pebbles. In other words, it is an aggregate of smaller things that has a name applied to it.



Marpa, the Translator

Marpa was born in southern Tibet to an affluent family and studied under Shakyas Yeshe at an early age and mastered Sanskrit. He took his first trip to India as an attendant to the translator Nyo. After returning, he took his inheritance, converted it to gold, went to Nepal, studied under two translators, and then went to India. There he found Naropa and stayed with him for 12 years. Upon returning he began farming, married, had eight children, taught the Dharma, and also became Milarepa's guru. He is depicted in this picture as being very angry because of how roughly he treated Milarepa. He is in meditation posture and is wearing a *gau* (amulet holding precious substances). *Drawing by Jamyong Singhe.*

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The practice of meditation

This spiritual song, The Perfect Description of the Middle Way, has three parts: the view, the meditation, and the result. We have covered the view, including the view of relative and ultimate reality.

We now come to the second section, the practice of meditation in the Middle Way. For the practice of meditation, we first need to establish the foundation. The foundation of our meditation can be established through two methods: through logical reasoning or through direct perception. We have used logical reasoning to establish that there is no true existence of the self, in the previous chapter. This foundation gives us the goal of what the meditation should be focused upon.

To develop the view through direct perception we receive instructions from a teacher, and the teacher then gives us a direct introduction to, or “pointing out” of the nature of the mind. Up until that point,

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we did not have faith or trust in the fact that the nature of the mind has no reality and is the nature of emptiness. So, the teacher points this out the empty essence of the mind. Our teacher tells us that the nature of the mind is emptiness, but that it is not nothingness: it is empty but it also has luminous clarity. Then, through meditation, we gain direct understanding that this is the goal of meditation and this is what we should focus on.

Understanding of the view can be gained through reasoning, and through doing this we can gain a certainty in that understanding. We continue to develop and contemplate this certainty again and again, so that our understanding of the emptiness of phenomena gradually becomes clearer and clearer. Then, we begin to understand that the earth and rocks and stones and mountains all have the nature of emptiness. But, when we actually look directly at mountains, rocks, stones, and earth, they appear to us as being solid and real and not having the nature of emptiness.

The purpose of meditation

In meditation, we look nakedly⁸² at mind itself. And when we do that, we see that the mind has no size, no color, and so on. When we perceive this empty essence of mind, we have a direct perception of it, and we can cultivate this so it becomes clearer and clearer. When we perceive the empty essence of the mind, this does not

82. The phrase to “look nakedly” means perceiving directly without any conceptualization.

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mean that our body becomes a corpse. In looking at the essence of the mind we see emptiness, yet there are still all the illusory experiences of samsara that arise from it. We also perceive that all the experiences of meditation arise from the mind. But when we look directly at this in our meditation, this empty essence of the mind is not a voidness because we also gain a recognition of what Nagarjuna meant when he discussed emptiness, or what the Buddha meant when he taught about illusory nature of everything. We then think, “Oh, this is what the Buddha and Nagarjuna were talking about.” Sometimes we can identify this and sometimes we can’t. So, we keep on meditating so that we will be able to identify this emptiness and we continue to meditate so that we can maintain this view so that it will become clearer and clearer.

The purpose of meditation, therefore, is to see the nature of the mind and the true nature of phenomena. But to do that, we must engage in Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. To develop a clear Vipashyana meditation, we need to have the stability that comes from Shamatha meditation. If we do not have Shamatha meditation, our Vipashyana meditation will lack clarity and we will fail to progress in our meditation. So, it is very important to have good Shamatha meditation.

Shamatha meditation

In his commentary on Milarepa's Perfect Description of the Middle Way, Pema Karpo primarily discusses Vipashyana meditation and I (Rinpoche Rinpoche) thought it would be a good idea to supplement this with a teaching on Shamatha meditation. There are many methods for doing Shamatha meditation. We can begin by focusing the mind on an impure object such as a pebble, or on a pure object, such as picture or statue of the Buddha. Most teachers give Shamatha instructions by having the student focus on their breathing — focusing the mind on the out-breath and the in-breath. This is a very good method. Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* says that if we have strong desires, we should meditate on the unpleasantness of the object; if we have strong anger, we should meditate on love; and if we have many thoughts, we should meditate on the breath. Having many strong thoughts is a great obstacle to our practice. The Buddha recommended meditating on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath to pacify strong thoughts and make the mind become peaceful and calm. Then, when the mind has become peaceful and calm, we can have a stable practice of Vipashyana meditation.

This meditation on the breath is very good, but there is another meditation for having too many thoughts that is not solely focused on the breathing. The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje in *The Aspirational Prayer of Mahamudra* has a verse on Shamatha meditation

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saying that the waves of the strong and subtle thoughts become pacified by examining the mind.

*The waves of obvious and subtle thoughts cease by themselves;
the undisturbed river of the mind becomes naturally calm.
May there be an untroubled peaceful sea of Shamatha,
free from the polluting impurities of dullness and agitation.*

— Rangjung Dorje, Verse 16

Many different thoughts arise in our mind. By “mind” we mean the basic luminous clarity and knowing of the mind itself. There are very strong thoughts and very subtle thoughts. Sometimes these thoughts are so subtle that we are not normally even aware of them. Other times we have very strong thoughts of anger or worry that can be overwhelming. What should we do with these strong thoughts? The Third Karmapa gives the simile that the mind is like an ocean with all these waves on it. These subtle and obvious thoughts are like waves. Sometimes we have tiny waves and sometimes very large waves. All of these waves, strong and subtle thoughts, need to be pacified. When they are stilled, we can rest in the nature of the mind. And when the mind becomes still, we rest in this unwavering state of the nature of the mind, which we call Shamatha. So how do we still the mind?

Maintaining mindfulness and alertness

The abhidharma makes a distinction between mind and mental events. The mental events are all of the thoughts that arise in the mind, which can be neutral thoughts, good thoughts, and bad thoughts. In meditation, we can be distracted by thoughts, but also, we can have the intention to not be distracted by these thoughts. In Tibetan we say we can employ *drenpa* which literally means “remembering,” or we can say, “mindfulness,” in which we are able to maintain the awareness, or remember, that we are not going to be distracted and will not forget to continue meditating when thoughts arise. Obviously, sometimes we may forget and the mind becomes distracted. Then, we remember again, and focus the mind back on the meditation. To be mindful and not become distracted by thoughts, we also need to have an alertness of these different thoughts that are coming and going in the mind. If we are not aware of the coming and going in the mind, we will have no idea of what is happening — where the mind has been going, what thoughts our mind has been chasing after. This mental factor of alertness, called *seshin* in Tibetan, is that we know exactly where the mind is resting, what it is focusing on, what thoughts are arising in the mind, and when the thought ceases. During the practice of Shamatha meditation it is very important to maintain this mindfulness and alertness.

Nine stages of resting the mind in Shamatha

In developing Shamatha there are nine stages of resting the mind. The first stage is called “resting the mind,” where our mind is able to rest in a relaxed and calm state with mindfulness and alertness. After being able to rest the mind using mindfulness and alertness, the second stage called “continued resting.” The first stage, “resting,” lasts for a very brief time. The second stage of “continued resting” lasts a little longer with our meditation becoming a little longer, and then still a little longer.

After this continued resting using mindfulness and alertness, we begin the third stage. In our meditation we will become distracted by thoughts and our mind will no longer be at rest. We recognize that we are being distracted, and we then return to resting the mind in meditation. This third stage is called “repeated resting.” So, we recognize that we have been distracted by thoughts, and at that point we don’t think, “Oh, these thoughts are very good and I should continue to think about them,” or “Oh, these are terrible I’ve been distracted.” In this third stage we don’t consider the distraction as being something good or bad, but rather we just think that thoughts will naturally arise in our mind. So, we recognize that thoughts arise in the mind and that we have been distracted by the thoughts. Then without judgement, we simply return to resting in meditation. In this third stage we don’t need to become worried

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or discouraged because we were distracted; instead we should just to think that the arising of thoughts is the natural state of beings, and simply go back to resting in meditation. In the fourth stage, “fully settling,” the mind has developed a stronger, more intensive resting, which is the result of mindfulness.

The fifth stage is “taming.” Sometimes so many thoughts will arise in meditation that we are unable to rest in meditation at all. At that time, we should think how beneficial it is to meditate, and how fortunate we are to be able to do it. We can think of all of the good qualities of meditation and how it benefits our health and the stability of the mind. By doing that, we will be able to tame this untamed mind.

In the sixth stage, called “pacification,” we contemplate the harmful qualities of not meditating, namely, that how without meditation, thoughts crowd our mind and cause the disturbing emotions. We think of all the negative results that come from these thoughts and disturbing emotions and because of them, we are not able to meditate. We contemplate how these thoughts and disturbing emotions create negative karma and this negative karma creates all the suffering in samsara. Thinking of all of these negative results will help prevent these thoughts from arising.

Through the practice of the fifth and sixth stages, taming and pacification, we can engage in the seventh stage, called “complete pacifica-

tion.” So, through a very strong, controlled use of mindfulness and alertness, we are able to reach the stage of complete pacification.

The eighth and the ninth stages are named after obstacles that may occur at these last two levels. The eighth level is called mental excitement (Tib. *göpa*)” that occurs when we are too tense and too controlled with what is happening, whether our mind is resting or not. The ninth stage called “dullness”(Tib. *chingwa*) is where the mind is so relaxed in meditation that our mindfulness and alertness is lost.

These nine stages of Shamatha are sometimes called “separating clarity from the dross.” There is natural purity and clarity in the mind when it is resting in meditation. Then, when thoughts arise, they are like dross, or a pollution. Dross is the impurity in a metal that has to be eliminated for the metal to become strong. So, in the practice of meditation, we need to free this state of clarity or brightness of the mind from the pollution of the arising thoughts.

Rangjung Dorje’s verse says that the waves of strong and subtle thoughts should naturally be stilled and that we should just rest in the nature of the mind. Then he says that we should also be free from dullness and stupor. What prevents clarity of mind is this dullness that can arise in our meditation. This dullness of mind is like a sediment that clouds water so that the water is no longer clear. This dullness is lack of clarity that can make the mind become

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duller and duller. In meditation we need to have clarity free from the stain of dullness and stupor.

Other practices can also help develop the stability and clarity of the mind. We can do yidam practices such as Medicine Buddha or Chenrezig to receive their blessings in our meditation. Doing deity meditation also develops our Shamatha meditation. In deity meditation we often focus on very large images, such as a palace or retinue, and sometimes we focus on something very small such as the seed syllable in our heart, or the entire body of Guru Rinpoche or Chenrezig the size of this seed syllable. This helps to develop the stability of the mind and also develops mental clarity, bringing us blessings. Depending on the nature of an individual's subtle channels and winds, some persons have great clarity in their visualization and others less. But whether the image is clear or whether it is less clear, the practice focuses the mind on that image, and by focusing on that image, whatever its clarity, it will develop stability of the mind. So, these are other practices that help us to develop the stability and clarity we need in Shamatha meditation.

Some meditators may be very strict while doing the actual practice of meditation, and then when their session is over, they just relax and forget about it. Doing this will prevent good meditation from developing. It is said that the actual practice of meditation involves two things: “resting the mind,” and the “period of subsequent attain-

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ment,” or post-meditation. First, we rest the mind during meditation practice and then afterwards we maintain this mindfulness and alertness in whatever we are doing — going somewhere, or sitting, or eating, or talking, or working. We do not just completely forget our meditation and become distracted and follow our thoughts. Maintaining mindfulness and alertness during post-meditation benefits our meditation session. And our meditation session will also benefit our post-meditation. So, this was a brief explanation of Shamatha meditation.

E MA! If sentient beings don't exist

From where would the buddhas of the three times arise?

Without cause, fruition is impossible.

Returning to Milarepa's song, the next three lines teach the union of the two truths (relative and ultimate reality). We might think of these two realities as being separate things by thinking that if there is relative reality, then there cannot be ultimate reality, or if there is ultimate reality, then there cannot be a relative reality. But in fact, they are not contradictory. There is a union, or inseparability, of the relative and ultimate reality. It is just like if one sees a moon on the surface of calm water, the moon is not in the water, yet we definitely see the moon there. Milarepa's song begins with an expression of wonder or amazement with “E MA,” that these two

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realities are united as one, phenomena are empty and yet there are appearances — just like the moon on water.

This unity is explained by the great Indian pandita, Chandrakirti, who says that all phenomena do not exist as themselves, “but they are known in the world.” This means that even though we perceive vases or houses, they have no real existence when we analyze them with the logical reasoning, as explained earlier. This logical reasoning shows that in terms of the ultimate, they do not have existence as inherent objects. But at the same time, in relative reality they appear to us as household objects, trees, mountains, so on. We are actually able to build a house and furnish it with these things in relative reality.

From the standpoint of relative reality:

The Capable One⁸³ taught

“Samsara and nirvana — everything exists.”

*Existence appearing as things and non-
existence, their inner reality of emptiness,*

Both are inseparable in entity, of one taste, thus

Self-knowing and other knowing are non-existent and

Everything is a unification vast and open.

83. Skt. *muni*, Tib. *tupa*. Often translated as “sage” but it means one who has developed the capability of being able to keep his three doors away from non-virtue. — Duff

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Having these meanings correctly in mind is crucial to being able to understand the view in general but especially certain points of the Shentong view.

Milarepa says that on the relative level, there are beings, and because there are beings, the buddhas also appear. In terms of relative reality, there is samsara and there are also the buddhas. So, what we have to understand and put into practice is this union of the relative and ultimate truths. This inseparability of relative and ultimate reality is the true nature of phenomena which pervades everything. The emptiness of external appearances can only be analyzed through intellectual reasoning, not by looking directly at the mind. By looking directly at the mind we can experience this union of the relative and ultimate reality. This is easy to practice, easy to realize, and easy to maintain. This is because the mind itself is the unity of emptiness and appearance; it is the embodiment of the true nature of phenomena. So, we can directly experience the mind as being empty of any solid existence while also experiencing the mind's luminous clarity.

Pema Karpo's commentary on Milarepa's song gives two quotations on how to apply this practice to our mind: a quotation from Rangjung Dorje, the Third Karmapa, and a quotation from Khaché Wangpo, the Second Sharmapa. Rangjung Dorje says we all have a natural state of mind, but normally we are not aware of it. Usually,

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our mind is distracted and engaged in following thoughts. Because of this, we are not aware of what is occurring in our mind. Rather, we need to realize there is the true nature of phenomena which pervades everything. An easy way to realize this true nature is to look directly at our mind.

In his *Aspirational Prayer of Mahamudra* Rangjung Dorje says, “May one realize this true nature of mind, free from extremes.” One extreme is eternalism, believing that phenomena have a solid real existence. The other extreme is nihilism, believing everything is nonexistent. When we investigate the mind and find that it does not have any substantiality, or reality. Is it absolutely nonexistent like “the horns of a rabbit,” just a voidness? If we believe this then we could conclude that nothing we do has any consequence. But Rangjung Dorje says that the true nature of the mind is free from the extremes of existing and not existing.

It has no existence: Even the victorious ones have not seen it.

It is not nonexistent: It is the basis for all samsara and nirvana.

*There is no contradiction: It is the path
of the Middle Way of union.*

May the true nature of the mind, free from extremes, be realized.

— Rangjung Dorje, verse 11

In *The Aspirational Prayer of Mahamudra*, Rangjung Dorje says, “It is not existent, because even the buddhas and the victorious ones

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have not seen it.” When we look at the mind, we cannot find a color, or a shape, or a substance and therefore we conclude that it has no real existence. Or we may think, “Well, it may be that I am not able to see it, because I may not have enough wisdom or because I don’t know how to look for it. That may be why I am not able to see the mind, but the buddhas may be able to see it.” But that is not so. When the buddhas look for mind, they also do not see any color, form, shape, or anything else that has any reality. This is not because we have some kind of deficit so that we aren’t able to see it. Rather what the buddhas experience as the essence of the mind is that it is empty, devoid of any real existence. Is this the reason we and the buddhas cannot perceive the nature of mind is because the mind is non-existent?

The next line of this prayer says, “It is not non-existent because it is the ground of all of samsara and nirvana.” Though we cannot see anything in our mind, nevertheless, all of the appearances of samsara arise in the mind. Those who have transcended samsara and have attained nirvana, have come to the realization that samsara is the mind and the attainment of nirvana is also the mind. Therefore, we cannot say that the mind is without any existence whatsoever. At the same time, we know the mind does exist.

Our normal way of thinking is, “If something exists, then we obviously cannot say it is doesn’t exist. Or if something does not exist,

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then we cannot obviously say it exists.” But, in the case of the mind, there isn’t a contradiction between it being existent and non-existent at the same time, because there is the union between the relative and the ultimate level of reality; this union is the path of the Middle Way which does not fall into either the extreme of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism. The main point Rangjung Dorje is making is that the mind is the unity of relative and ultimate reality.

Khachö Wangpo argues that because all perceptions and appearances in the mind are not solid things, they are merely the luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*) of the mind. So, these appearances themselves exist in relative reality and then if we recognize the essence of the natural uncontrived state of these appearances and look at their true nature, we will realize that the true nature of the mind is naturally existent on the ultimate reality of phenomena.

There are two ways of understanding relative and ultimate reality. One way is by those who have carefully studied the texts on the two truths and understand their concepts and terminology. For these scholars there are obviously two levels of reality. The other understanding is to take these two as actual meditation instructions. What is the difference between these two? Those who are skilled in reading texts and grasping concepts of scriptures can thoroughly understand relative existence. But they also believe that relative truth exists and ultimate truth does not exist. As a result, they are

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unable to realize union of relative and ultimate reality through their texts and terminology. Because of this inability, they believe there are things that a practitioner has to eliminate and there are other things that the practitioner has to acquire.

However, by following the meditation instructions on these two levels of reality, the practitioner can directly realize the union of these two realities. In meditation we do not approach the two realities through inference, but by looking directly at the actual true nature and perceiving that experience as the ultimate truth. We look directly at mind and think, “So, this is what is meant by relative and ultimate reality.” This is how Rangjung Dorje and Khachö Wangpo describe these realities and how these two seemingly different things are actually united or, as it is said, they have one taste.

*Not adulterating meditation with conceptual
striving or mentally created meditation,
Unmoved by the winds of everyday busyness,
Knowing how to rest in the uncontrived, natural spontaneous flow,
May the practice of resting in mind's true
nature be skillfully sustained.*

— Rangjung Dorje, verse 15

We can begin to realize the union of these two realities, but then how do we actually put these into practice? Rangjung Dorje says we should strive to develop uncontrived mind so that we can see

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the true nature of the mind. Having become familiar in perceiving the nature of the mind, we then need to maintain and cultivate this practice. So, Rangjung Dorje says, “May the practice of resting in mind’s true nature be skillfully sustained.”

There are two obstacles that may arise when examining the nature of mind. First, we may feel that our meditation needs to be improved so that it can be clearer. In trying to do this, our meditation will just become mentally contrived or fabricated. Rather, we should meditate on the nature of mind exactly as it is, without trying to make it better in any way. So, the verse says we should rest in the uncontrived natural flow.

The second obstacle is that we can be agitated by ordinary busyness causing many thoughts to arise in our mind. These are thoughts concerned with ordinary things and events that distract the mind and prevent us from being able to see our true nature. We need to be able to rest in a natural state without effort and mental contrivance and without any disturbance from ordinary thoughts.

If we are free of these two faults we can just rest in the nature of mind and whatever exists, or doesn’t exist there. We don’t need to eliminate what exists or nor do we need to create something that doesn’t exist; we just naturally and effortlessly rest in that state. We don’t need to alter our naturally luminous clarity or our naturally

present emptiness in our meditation. We let it be like the flow of a river which just naturally flows down-hill.

So, this is the method for resting in the natural state in our meditation. Wangchuk Dorje, the Ninth Karmapa, in his text *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, teaches five ways of looking at mind. And, in his *Ocean of Definitive Meaning* he describes three ways of looking at the mind: the mind at rest, the mind moving, and viewing the difference between these two states. I think it would be useful to explain these last three ways.

The three ways of looking at mind

The Ocean of Definitive Meaning begins with the practice of Shamatha meditation. In Shamatha we are not looking at the true nature of the mind. But, through our practice of Shamatha meditation, we develop pacification of thought and stability of mind that allows the mind to come to rest. We develop these two qualities and then we look directly at the mind while it is at rest. We look to see who is resting and how it is resting. We look inside, outside, and between the different parts of the body to identify where this resting is taking place. Then we look to see who is resting. If there is someone or something that is resting, then it must have some kind of shape or form. Even if it is formless, we should be able to identify some qualities of the formless thing resting. Does it have a color or is it colorless? Does it have a shape or is it shapeless? We discover that

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we cannot identify anyone who is resting, or discover a place where the mind is resting, and we can't even find what is resting. In this examination, we are able to perceive the emptiness of the mind. This method is called "viewing the mind while at rest."

In viewing the mind at rest, we get the direct experience of the mind being stable, and yet we find that we are unable to identify any solid nature of the mind. In terms of relative reality, there is a resting taking place even though we cannot identify where it is resting or how it is resting. By looking directly at the mind at rest, we gain direct experience of the mind's empty nature and of the mind's dependent origination. This dependent origination and empty nature of the mind are not something that we have to created, nor do we need to eliminate it, because we are just resting in the natural state of the mind.

The second way to directly looking at the mind is called "viewing the mind in movement." Even when the mind has been brought to rest, there are still many kinds of thoughts that arise — good thoughts, bad thoughts, thoughts of happiness, thoughts of sadness. When we view these thoughts from an ordinary or impure perspective we may think, "My mind was at rest and now these thoughts are arising, and this feeling is different when my mind is in movement."

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When thoughts arise, they can either be thoughts of anger, desire, envy, ignorance, and pride, or they can be thoughts of faith, devotion, bodhichitta, altruism, and so on. On the relative level there are a great number of thoughts that can arise. As Wangchuk Dorje has said, “These thoughts are actually the luminous clarity of the mind, but in terms of relative reality, they appear through dependent origination.” So, when these thoughts arise, we may think they are real and that they are causing an obstacle to our meditation. But when we look directly at these thoughts in motion, like strong thoughts of anger, and try to perceive where they came from, where they are moving to, where they disappear to, whether they are located inside or outside the body we find the answer is always that we cannot find any place thoughts have come from or are going to. In other words, we cannot find any source or location of these intense thoughts. We then have to conclude that our thoughts are “unborn,” meaning that they do not take birth, they are not created. Although these thoughts seem to us to be disrupting our meditation, this is only true in terms of the relative level of reality and dependent origination. When we look directly at the essence of the thought, we see that thoughts, even strong thoughts are devoid of any solid or real existence.

A third way of looking at mind is to examine the stillness and the movement of mind to determine if these two states are the same or different. On the surface the stillness of mind and its movements

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appear to be two different states of mind. But when we look at the essence of the mind in stillness and in movement, we see that there is no difference between them. If we examine the essence of movement, we find that there is no stability that can be distinguished from the essence of the movement of the mind. And if we look at the mind in stillness, there is no movement that is distinct from the essence of the mind in stillness. So, in terms of relative reality, there are some differences between the still and the moving mind. This is called “viewing the difference of the mind in stillness and in movement.”

When looking at the essence of the mind; we see that mind is not just emptiness and it is not just luminous clarity. Rather, whether the mind is in movement or in stillness it is the indivisibility of emptiness and luminous clarity. It is through this direct experience that we gain certainty in experiencing the nature of mind.

Rangjung Dorje says that our meditation should be free from contrivance and effort. So, we meditate directly on the nature of the mind again and again, and some days there will be some clarity, and other days less clarity. Some days the meditation will be good, some days it will be bad. But we should just continue with this repeated meditation of directly observing the nature of the mind. By doing that, the meditation will gradually become better and better. So, that is a brief explanation of Shamatha meditation.

Questions

Rinpoche, when we are examining the mind at rest and find it is clear and undistracted, why do we not recognize the nature of mind at that point? Why do we still only recognize the stillness of the mind? And how do we get from simply looking at the still mind to looking at the true nature of mind?

At the point when the mind is resting, we need to ask, “who’s resting, who’s still, what is still,” and try to find that out. That is when we see the nature of the mind.

When we are talking about clarity and emptiness, it seems like we should look inwards. Yet, luminous clarity is described as looking more outwards. In “looking in stillness,” it doesn’t seem like there is any particular location. So, I don’t see why some of the texts are implying that some of the appearances are more outwards and the emptiness seems to be described as a little more inwards.

There is a difference between the appearances and the luminous clarity of mind. Appearances are external, like images, sounds, smells, taste, and touch. These appearances all have an empty nature, but they also have external appearances — they are also sensory objects with form, sound, smell, taste, and touch perceived by our internal sensory consciousnesses. In meditation, we don’t pay much attention to them, but instead look at the clarity and emptiness of the mind.

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When we look at the mind, we cannot identify anything, which is its empty aspect — nothing can be identified as being solid and real. But even though we cannot identify anything as real, there is still luminous clarity. What is meant by luminous clarity is that the mind doesn't stop — it just keeps on going by day by thinking and by night by dreaming. The mind is unceasing and does not stop for even one minute, and that is the luminous clarity aspect of the emptiness that we see within our own mind.

When I am meditating on the mind in motion and I look at a thought, without following it or developing it, it simply vanishes, or dissolves. I am wondering if, when looking at a thought to see its true nature, I should try to hold it there to look at it and examine it, or just let it dissolve.

If you could do that, that would be good to do, yes.

Rinpoche, I find that when I am trying look at my mind, I often get involved thinking, “Now I am looking for my mind. Is my mind red?” So, I think I just need to relax, but when I try to relax, I often slip into a bit of dullness. I am wondering if you have any antidotes for either of these two problems.

The antidote for not being able to look directly at the mind because it is covered by thoughts was given by Tashi Namgyal, who recommended that we do not need to be relaxed, but rather we need to have our mindfulness and alertness very bright and sharp

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and to be very intense and tight. If we do that, it will help stop our mind being consumed by thoughts. Also, it is a good antidote for not falling into dullness. A second thing we can do if our mind's nature is obscured by thoughts is to develop faith and devotion by reciting a prayer of supplication, and then return to our meditation.

Rinpoche mentioned the fault of mentally trying to contrive your meditation to improve it. Not only during meditation does it come up as a wish, but even at times during my prayers or in my intentions leading into it. I am wondering if this is a fault that I would start meditation with a wish to improve. I'm wondering how to stop this grasping at this wish that I have.

Ultimately speaking, the meditation should be just a relaxed state, but it is good that you should want to have good meditation. In Tibetan we don't call this positive wish to improve our meditation a negative "desire," or *döchag*, rather we call this type of wish an "aspiration" or *mönlam* in Tibetan. It is very good to have this aspiration, it is one of the most important things in practice.

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*The learned ones who realize it that way
Do not see consciousness, they see wisdom,
Do not see sentient beings, they see buddhas,
Do not see phenomena, they see its reality.*

We now come to the third part of the Song of the Middle Way by Milarepa, the result. There are two results that come from practicing this way. First, through this practice of meditation, there will be a benefit for ourselves that will spontaneously manifest. Second, our practice also will cause a spontaneous benefit for others.

The benefit to self

We will look first at the benefit to ourselves. Milarepa's spiritual song says that those of high realization do not see consciousnesses, they see wisdom; they do not see sentient beings, they see only buddhas; they do not see phenomena, they see the true nature of phenomena. In contrast to these realized practitioners, those

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individuals who do not practice and do not meditate will perceive only what is in their consciousness. These non-practitioners won't see buddhas and deities, but will only see other ordinary beings. They will not perceive the true nature of phenomena, but will only see the appearances of phenomena.

Those who are able to rest their mind and who have become skilled in this meditation do not perceive phenomena through their consciousnesses because their consciousnesses have disappeared.⁸⁴ When an individual realizes the true nature of phenomena, they become fearless because they have achieved the wisdom of the true nature of phenomena (Tib. *jitapa*).

The Buddha has the wisdom of perceiving things as they truly are, but does that mean the Buddha perceives emptiness as being nothing whatsoever? No, when the Buddha perceives emptiness, he also perceives all of the delusory appearances of samsara. He has the second wisdom that perceives the complete variety of phenomena (Tib. *jinyepa*), often translated as “omniscience.” So, the Buddha can perceive all those individuals who are being taught the Dharma and he knows the appropriate method to be taught to each particular person, as well as knowing the result that will come from that particular person practicing the teaching. In this way the Buddha perceives all phenomena.

84. At a high state of realization, the eight consciousnesses are transformed into the five Buddha wisdoms. See [Appendix F](#).

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We ordinary beings just see all kinds of people and animals around us. But, realized beings perceive all sentient beings as being the same as buddhas. This is because all beings have buddha nature that is identical to the nature of the buddhas, and therefore they are all capable of attaining buddhahood. Therefore, realized beings do not see ordinary beings around them, they see them as buddhas.

Then Milarepa says the realized beings do not see phenomena, rather they see the true nature of phenomena. This means ordinary beings without realization just see phenomena as being samsara. Because of this, they suffer and are frightened or feel anger towards it. Then, when they encounter something pleasant, they desire it. Thus, all ordinary beings have a longing for happiness and a desire to be free of suffering. Because of this, they have many thoughts and disturbing emotions that cause them to accumulate much negative karma. But, when the realized ones see all phenomena, they perceive its true nature, which is that it is empty. So, while perceiving relative phenomena, they also see the ultimate truth of the nature of phenomena.

We may wonder, "If the phenomena of the relative world are perceived by realized persons, does that mean they are perceiving a delusion?" No, because while these phenomena are perceived as being empty, the true nature of phenomena is also perceived, so

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their perception is not a delusion. As Milarepa says, “They do not see phenomena, but see the true nature of phenomena.”

Result of the benefit for others

*Compassion's force drawn forth from that is
What the good qualities of the buddhas are —
The strengths, fearlessnesses, retentions, and so on,
Originating like from a precious jewel.
That for me, the yogin, is the measure of my realization.*

In discussing the benefit for one's self, Milarepa described that practitioners with realization do not perceive just the external phenomena, but they also perceive the true nature of phenomena; they don't see consciousnesses, but see wisdoms; they don't see sentient beings, they see buddhas. In other words, they have the perception that sees only purity in the world. We might ask, “If a realized person perceives only emptiness, what about compassion? If there is no self and there's no other, then will compassion just disappear?” No, because from that realization, compassion naturally and spontaneously arises. The realization of the true nature creates non-dualistic compassion for all sentient beings.

So how does this compassion arise? Milarepa says, “They do not see sentient beings, they see buddhas. They do not see phenomena, they see its reality.” So ordinary beings are wandering in samsara and are

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deluded by the experience of endless suffering of body and mind. But, in fact, they do not need to experience all of this of suffering because they all have buddha nature, and if they just realized this, they will not have to experience this suffering.

When ordinary beings realize the true nature, then effortlessly and spontaneously they develop compassion for all other beings. This is nondual compassion that is not directed at any particular person or group of persons. This effortless compassion is for all beings who are still deluded and experiencing suffering. Not only is non-dual compassion developed for all beings, but realized individuals also develop all of the qualities of the Buddha that come out of this realization. These qualities — the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen distinct qualities, the four retentions, and so on⁸⁵ are gained from the realization of the true nature.

There is a difference between the attainment of buddhahood through the practice of the Vajrayana and the attainment of buddhahood achieved by the Buddha Shakyamuni. First, there is no difference in terms of realization and experience of other buddhas and the Shakyamuni Buddha because they have both attained the wisdom of the dharmakaya. However, there are differences in the process of how their buddhahood was attained. For example, Milarepa was born an ordinary being, then he practiced the Vajrayana, and through

85. See [Appendix G](#) for a list of these qualities.

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this practice he attained buddhahood. The Shakyamuni Buddha, in contrast, went through countless lives gathering vast accumulations of merit and wisdom and then attained buddhahood. In terms of their mind, in terms of the dharmakaya, they are the same.

The difference between these two ways of achieving buddhahood is also different in terms of the body. The Buddha, having gathered merit and wisdom through all his previous lifetimes, had all of the physical qualities of buddhahood: the 32 major signs, 80 secondary signs, the 60 aspects of the speech, and so on. On the other hand, Milarepa was born as an ordinary person with an ordinary body, practiced the Vajrayana, and through this practice attained buddhahood. But, having attained buddhahood in one lifetime, Milarepa did not have the qualities of the body and speech that the Buddha had because in order to have these qualities, one has to have accumulated vast merit for many lifetimes. The Buddha, with all of those qualities, was able to turn the wheel of Dharma, and so on. Milarepa and other great masters were able to teach and benefit beings during their lifetimes, but it is not the same as the vast activity of the Buddha. The Buddha attained the three kayas: the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya.

The dharmakaya is said to be the ultimate benefit for ourselves. But to benefit others, two other wisdoms are needed: the wisdom of understanding the nature of those who are to be taught and the

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wisdom of knowing which methods to use to teach them. In addition, love and compassion are needed because if these wisdoms aren't joined with compassion, they would not be able to help and teach other beings like the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.⁸⁶ A buddha also needs to have the ability or power to be able to help and teach others. So, all these qualities needed to have to fully help others are given in the explanation of ten strengths, the four fearlessness, the eighteen distinct qualities, and so on. Wisdom, compassion, and power are gained from the realization of the true nature of phenomena and the true nature of the mind. When this true nature is realized, these qualities automatically manifest.

The dharmakaya produces the ability to benefit one's self and also to benefit others. Although the dharmakaya is the source of the benefit for others, to actually benefit others requires the existence of the form kayas creating a direct connection with the teacher and those who are being taught. Because those to be taught cannot enter the dharmakaya, the Buddha manifested two form kayas: the sambhogakaya (literally, "enjoyment body") and the nirmanakaya (literally, "emanation body"). The sambhogakaya is for those advanced practitioners who are bodhisattvas practicing on the ten bodhisattva levels. They are able to encounter the sambhogakaya which has all of the splendor of the dharmakaya. The sambhogakaya is much like

86. Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas are Foundation Vehicle practitioners who can have excellent meditation and self-realization, but usually have the goal of reaching enlightenment only for themselves.

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a pure realm with continuous teaching of the Dharma. The Sambhogakaya has five certainties⁸⁷ and in it only the pure teachings of the Mahayana are taught and is inhabited only by bodhisattvas on the ten levels. Is it enough for the Buddha to give teachings only to pure beings? No, ordinary beings must also be taught and therefore the Buddha created the nirmanakaya.

The nirmanakaya, in contrast of the other two kayas, is not permanent and exists for only a certain length time. The nirmanakaya contains some pure and some impure students; some who have actually met the Buddha and some who have not. The Shakyamuni Buddha, called “the supreme nirmanakaya,” lived 2,500 years ago, took birth in India, lived as a prince, left his palace for a homeless life, attaining buddhahood, turned the wheel of the Dharma, and finally passed into parinirvana. Through these twelve major deeds of the Buddha,⁸⁸ the Dharma teachings were able to continue in our world for thousands of years and to be practiced by many, many people. This, then, is the nirmanakaya manifestation of the Buddha.

The Tibetan word for the Sanskrit word *nirmanakaya* is *tulku*.⁸⁹ Nowadays we have many tulkus in Tibet, but this is not the same

87. These five certainties are: a perfect teacher (a buddha), the perfect (the definitive) teachings, the perfect place (a pure realm), the perfect disciples (high level bodhisattvas), and the perfect time (continuous teaching).

88. See the [Glossary](#) for these twelve deeds.

89. The term *tulku* is used to refer to persons who have been recognized by a high lama as being the reincarnation of a previous rinpoche. For example, when the eighth Thrangu

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as the Buddha and the future Buddha, Maitreya, or all the future and past buddhas who are called the supreme nirmanakayas. Sometimes a tulku who is a great bodhisattva is discovered who seems to be an emanation of a buddha. And sometimes a tulku is found who is very ordinary. We cannot judge tulkus on whether they behave wildly or not. Some tulkus have decided to take birth in our world to benefit beings such as the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama who have literally devoted their entire life to benefit beings. These are “first class” tulkus.

Then there are “second class” tulkus who practiced well and achieved very good realization. Then, at the end of their life, they make prayers like, “May I be reborn so that I can continue to help and benefit beings.” They are then reborn, and through the power of their aspirational prayers that the rebirth takes place where there will be high lamas who will be able to identify that rebirth and say, “This is the tulku of so and so lama who died.” They are then recognized and during this new lifetime they are able to help and benefit many beings.

There are also “third class” tulkus. Sometimes a great lama with realization and practice passes away and goes to a pure realm rather

Tulku passed away in 1930, members of his monastery went to the previous Sixteenth Karmapa and Tai Situ Rinpoche and each wrote a letter describing where the Eighth Thrangu Tulku had been reborn. Although neither was shown the other's letter, and these lamas living 500 miles apart with no communication between them, wrote identical letters.

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than taking a human rebirth. But all the pupils of that lama beg the high lamas with, “The rebirth of our lama must be recognized. Our monastery cannot function properly without the rebirth of our lama.” So, they go to the Karmapa or some other high lama and ask him to find the reincarnation of their lama. It wouldn't be right for the Karmapa to say there isn't a rebirth of this particular lama, so instead, he looks around and finds a child who would benefit many people thinking, “This child would be an excellent choice for the reincarnation of this tulku.” So, while not actually being the reincarnation of the tulku, this third class tulku is one who is given the name of the famous lama that passed away.

It is my opinion that I (Rinpoche) am one of these third class tulkus. I don't have the wisdom or mind of the previous Thrangu tulkus. I think that the Sixteenth Karmapa looked for someone who could enter into the Dharma and do well and benefit many people, and decided out of his compassion it would be good to give me the name of the Thrangu Tulku. My father was a merchant, and if he had not chosen me, I would have become a merchant like my father. But having been given this title of tulku, I was enthroned as the Thrangu Tulku, entered into the Dharma, given vows to keep, and learned and practiced the Dharma at Thrangu Monastery. In this way, I had the chance to be liberated from samsara through the compassion of the Karmapa.⁹⁰ I have been able to receive Dharma

90. Thrangu Rinpoche is being very modest here. The many amazing events of his rein-

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instructions and been able to teach these instructions to others, and so to help others. I consider this is due to the compassion and activity of the Sixteenth Karmapa.

So, there is a difference between the supreme nirmanakaya and the other kinds of tulkus. From the supreme nirmanakaya comes a spontaneous or a naturally present benefit to other beings, just like what comes from a wish-fulfilling jewel. A wish-fulfilling jewel is said to give you anything you want. When the supreme nirmanakaya has this realization, there is the spontaneous benefit for other beings that comes through the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya.

Milarepa says, “This is the realization of this yogi.” His understanding that he had been an ordinary being, but then through his practice of the Vajrayana, he gained this realization. Milarepa saying, “this is my realization” is not due to pride, but said to inspire confidence in his students showing that an ordinary person through the practice of the Dharma will be able to attain the realization of the true nature of reality.

If we have the diligence and do this practice, we can attain buddhahood. Some people may think the purpose of practicing the Dharma is just to attain buddhahood. They may think, “I have to reach that ultimate stage, and if I don't then this practice I have done is meaningless.” But it is not like that. Take an example of

carnation can be found in his Long Biography (see Thrangu Rinpoche in the [Bibliography](#)).

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our translator Peter Roberts, who has just finished his Ph.D. thesis on Rechungpa. With a thesis one must take an exam and one can fail it. But with the practice of Buddhism, there is no “fail.” If one does a little, one gets a little result. If one does a lot, one gets a big result. So, one is always gradually on the path of Dharma and if it doesn't get done by a certain date it has not been wasted. That is why, Milarepa says, “That is the realization of this yogi.”

The realization

*You troublesome gods and ghosts assembled here have heard
Profound dharma but it was just evanescent sound.⁹¹*

In the kingdom of Abhira

The clever ones outsmart the stupid ones;

The foxes roaming the charnel grounds

Are scared and frightened by the lion's roar.

If there are some fortunate ones here,

They will be liberated through hearing this.

Altogether, humans have taken delight in,

Taken joy in, been pleased with me! Sudden victory!

The first part of the conclusion of Milarepa's song begins with Milarepa saying that this is the extent of his realization. He then says to the worldly deities and spirits that are gathered here preferred

91. Stagg translates this as “Bön is more pleasing than the profound Dharma.”

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to listen to the pleasant words of the Bönpos rather than hearing the profound Dharma. He is basically saying that they are not able to understand the profound Dharma teachings.

He says that in the land of Abhira, meaning a border land outside the Dharma, instead of seeking out the wise, they seek out the fools who are unable to understand this teaching on the true nature. “The foxes and jackals that wander around the cemeteries and through the charnel grounds are terrified by the roar of the lion,” is another way of saying that these beings are unable to understand the profound Dharma.

Milarepa says that he has just presented a song that perfectly describes the Middle Way to these deities and spirits and people, but most do not have the good fortune of being able to understand it. Just as Milarepa's name is Töpaga, “joyful to hear,” instead of listening to the profound meaning of the song, they only enjoy the beautiful melody of his singing.

Nevertheless, it is possible that there may be a few individuals, such as the five Tseringma sisters, who are worthy of being able to ‘understand the meaning of the song. They may, for example, understand what is a bad view and what conduct will yield unhappiness. They have been able to understand how one develops the correct view, how one should practice meditation, and then having practiced meditation, what kind of results will come from that.

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Those who are able to understand this song and are able to practice these instructions will be able to attain liberation. So, it is possible that a few fortunate ones, by hearing this song, will be liberated.

Milarepa says he has explained how he gained this realization. First, he did not let his precious human existence go to waste, but met a good teacher and received excellent instructions from that teacher. Then he was able to put these instructions into practice. And through all this he was able to attain the realization of the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, he rejoices and is happy to have that realization and he was able to compose this song and sing it to others.

Tseringma and others listening to this song will be able to understand the meaning, the view, the meditation, and the result. And through their practice, they will be able to attain realization. His song has been able to benefit these individuals and therefore he feels great joy at this. This is the happiness that Milarepa feels through the benefit that he has been able to give.

When we first look at samsara, it looked like happiness. But when we examined it more carefully, we saw all this suffering. This suffering is not just a mistaken perception because this is actually how things actually are. If we wish to be liberated from it, then we must receive the instructions, and when we are able to understand and meditate on them, we will be able to see the true nature of phenomena and

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be liberated from suffering. We will then reach a state of peace and happiness with nothing to be afraid of — we are free from all the suffering of samsara. So, Milarepa expresses his happiness and joy at attaining this liberation with an exclamation of SOHA.

The summary of the meaning

The second part of the conclusion of Milarepa's song of realization is a summary of the song's meaning. This is in prose and not a spiritual song. Milarepa says that the Buddha taught the 84,000 kinds of Dharma. He taught all of these to help a myriad of different beings — some with great wisdom, some with very little wisdom; some with great aspiration, some with little aspiration; some with great diligence, and some with little diligence; some with faith in the Dharma, some not. As a result, he taught the Foundation vehicle and the Mahayana vehicles, and so on.

There are many different types of teachings, but ultimately, they have a single destination — understanding the uncontrived natural state of phenomena. Knowing this and meditating upon it will lead us to liberation.

We are presently in a state of delusion and suffering not because we are under the control of someone else or have encountered some negative conditions or circumstances. The only reason we are not liberated from delusion is because we have failed to realize the

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true nature of phenomena. We see our happiness and suffering as truly existing, and that is because we don't understand that phenomena are really empty. Once we understand the true nature of phenomena, we see the world exactly as it is, and at this point we become liberated from our delusion. To become liberated we have to first understand the nature of phenomena. To do that, we begin by hearing the teachings to understand the nature of phenomena. But this knowledge is not enough to liberate us because we have to train on the Buddhist path. Finally, we need to make that true nature manifest in ourselves with the practice of meditation. With habituation to the true nature that we develop through constant practice this understanding will manifest in us, and then we will be liberated. The essence of this path is understanding emptiness, and the understanding of emptiness comes with compassion. So, the essence of the Buddhist path is the union of emptiness and compassion.

There are countless ways of proceeding on this path to liberation — the Foundation, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana vehicles. In the Vajrayana vehicle there is the kriya tantra, charya tantra, yoga tantra, highest yoga tantra and also the father, the mother, and non-dual tantras. But if we put all these together and summarize their meaning, the essence of all vehicles is the union of skillful means and wisdom.

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It is very difficult to practice like Milarepa, who did nothing but meditate. The practice of meditation and the practice of engaging in a life of Dharma are both very important. We are not to blame if we cannot undergo the hardships and difficult life that Milarepa faced. We have to wear clothes, eat nutritious food, and work. Therefore, when we have the opportunity to practice meditation, we must practice meditation. At other times in post-meditation, we apply what we have gained from our meditation with the continuous practice of mindfulness and alertness. It is extremely important to have these two qualities while resting in meditation and also while we are in post-meditation.

Whatever work or activity we are doing in periods of post-meditation, we pay attention to the mind by maintaining mindfulness and alertness. Then, when we practice resting in meditation, it will be beneficial for our meditation. Jamgon Kongtrul taught that the most important practice we can do is to habituate ourselves to mindfulness and alertness. From the time we wake up until we go to sleep, we should maintain our mindfulness and alertness and not allow our mind to become distracted. This is very difficult to do. But, if we keep doing this again and again, we will become habituated to developing mindfulness and alertness. This is called “blending” our meditation in all our daily activities. Doing meditation in an isolated, solitary place is very good and beneficial. However,

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blending, the union of skillful means and wisdom, is a practice we can do in all our activities.

We can have much happiness and also much suffering in our life. When we are happy and things are pleasant, we should not forget Dharma practice because this happiness will eventually come to an end. Then there are times when we will experience difficult circumstances with mental and physical suffering. At these times, we should not become discouraged or depressed, but remember the Dharma and think that Dharma practice is what we can rely on. Therefore, whatever happens in our life, we should at all times never forget the Dharma.

During our life we can have many kinds of suffering. It is good to be able to bring this suffering onto the path, or we could say transform suffering onto the path. We may have a physical or a mental illness, or actually be dying. These three things can be transformed onto the path. If we have mental suffering, we can look directly at the essence of that suffering. In doing this the suffering won't immediately vanish, but by looking into the essence of that suffering, it will cause the mental pain to become less sharp and make it more endurable.

Similarly, there is the suffering of illness, which creates physical pain. When we are resting the mind in meditation, we can investigate where the essence of the pain rests. Resting our mind in the

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essence of the pain doesn't cause that pain to vanish, but the pain itself will become less oppressive and more endurable. That is how we can transform pain and illness onto the path.

When we are dying and in the bardo of dharmata when we become separated from our body, we will experience many horrifying visions and loud sounds. Normally, these are terrifying experiences but instead of becoming terrified, we can rest in the essence of this experience. To get a brief experience of this, we can close our eyes very tightly and at first there is nothing but blackness. But then, gradually lights and colors will start appearing to us. Similarly, if we stop listening to anything and block the ears, we will gradually and naturally begin to hear a sound called the sound of dharmata. These images and sounds that we see and hear are, not created by us, but are naturally arising appearances. When we are in the bardo, these images and sounds are also naturally arising visions and sounds. So, instead of being terrified of them, we just rest in the essence of these images and sounds perceived by our mind, and when we do this, they will naturally subside.

After Milarepa had completed this Song of the Middle Way, Tashi Tseringma and all the other worldly deities, humans, asuras, and gandharvas who had attended his teaching, all rejoiced and praised the words of Milarepa.

Concluding remarks

When we have all of the necessary favorable conditions, we should try to practice with diligence, thinking, “Through this practice may I gain benefit for myself and also benefit for others.” By applying ourselves with diligence, we will eventually become free from the disturbing emotions and therefore become free from samsara and attain the vast goal of liberation. This is how we gain the complete benefit for ourselves. But it will not just benefit ourselves because the result will be our continuous activity to benefit all other beings for as long as samsara is not emptied. We should try to apply ourselves with as much diligence as we can, whether it is studying or practicing.

Sometimes we do not have the diligence or the conditions are not right. At those times, we shouldn't think, “I'm bad, I can't practice the Dharma. Nothing will come from this practice.” Instead, as Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* says, if we believe that the Three Jewels are good, but do not have complete faith in them, this is not bad. The Buddha said that it is beneficial if we just put our two hands together in homage to the Buddha. He also said that even if we have just enough faith to raise one hand in homage, that is good also because it creates a karmic seed or latency of showing respect for the Dharma. With this positive karmic seed an individual will enter the path and eventually reach the goal. If just raising one

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hand in homage can enable us to reach this great result, then there is no need to question what benefit comes from formally entering into the Dharma and actually practicing it.

We are living in darkness and there is only a brief time when we are exposed to the Dharma. Shantideva in *A Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva* says this is like a flash of lightning in a dark night. It is like a moonless night in which we can't see anything and then there is a sudden flash of lightening and we can briefly see the path ahead. We may ask how does this flash of lightening happen? It is through the kindness of the Buddha that this lightning flashed in the middle of the darkness. Similarly, we are living in the world and want to find the right way to go. We are very fortunate to be able to enter and follow the correct path. Practitioners in the West and in Asia are not just following the Dharma as nice words, but they are actually putting it into practice. So, doing the preliminary practices, doing retreats, and so on, are very beneficial and this motivation you to follow the path. You are very fortunate.

Questions

Rinpoche, when we are doing a yidam practice, such as Medicine Buddha, and the text says, “become inseparable with the yidam” what does this mean?

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Let us say you like to have milk in your tea and you pour some white milk into the black tea and it becomes an inseparable grayish liquid. Inseparability is like that: there is you and there is the Medicine Buddha, and then the Medicine Buddha is poured into you through the crown of your head. So just like the cup of tea, the Medicine Buddha becomes inseparable from you, and you gain all of the qualities of the Medicine Buddha.

Rinpoche, would you be kind enough to explain the formation of the word *namtok* which is often translated as “discursive thought”?

The second syllable of *namtok*, is *tok* which is short for *tokpa*. Tokpa is when one thinks, “Well, it could be like this or it could be like that.” We should not have this type of conceptual thinking in our Shamatha meditation. We can have consciousnesses with and without this *tok*, in other words, we can have conceptual consciousness and non-conceptual consciousness. For example, if we look at something that is white, we automatically perceive it as white, red as red, and blue as blue, and this is non-conceptual consciousness. Whereas, if we are engaged in *tok* by thinking the object has name, put it together with our past and present experiences with the object, this is usually what we call conceptual consciousness. The first syllable *nam* is an intensifying syllable that makes *namtok* much stronger and more vivid.

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When we bring suffering onto the path and look at the essence of the suffering, is it that we are looking for the emptiness, for the non-self existent nature of the suffering?

Looking at the essence of the suffering and seeing that empty essence makes the suffering lighter. With good motivation we are able to look at the suffering and realize its empty essence. Otherwise, if we are just thinking, “Oh, suffering is empty,” then this won't help.

Rangjung Dorje says the mind doesn't exist “because even the buddhas couldn't find it.” My question is why would the buddhas describe mind as being the inseparable union of clarity and emptiness if mind does not truly exist and there is only awareness.

The reason we say “mind” is because in the relative level of reality we have a body and we have a mind. Then, when we are practicing meditation, we look at the mind and we see that there is no mind, and we discover emptiness. But when we do not find the mind, there is still this continuous awareness that we are aware of things and this awareness never ceases. Then, if we say, “There is no mind,” and then say, “But there is this knowing,” this doesn't mean mind is just a blank or voidness, because there is this awareness or knowing going on all the time. So, when we describe “the emptiness of the mind,” it is that the mind, while not existing, is still knowing, which leads us to talk about the union of luminous clarity and emptiness. We say there is emptiness, but at the same

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time, we perceive things. The eyes still see things and the ears still hear things because this emptiness is not like the emptiness of an empty cup. There is always this knowing of the mind, and to make that clear, they talk of the union of clarity and emptiness.

Afterword

I was born in a country where Buddhism was established, and my parents therefore were Buddhists and had entered the Buddhist Dharma, so I really had no choice about becoming a Buddhist. I was born a Buddhist through the power of karma.

But for you, it is a very fortunate sign that you are living in a country where Buddhism has spread and you had the aspiration to enter into the Dharma. You also had the good aspiration to decide to practice the Dharma, and did so. You did this all by yourselves. This is also a sign of accumulating merit which is a sign of having received the compassion and blessing of the Buddha.

As told before, Rechungpa asked Milarepa to tell his life story. When his pupils heard of the great diligence that he had in the early part of his life and how he had attained final realization, his pupils said to Milarepa that he must be an emanation of a bodhisattva or a buddha. Milarepa said that in the early part of his life, he practiced sorcery, caused hailstorms, killed many people, and therefore accumulated a great deal of negative karma. But he had been fortunate to meet a

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great teacher, Marpa, who gave him these instructions. And through the diligence of his practice, he was able to attain enlightenment.

So, Milarepa is a good example for our practice. In practicing the Dharma, we might think, “I can’t accomplish anything because I have so many faults or I have so much bad karma, and so on and then become disheartened and discouraged with these thoughts. But with the example of Milarepa, we can see that it doesn’t matter what faults and bad karma we have accumulated in our life — if we have diligence and we practice, then we can attain the same result as Milarepa. So, we don’t need to worry about the faults, thoughts, defilements, and bad karma, and so on, if we practice with diligence.

Sometimes we are diligent and sometimes we are not. We may think, “It has been many years since I entered into the Dharma, but my disturbing emotions aren’t getting any less and my meditation has not gotten any better.” But we don’t need to become disheartened, thinking that we don’t have enough diligence or wisdom. Even though we perceive no progress in meditation, we can still think that we are very fortunate to have been able to enter into the Dharma in the first place. Even practicing with no improvement in meditation is not bad. Even if we haven’t been able to accomplish anything, this is not bad because by practicing in the Dharma we are creating karmic latencies (Tib. *bakchak*), which will lead to the potential for the future accomplishment.

Part Three:
APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Four Great and Eight Lesser Lineages

The four greater schools

These are called “greater” or major lineages because they were all founded by direct students of Gampopa.

1. The Karma Kagyu School was founded by Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193 CE), who was the first Karmapa and who established the tulku system. This lineage has spread to many countries, mainly in Asia, Europe, and North America and is headed by the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa.
2. The Barom Kagyu School was founded by Barompa Darma Wangchuk (1127-1200). It is a very small school with its members mostly living in Kham, Tibet. Its most famous recent member was Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche (1920-1996).
3. The Tsalpa Kagyu School was founded by Zhang Rinpoche (1123-1193) who was a disciple of Gampopa’s nephew. This lineage was an independent Kagyu lineage until it was taken over by the Gelug lineage in the fifteenth century.
4. The Phagdru Kagyu School was founded by Phagmo Drupa (1110-1170). This school later divided into eight

sub-schools headed by Phagmo Drupa's main students.
These schools are described on the next page.

The eight “lesser” or “more distant” schools

These were all founded by the main students of Phagmo Drupa of the Phagdru Kagyu School.

1. The Drikung Kagyu was founded by Jigten Sumgén (1143-1217) and is a Kagyu school that is centered mostly in Bhutan.
2. The Drukpa Kagyu was founded by Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211) and became widespread as the state religion of Bhutan and a main lineage in Ladakh. This lineage has also combined the teachings of Gampopa with those of Rechungpa.
3. The Taklung Kagyu was founded by Taklung Thangpa Tashi Pal (1142-1210). This school has had many famous Rinpoches and is currently led by the Seventh Phakchok Rinpoche.
4. The Martsang Kagyu was founded by Chéjé Marpa (1135-1203) and this school no longer exists.
5. The Shugseb Kagyu was founded by Chékyi Senge (1144-1204) and this school no longer exists.

Appendix A: Four Great and Eight Lesser Lineages

6. The Trophu Kagyu was founded by Drogén Gyalsa (1118-1195) and this school no longer exists.
7. The Yamzang Kagyu was founded by Yeshe Senge (d. 1207) and this school no longer exists.
8. The Yelpa Kagyu was founded by Yelphukpa (1134-1194) and this school no longer exists.

Appendix B:

The Correspondences Between Texts

Chapter	Our title	Chapter in Chan and Stagg
2	The Story of Milarepa Collecting Wood	1
3	The Song of the Snow Range	3
4	The Rock Sinmo in Lingpa Cave	4
5	Songs on Yolmo Snow Mountain	7
6	The Story of Nyama Paldarbum	14
7	The Encounter with Naro Bönchung	22
8	The Invitation from the King of Môn	27
9	Entering a Yak Horn	38
10	The Story of Gampopa	41
11	The Song of Victory over the Four Maras	60
12	Milarepa's Thirty Instructions	23
18	The Song of the Middle Way	29



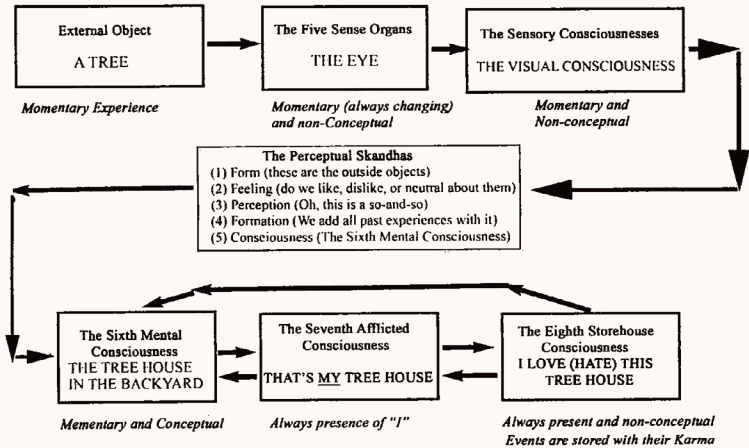
Thrangu Rinpoche at a teaching on Marpa at Parping, Nepal.

This monastery where Marpa, was said to have practiced here while he was acclimate his body for the hot summers in India and also studying several Indian languages with the bilingual scholars in Nepal. The picture on [page 219](#) shows the whole class at the teaching in 1987.

Courtesy of Clark Johnson.

Appendix C: Eight Consciousnesses

The Eight Consciousnesses with an Example of Perceiving a Tree



Note: This is based on the Mind-only (Chittamatra) school which has Eight Consciousnesses which Thrangu Rinpoche uses in the text. Other schools have six consciousnesses with the seventh and eighth consciousness being part of the sixth mental consciousness.

Explanation:

1. We begin with an external object (*Example*: a tree)
2. We have five sense organs (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body touch receptors. (*Example*: the eye). These organs are momentary (always changing) and non-conceptual.
3. These organs send information to the five consciousnesses — Visual, Auditory, Olfactory, Gustatory, Touch Consciousnesses. The consciousnesses are in the brain and are non-conceptual processors of the information.
4. Then the combinations of these consciousnesses go to the Sixth Mental Consciousness or discursive mind and is combined with past experiences and thoughts and feelings. This consciousness is momentary. (*Example*: this is a tree house in my back yard that was built last year).
5. This Sixth Consciousness interacts with the Seventh Afflicted Consciousness that is the always present feeling of “I” which we have had for many lifetimes. (*Example*: That is my tree house)
6. The Seventh Consciousness passes the information along to the Eighth Store-house Consciousness which stores the event with its positive, neutral, or negative karma. This Eighth Consciousness also

Appendix C: Eight Consciousnesses

sends back information to the Sixth Consciousness along with past thoughts and feelings. (*Example*: I love (or I hate) this tree house.)

Appendix D: The Ten Virtuous and Unvirtuous Deeds

King Trisong Detsen asked the high lamas of the realm to come up with a list of virtuous and unvirtuous deeds that were easy to understand that he could give to his subjects to guide them.

The ten unvirtuous deeds

1. Killing
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Lying
5. Using coarse or abusive language
6. Slandering others
7. Gossiping
8. Coveting other's property or power
9. Being malicious
10. Holding false beliefs

The ten virtuous deeds

1. Not destroying life
2. Not taking what has not been given
3. Refraining from improper sexual conduct
4. Not telling a falsehood
5. Not using abusive language
6. Not slandering others
7. Not indulging in irrelevant talk
8. Not being covetous of other's property or power
9. Not being malicious
10. Not holding incorrect or destructive beliefs

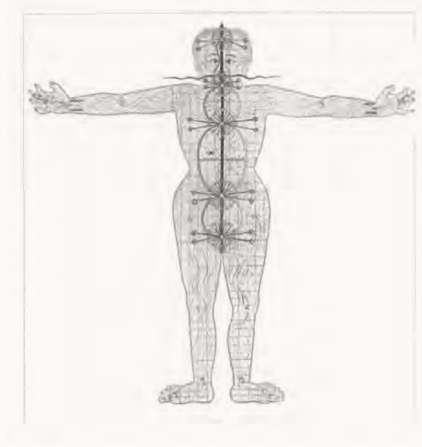
The Ten Special Deeds

1. Saving the lives of others
2. Giving to others what is really beneficial to them
3. Promoting healthy relationships between partners
4. Not telling the truth if the information that will harm the person

Appendix D: The Ten Virtuous and Unvirtuous Deeds

5. Bringing people together and trying to remove conflicts
6. Using pleasant and gentle words to make others happy
7. Always saying what is meaningful
8. Always being content with whatever you have
9. Having malicious persons removed when they are harming other individuals
10. Examining, analyzing, and understanding the true nature of phenomena

Appendix E: The Subtle Winds and Channels and Chakras



The body of a male and female has five main chakras or energy centers which distribute the subtle energy (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) throughout the body. They are connected to the blue central channel running along the spine at the crown of the head, at the throat, at the heart, at the solar plexus and at the sexual organs along the spine.

On the person's right is the red channel that holds the air or wind breathed in and out of the right nostril called the wind of karma. On the left is the white channel that holds the air or wind breathed

in the left nostril called the wind of wisdom. Within the body there are hundreds of subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*) going out from these main energy centers (Skt. *chakra*, Tib. *khorlo*).

Tibetan anatomy identifies a vast network of subtle channels in the body through which drops (Skt. *bindu*) and energy winds (Skt. *prana*) flow. These channels are not visible to the eye but are analogous to meridians in acupuncture. The energy flowing through the channels keeps the organs in harmony and helps in basic metabolic functions such as digestion. These subtle channels and the energy that flows through them also are intimately connected to consciousness and therefore can be manipulated with visualizations.

The use of these subtle channels in meditation is called “the path of means” and these are complex yogic practices called *trülkhor*. Several lamas now have books with diagrams of *trülkhor* exercises. The purpose of these exercises is to loosen up the subtle channels so that the subtle winds can flow evenly through them.

In the Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*) practice the advanced practitioner does special yogic practices to force the subtle energies from the left and right channels into the central channel at the “secret” place (the chakra at the sexual organs). This causes great bliss and a great deal of heat which the yogis used to stay warm in unheated caves and huts during the winter.

When Thrangu Rinpoche gave these teachings on Milarepa, the discussion of the practices in the three-year retreat were very secret. These practices are restricted to three-year retreatants, not because the Tibetans wanted to keep these practices for themselves, but because they require about two years of continuous preparation in a retreat before the retreatant is ready to do these practices. Doing these practices without supervision is not done because if they are done improperly, they can lead to significant mental disturbances.

Since then, information on the subtle winds and channels and the practice of tummo has come available (including a Tibetan yogi demonstrating the three-year practices, with the Dalai Lama's permission, on YouTube).

In this extremely brief summary of the winds and channels and tummo practice we have explained to simply help the reader understand the practice Milarepa was doing that are described in his songs of realization.

Appendix F: Transforming Consciousnesses into Wisdoms

The Transformation of Consciousnesses into Wisdoms

Organ	Consciousness	Wisdom	Kaya
Eye	1. Eye Consciousness	All Accomplishing Wisdom	Nirmanakaya
Ear	2. Ear Consciousness		
Nose	3. Nose Consciousness		
Tongue	4. Tongue Consciousness		
Body	5. Body Consciousness		
Mind	6a. Nonconceptual Mind Consciousness	Dharmadhatu Wisdom	Svabhavikakaya
	6b. Conceptual Mind Consciousness		

Appendix F: Transforming Consciousnesses into Wisdoms

Organ	Consciousness	Wisdom	Kaya
	7a. The Immediate Mind Consciousness	Discriminating Wisdom	Sambhoghakaya
	7b. Afflicted Mind Consciousness	Wisdom of Equality	
	8. The Ground Consciousness	Mirror-like Wisdom	Dharmakaya

Explanation

In Tibetan Buddhism there are six organs — the five sensory organs and the mind shown in **column 1**.

Each sensory organ has a consciousness connect to it that interprets the information from the organs shown in **column 2**.

For example, the eye organ changes light waves into electrical impulses and it is the eye consciousness (or visual consciousness) which turns these into images for the mind to process. This is true for the other four consciousness.

The Sixth Mental consciousness receives all the information for the five sensory consciousnesses and processes this information based on what is perceived, past experiences, and thoughts that happen to be in the mind. This Sixth consciousness then has two aspects: the Nonconceptual mind which is the sensory information that is

turned into thoughts and Conceptual mind which is the constant discursive commentary we have going on in our head.

The seventh consciousness has two aspects. One is the immediate mind which connects all the instants of consciousness into a coherent, orderly pattern of thoughts. Second, it has the klesha or afflicted aspect which is the constant presence of self we have had for many lifetimes.

The eighth consciousness accumulates all the actions of the other seven consciousnesses including the latent karmic imprints imprint that can express themselves later under the right circumstances. This consciousness is considered the source of all samsaric appearances. This is called the “store house” aspect of the eighth consciousness and the other aspect is that it organizes the other seven consciousnesses.

Column 3 shows which consciousness it transformed into which of the five buddha wisdoms upon reaching enlightenment.

Column 4 shows that each of the buddha wisdoms is associated with a particular kaya. For example, the all accomplishing wisdom — the wisdom of how to teach the dharma — is connected with nirmanakaya which is the kaya involving beings on this earth.

Appendix G:

The Thirty-two Qualities of the Buddha

Ten Powers

1. Knowing what is correct and incorrect
2. Knowing the results of actions
3. Knowing the aspirations of beings
4. Knowing all the elements
5. Knowing the different capacities of beings
6. Knowing all the paths
7. Knowing all the different ways to establish meditative concentration
8. Knowing previous lives of oneself and others
9. Knowing transference, death, and future rebirths
10. Knowing that the defilements are exhausted or knowing the path and result

Four Fearlessness

1. Fearlessness in the knowledge of all things
2. Fearlessness in knowing all the cessations of corruption
3. Fearlessness according to the definitive prophetic declarations that these things which are intermittently cut off on the path
4. Fearlessness knowing all excellent attributes are obtained, transformed and ascertained, is just what it is.

Eighteen Unique Qualities of the Buddhas

1. Their physical conduct is without error
2. Their speech is without impediment or imprecision
3. Their minds are never lacking mindfulness
4. Their minds are only ever resting in meditative equipoise
5. They do not entertain varied ideas about their perceptions
6. They never experience neutral states lacking full discernment
7. They never lack the willingness to uphold the lineage of the Three Jewels and to benefit beings
8. They never lack the enthusiastic diligence to work for others' welfare

Appendix G: The Thirty-two Qualities of the Buddha

9. They are never without the mindfulness insuring they never forget to see all things and events exactly as they are
10. They are never without the wisdom that discerns precisely all things and events
11. They never lack total freedom from the two obscurations
12. They never lack the wisdom of complete liberation
13. All the actions of their body are preceded by and undertaken with wisdom
14. All the actions of their speech are preceded by and undertaken with wisdom
15. All the actions of their mind are preceded by and undertaken with wisdom
16. They see into the past with wisdom vision that is without attachment and without impediment
17. They see into the present with wisdom vision that is without attachment and without impediment
18. They see into the future with wisdom vision that is without attachment and without impediment

— Based on Mipham Rinpoche's *Khenjuk* taken from rigpawiki.org

Appendix G: The Thirty-two Qualities of the Buddha

For a complete description of these 32 qualities of the Buddha and the 32 qualities of the major and minor marks of the Buddha see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Uttaratantra: A Treatise on Buddha Nature*.

Appendix H:

Requirements for an Act to Create Negative Karma

For an action to be unvirtuous and lead to negative karma four conditions have to be present.

1. There must be an object of the action

In order for the negative karma of killing to occur, there must be an actual being who is killed. It can be any kind of living being from a small insect to a large animal. It must also be a being capable of experiencing sensations and sufferings.

2. There must be an intention to do the action

To receive the negative karma, one must have the motivation to harm a sentient being. For example, if we think, “This person or animal is going to harm me” or “It is dangerous and therefore I will kill it” we are killing out of the disturbing emotion of anger and the desire to cause harm. We can also kill through the motivation of desire by thinking for example, “If I kill this being, then I will have food, clothing, pleasure, and enjoyment.” One then intentionally kills that being. Or one can kill with the motivation of ignorance

such as sacrificing an animal will lead to negative karma. However, stepping on an insect without intending to harm it does not bring about negative karma.

3. The action itself must be done

The third factor is actually undertaking of the action of killing. This means that one may have the intention of killing someone, or one induces someone else to do it. The person must try to physically do it for it to be the negative factor of killing. So, as well as the motivation to kill, there is the actual act of killing, whether done by oneself or done according to one's wishes.

4. The action must be completed

Finally, the fourth factor is called “completion.” For an act to reap the negative karma of the action, there has to be an actual result of the action. For an act of killing, the sentient being must actually die. So, one might have the intention to kill someone and one might carry out the action, but the victim does not actually die in spite of one's having done one's best to kill him.

While trying to kill someone, to steal their possessions, or to slander and lie to them are obviously negative acts even when they are not completed. Also, if one has ordered someone else to kill somebody and that person disobeys or fails in the job, it is not an actual act of killing.

Appendix H: Requirements for an Act to Create Negative Karma

But clearly, thinking about and harboring hate and wishing for negativity to fall upon that sentient being leads to negative karma; but if the action fails in its goal, then it does not become as serious a negative action as of actually having killed someone.

— From Thrangu Rinpoche's *Ten Virtuous Deeds*

A Short Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the 16th Karmapa. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology.

At the age of 23 Rinpoche along with Trungpa Rinpoche received full ordination from the 16th Karmapa. At the age of 27 he left Tibet for India during the cultural revolution. He stayed at Rumtek monastery in Sikkim and at the age of 35 he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp and was awarded the highest Lharampa degree.

Returning to Rumtek monastery he was asked to set up the Karma Kagyu curriculum and teach the four Karma Kagyu regents and many other Rinpoche. He did this along with Khenpo Tsultrim and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoches.

In the 1970s Thrangu Rinpoche began teaching in Europe, North America, and Asia. He established a number of monasteries and retreat centers and is the author of over 50 books. He is known

A Short Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

especially for taking difficult Buddhist topics and presenting them in a very accessible form to students.

Thrangu Rinpoche has four main monasteries in Boudhanath, Namo Buddha, and Bhaktapur in Nepal and in Sarnath, India—all of which are located in sacred places. He also has a number of other centers located in North American, Europe, and Asia.

For a longer biography of Thrangu Rinpoche, please go to NamoBuddhaPub.org to download a PDF of his longer 20 page biography with color photos.

The Glossary

abhidharma. The Buddhist teachings are often divided into the Tripitaka: the Sutras (direct teachings of the Buddha), the Vinaya (teachings on conduct), and the Abhidharma, the teachings that explain and classify phenomena into types and categories.

Abhira. This originally meant a tribe in the Gupta Empire in India around 300 CE. Thrangu Rinpoche says it now means a foreign land outside or on the outskirts of Buddhism.

afflictions (Skt. *kleshas*). See disturbing emotions.

afflicted seventh consciousness (Skt. *klesha consciousness*). The seventh consciousness has two aspects: the immediate consciousness which monitors the other consciousnesses making them continuous, and the afflicted consciousness, which is the continuous presence of self. See consciousnesses, eight.

agitation (Tib. *mukpa*). A state in meditation where the mind is constantly wrapped up in excessive thoughts and feelings.

aggregates, five (Skt. *skandha*). The Buddha in the *Surangama Sutra* taught that sentient beings are not solid and enduring objects, but rather are composed of collections or “heaps” of the five aggregates.

The Glossary

These are the five mental transformations that perceptions undergo: First is form which includes images, sounds, tastes, etc. that are perceived. Second is sensation which one treats them as positive, negative, or neutral. Third, is identification which is recognizing the sensation. Fourth is formation which is the perception combined with past experience thus identifying it. Finally, is consciousness which is all of a person's discursive thoughts.

alertness (Tib. *seshin*). In Mahamudra meditation one tries to always maintain mindfulness which is being aware of what is happening in the mind, and alertness which is noticing if the mind has wandered.

Amitayus. Literally, "limitless life." A meditational deity associated with long life and is the long-life aspect of Buddha Amitabha.

Amitabha. Literally, "immeasurable light." The Buddha of the Lotus Family. See **five buddhas**.

amrita (Tib. *dutsi*). A blessed substance which can cause spiritual and physical healing.

Aryadeva. One of the six great commentators. He was a close pupil of Nagarjuna who became his heir. He was born in Sri Lanka and wrote the *Four Hundred Verses* (Skt. *Catuhshataka*) on the Middle Way.

arhat. An accomplished Foundation Vehicle practitioner who has eliminated the disturbing emotions. Arhats are the fully realized shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

atasaras. This word should be acarya (pronounced “acharya”) and refers to a highly respected teacher in a monastery who was not necessarily a yogi.

Barom Dharma Wangchuk (1584-1630). A student of Gampopa who founded the Barom Kagyu lineage.

bindu (Skt., Tib. *tigle*). Literally “drop.” The vital essence that moves through the subtle channels of the body.

blessings (Tib. *jinlap*). When one has great devotion, one is able to receive the blessings or the energy created by the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The blessings of the lineage are always there, but can only be received if one is receptive to them.

bodhichitta. Literally the “mind of enlightenment.” There are two kinds of bodhicitta: ultimate bodhicitta, which is a completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and relative bodhichitta, which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara. A prayer to engender bodhicitta is considered a prerequisite to beginning any Vajrayana practice.

bodhisattva levels (Skt. *bhumi*). Literally, “ground.” The levels or stages a bodhisattva goes through to reach enlightenment. There are ten levels in the sutra tradition and thirteen in the tantra tradition.

bodhisattva vow. A vow promising to stay in samsara until all other sentient beings have reached buddhahood and this is chanted at the beginning of many practices. In the Tibetan tradition monastics also take eighteen root and forty-six secondary bodhisattva vows.

Bön. A pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet which is still being practiced. Many Buddhist Vajrayana practices have Bön elements in them and many Bön practices have Buddhist elements in them. A member of the Bön religion is called a Bönpo.

buddha nature or **buddha essence** (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*). The original nature present in all sentient beings, which when realized, allows them to reach enlightenment. Buddha nature is possessed by all sentient beings including humans, animals, ghosts, earth spirits, so on — and not just Buddhist.

Buddha Shakyamuni. Often called the Gautama Buddha or the historical Buddha and refers to the most recent Buddha who lived approximately between 563 and 483 BCE.

Chakrasamvara. One of the five main yidam practices of the Kagyu Lineage. He belongs to the lotus (or Amitabha Buddha) family and plays an important part in the Six Yogas of Naropa. His consort is Vajrayogini.

Chakravartin. Literally, “turner of the wheel” and also called a universal ruler. This is a king who propagates the Dharma and starts a new era.

Chandrakirti. A seventh century Indian Buddhist scholar of the Madhyamaka school best known for founding the Prasangika sub-school and writing two treatises (the *Prasannapada* and the *Madhyamakavatara*) on emptiness using analytical reasoning.

Charvakas. A Hindu school which originated around the time of the Buddha. This school rejected the sacred scriptures of the Vedas, the belief in reincarnation and karma, and therefore advocated acting in self-interest.

Chenrezig (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*). Deity of compassion and Tibet’s most popular deity. His mantra is OM MANI PEDME HUNG. The Dalai Lama and the Karmapa are said to be emanations of Chenrezig.

Chittamatra school. See **Mind Only School**.

Chöd (Tib.). Pronounced ché and literally means “to cut off” and refers to a practice that is designed to cut off attachment to the self. The *mo chö* (female Chöd) practice was founded by the Machig Labdron.

daka. A male counterpart to a dakini.

dakini. Literally, “sky goer.” A yogini who has attained the high realization of the fully enlightened mind. She may be a human being who has achieved such attainments or a non-human manifestation of the enlightened mind of a meditational deity.

Dampa Sangye. A twelfth century mahasiddha who traveled to Tibet five times and spread the Chöd practice there particularly to Machig Labdron who founded the popular Ma Chöd practice.

dharani. A short utterance containing mystical formulas of knowledge. They are usually longer than mantras.

dependent origination (Tib. *tendrel*). The principal that nothing exists independently, but comes into existence only in dependence on previous causes and conditions. There is a cycle of twelve successive phases of this process that begin with ignorance and ends with old age and death.

desire realm. One of the three realms of samsara. It is called the desire realm because these beings are continually tempted by intense emotions and craving. See Six realms of samsara for the types of being in this realm.

Dewachen (Tib.). See **Sukhavati**.

Dharma. With a capital case refers to the Buddhist teachings. dharma. Dharma with a lowercase refers to external phenomena in general.

dharmakaya. One of the three bodies of the Buddha. It is enlightenment itself, wisdom beyond reference point. See also **kayas, three.**

dharmata (Tib. *chönyi*). Often translated as “suchness” or “the true nature of things” or “things as they are.” It is phenomena as they really are as seen by a completely enlightened being without any distortion or obscuration.

disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*, Tib. *nyön mong*). The emotional obscurations which are also translated as “afflictions” or “poisons.” The three main disturbing emotions are attachment or desire, aggression or anger, and ignorance or delusion. The five disturbing emotions are these three plus pride and envy or jealousy.

Druk Nyén Kunga Legpa (1455-1520). Also known as Drukpa Kunleg. He was known as the “Madman of Bhutan” because he engaged in unconventional behaviors while spreading the Dharma.

Drukpa Kagyu. One of the Kagyu lineages which was founded by Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211) and now is prevalent in the eastern section of Kham in Tibet, in Ladakh, and Bhutan.

dullness or **torpor** (Tib. *mukpa*). One of the two main obstacles to meditation. Dullness refers to a sinking, lethargic feeling that often leads to sleep. See **excitement in meditation.**

Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193). The First Karmapa, a student of Gampopa, and founder of the Karma Kagyu lineage. He is also known for founding the tulku system in Tibet.

eighty-four mahasiddhas. See **mahasiddhas**.

emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tong pa nyi*). Also translated as voidness. In the second turning of the wheel the Buddha taught that external phenomena and internal phenomena (the concept of self or “I”) have no real existence and therefore are “empty.”

eternalism. The belief that one’s self has concrete existence and is eternal. It also can mean that there is a permanent and causeless creator of everything; in particular, it can mean that one’s identity or consciousness has a concrete essence which is independent, everlasting, and singular.

excitement in meditation (Tib. *gépa*). One of the two main obstacles to meditation. When the mind is in a state of excitement or agitation, it is wild, jumping from thought to thought, so that one cannot meditate properly. See also **dullness**.

five buddhas of the five buddha families. These are Akshobhya who represents mirror-like wisdom that overcomes anger, Ratnasambhava who represents the wisdom of equality that overcomes pride, Amitabha who represents discriminating wisdom that overcomes desire, Amoghasiddhi who represents all-accomplishing

wisdom that overcomes jealousy, and Vairochana who represents dharmadhatu wisdom that overcomes ignorance.

five paths. Traditionally, a practitioner goes through five stages or paths to enlightenment. These are the path of accumulation, which emphasizes purifying one's obscurations and accumulating merit. The path of junction or application, in which the meditator develops profound understanding of the Four Noble Truths and cuts the root to the desire realm. The path of insight or seeing, in which the meditator develops greater insight and enters the first bodhisattva level. The path of meditation, in which the meditator cultivates insight in the second through tenth bodhisattva levels. And the path of fulfillment which is the complete attainment of buddhahood.

five perfections. These are the qualities of the sambhogakaya pure realms: having the perfect teacher, the perfect Dharma, the perfect place, the perfect time, and the perfect teaching.

five pure faculties. These are the abilities needed to reach enlightenment: faith, diligence, mindfulness, samadhi, and prajna.

form realm. One of the three realms of samsara. This is part of the god realm containing beings who have achieved the four meditative states so they no longer desire pleasure. See **three realms of samsara**.

formless realm. One of the three realms of samsara where beings, due to the power of their meditation, are born with immaterial bodies. See **three realms of samsara**.

Foundation Vehicle (Skt. *Hinayana*). The first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion.

four empowerments. These are the vase, the secret, the wisdom — knowledge, and the name empowerment.

Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind. Also called “the four common preliminaries” and these four are realizing the preciousness of human birth, the impermanence of life, karma cause and effect, and the faults of samsara.

Four Noble Truths. The Buddha’s first teaching in India at Sarnath were on the Four Noble Truths. These are the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path. These truths are the foundation of Buddhism.

Gampopa (1079-1153). One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage. A student of Milarepa who established the first Karma Kagyu monastery and is known for writing the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

gandharvas. A class of deities who are the celestial musicians and who are said to live on odors.

ground consciousness (Skt. *alaya*). The eighth consciousness holds the other seven consciousnesses together and also stores all the experiences and their karmic latencies.

Guru Rinpoche. See **Padmasambhava**.

guru yoga. A practice of devotion to the guru culminating in receiving the guru's blessing and blending indivisibly with his mind. Also, the fourth of the preliminary Ngendo practices.

Hevajra. One of the main yidams of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Insight Meditation. See **Vipashyana**.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892). One of the great lamas of the nineteenth century who studied all the lineages in Tibet and was one of the original founders of the non-sectarian (Rime) movement.

jealous gods (Skt. *asura*). A type of being residing in the six realms of samsara who are characterized as being very jealous. They are depicted in paintings as trying to cut down the divine trees of the gods.

Kadampa school. One of the major schools in Tibet founded by Atisha (993-1054).

Kagyü. One of the four major lineages of Buddhism in Tibet. It was founded by Marpa, the translator. The other three lineages are the Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug schools.

Karma Chagme (1613-1678). He studied under Nyingma and Kagyu teachers, was ordained by the sixth Sharmapa, and traveled in Tibet with the Ninth Karmapa. He was a tertön and an author of many books.

Karma Kagyu. One of the eight schools of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism which is headed by His Holiness Karmapa.

kayas, three. There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body” is the complete enlightenment or complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, called the “enjoyment body,” manifests only to bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, called the “emanation body,” manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha.

Khaché Wangpo (1350-1405). He was recognized by the Fourth Karmapa as the second Shamar Rinpoche and given the red crown (as seen in the Karma Kagyu Lineage Tree). He is author of eight volumes of texts.

latencies or **latent karmic imprints** (Tib. *bakchak*). Each act a person does leaves an imprint stored in the all ground, eighth consciousness. These latencies express themselves later by leaving the eighth consciousness and entering the sixth consciousness when stimulated by external experience.

kayas, three. There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body,” is the complete enlightenment or the complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” is perceived only by bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, also called the “emanation body,” manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha.

klesha. See **disturbing emotions.**

luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*) In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, it is said that everything is empty or insubstantial on the relative level of reality, but that emptiness is not completely void because it has a knowing quality which is called luminous clarity. This luminosity or clarity allows all phenomena to appear and is the knowing characteristic of the mind.

Machig Labdron (1031-1129) Machig Labdron received the Chöd teachings from the Indian teacher Dampa Sangye and his student Kyoton Sonam Lama, and propagated them in Tibet.

Mahakala. A dharma protector who is the wrathful manifestation of Chenrezig known as the “great black one” or Bernakchen. A chief Dharmapala or Dharma protector of the Kagyu lineage.

Mahamudra. Literally, “great seal” meaning that all phenomena are sealed by the primordially true nature. This form of meditation is traced back to Saraha (10th century) and was passed down in the Kagyu school through Tilopa, Naropa, and Marpa. Mahamudra practice emphasizes perceiving mind directly rather than through conceptual analysis. It also refers to the experience of the practitioners when they attain the union of emptiness and luminous clarity.

Mahayana. Literally, the “great vehicle.” The teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, which emphasize emptiness, compassion, and the six paramitas.

mahasiddha. A practitioner who has a great realization. These were usually Vajrayana practitioners who lived in India between the eighth and twelfth century and practiced tantra. Biographies of some of the most famous are found in *The Eighty-four Mahasiddhas*.

Maitripa (1007-1085). A great Indian mahasiddhas who was a student of Naropa and taught Atisha and Marpa. He taught Marpa the Mahamudra instructions and authored 26 works, mostly on Mahamudra.

mara. Literally, demon and refers to the obstacles encountered by the practitioner. The four kinds of mara include the skandha-mara which is incorrect view of self, the klesha-mara which is being overpowered by negative emotions, the mrityu-mara which is death

which interrupts spiritual practice, and the devaputra-mara which is becoming stuck in the bliss of meditation.

Marpa (1012-1097). A Tibetan student of Naropa who made three trips to India and brought back many tantric texts including the Six Dharmas of Naropa, the Guhyasamaja, and the Chakrasamvara practices. Marpa founded the Kagyu lineage in Tibet with Milarepa and Rechungpa being his most prominent disciples.

Middle Way school (Skt. *Madhyamaka*). The most influential of the four schools of Indian Buddhism, founded by Nagarjuna in the second century CE. The name means the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. The main postulate of this school is that all phenomena — both internal mental events and external physical objects — are empty of any true nature. The school uses extensive analytical reasoning based on the Prajnaparamita sutras to establish the emptiness of phenomena.

Mikyo Dorje (1507-1554). The Eighth Karmapa who wrote commentaries on the Madhyamaka, abhidharma, tantric texts, and Mahamudra. He was also extremely artistic and produced many Dharma paintings and metal statues.

Mind Only (Skt. *Chittamatra*) school. This school was founded by Asanga in the fourth century CE and is one of the four major schools of the Mahayana tradition. Its main tenet (to greatly simplify) is that all phenomena are mental events.

myrobalan (*Terminalia Chebula*). A south Asian fruit used to improve digestion and strengthen various organs.

naga. A water spirit that may take the form of a serpent and is often the custodian of treasures such as Dharma texts or material treasures hidden underground.

Nalanda. The greatest Buddhist university located near modern Rajagriha from the fifth to the tenth century and was seat of the Mahayana teachings. Many great Buddhist scholars studied there.

Naropa (956-1040). A great scholar at Nalanda University who one day was visited by a dakini who told him to go study under Tilopa. He became a mahasiddha and transmitted many Vajrayana teachings to Marpa who took these back to Tibet.

ngöndro (Tib. pronounced “nundro”). The preliminary practices that are done before one does an extensive practice. It usually involves doing about 100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yogas.

nihilism. The extreme view that all things lack ultimate existence, so there is no the law of cause and effect or past and future lives.

Nine Instructions of the Formless Dakinis. These instructions are: 1. Loosen the seal knot of mind as ripening and freeing, 2. Look at the mirror of mind as samaya, 3. Slash water with a sword

as activity, 4. Sun yourself in realization as samaya substance, 5. Look at the torch of wisdom as insight, 6. Turn the wheel of the web of *nadi* and *prana*, 7. Look at the outer mirror as equal taste, 8. Meditate on self-liberated Mahamudra, and 9. Hold the jewel of the great bliss teachings.

nirmanakaya (Tib. *tulku*). Of the three bodies of the Buddha the nirmanakaya or “emanation body” manifests a person or teacher as the Shakyamuni Buddha. See **kayas**, **three**.

Padmasambhava (Tib. *Guru Rinpoche*). The great eighth century mahasiddha who was invited by the King of Tibet to help tame all the negative elemental forces preventing the spreading Buddhism. He taught many tantras and Vajrayana practices and also concealed many of these texts to be later revealed by tertons.

Pagmo Drupa (1110-1170). A major student of Gampopa who founded the eight “lesser” or “more distant” schools of the Kagyu Lineage that were headed by his students.

parinirvana. When the Shakyamuni Buddha passed away, he did not die an ordinary death. He had achieved full enlightenment and went to Nirvana, but has kept helping beings ever since.

Pema Karpo (1527-1592). Also called Padma Karpo. The Fourth Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the Drukpa Kagyu Lineage. He was known for being a great scholar who was author of 24 volumes.

PHAT (often pronounced “peh”). A Sanskrit syllable that means “to disperse” or “to dispel” comprised of the syllable PHA that means “gathering means” with the ending letter “T” that makes it mean “cutting knowledge.”

phowa (Tib.). An advanced tantric practice concerned with the ejection of consciousness at death into a favorable realm.

Prajnaparamita (Skt. for “perfection of wisdom”). Buddhist sutras outlining the Mahayana path and the concept of emptiness in a set of texts revealed by Nagarjuna. These are about 40 sutras and the most well-known of these are the Prajnaparamita texts in 8,000, and in 25,000, and in 100,000 verses. A much shorter of these texts are the *Heart* and the *Diamond sutras*.

pratyekabuddhas. (Skt. for “solitary realizer”) Realized Foundation Vehicle practitioners who have achieved the wisdoms of the nature and variety of phenomena, but who did not committed themselves to the bodhisattva path of helping all others. The pratyekabuddhas have attained awakening for themselves, and have done this on their own without a teacher.

purusha. See **Samkhya school**.

raksha. In India an ogre and in Buddhism a flesh-eating demon who can fly and is especially strong at night.

Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339). The Third Karmapa known for writing a series of texts widely used in the Kagyu school. His text *Buddha Nature and Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom* introduced the Shentong view into the Kagyu lineage.

Rechungpa (1083-1161). One of two major disciples of Milarepa. At Milarepa's request, he visited India several times and brought back important teachings including some Chakrasamvara teachings. Many of his important teachings were absorbed into the Drukpa Kagyu lineage.

relative truth or reality (Tib. *kunsop*). There are two truths or levels of reality: relative and ultimate. Relative or conventional truth is the perception of ordinary (unenlightened) people who perceive the world through their disturbing emotions and projections which arise from the false belief in the existence of a self.

Rinchen Dargye (born 1823). He was also known as Karme Khenpo and was a Kagyu master who was the main holder of the tertön's Chokgyur Lingpa termas.

Sakya Pandita (1182-1251). A famous Sakya lineage forefather who was known as a great scholar in Tibet, India, Mongolia, and China. Having studied Buddhist writings in India and having mastered all the major Tibetan teachings, he authored dozens of works most notably the *Treasury of Logic and Valid Cognition*.

samadhi. A state of meditation that is non-dualistic with no discrimination between self and other. Also called meditative absorption or one-pointed meditation, this is the highest form of meditation.

Samantabhadra. Literally, “all good.” One of the eight main bodhisattvas in the Mahayana teachings. The name Samantabhadra also refers to the primordial dharmakaya buddha. It is said that at the beginning of creation Samantabhadra realized that the division of “I” and “other” (dualism) was an illusion and was not fooled by it unlike everyone else.

sambhogakaya. Also called the “enjoyment body.” See **three kayas**.

Samkhya school. One of six schools of Hindu philosophy. It was a school at the time of the Shakyamuni Buddha and held the belief that everything in the world was either consciousness (Skt. *prusha*) or matter (Skt. *prakriti*). They held that all objects of knowledge can be enumerated into twenty-five categories of phenomena and also believed in the “fundamental principle” which is partless, permanent, and pervades all phenomena.

samsara or “cyclic existence.” Conditioned existence in which suffering occurs because individuals still possess attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

Secret Mantra. Another name for the Vajrayana.

selflessness of person (Tib. *dagme* Skt. *anatman*). Also called egolessness. The Buddha taught that a “person” is not a real permanent self, but rather just a collection of ever-changing thoughts and feelings. This doctrine asserts that when one examines one’s mind, one finds this “I” is empty as an independent or substantial self. This position is held by most Buddhist schools.

selflessness of phenomena (Tib. *tong pa nyi*). This doctrine asserts that not only is there selflessness of person, but when one examines external phenomena, one finds that these external phenomena are also empty of substantial nature. This position is not held by the Foundation Vehicle schools, but is championed by the Mahayana schools, particularly the Madhyamaka school.

Sending and Receiving practice (Tib. *tonglen*). A meditation practice promulgated by Atisha in which the practitioner mentally breathes in the negative conditions of others and breathes out all that is positive.

Seven Points of Vairocana. These are points of correct meditation posture and are: (1) Straighten the upper body and spinal column, (2) Look slightly downward into space straight across from the tip of the nose while keeping the chin and neck straight, (3) Straighten the shoulder blades in the manner of a vulture flexing its wings, (4) Keep the lips touching gently, (5) Let the tip of the tongue touch the upper palate, (6) Form the legs into either the full-lotus posture or half-lotus posture, and (7) Keep the back of the right

hand flat on the left open palm with the inside of the tips of the thumbs gently touching.

Shamatha or **Tranquility meditation**. Basic sitting meditation in which one usually sits cross-legged and observes the workings of the mind. The main purpose of Shamatha meditation is to settle and tame the mind so that it will stay where one places it.

Shantideva (675-725). A great bodhisattva who studied at Nalanda University in India and is known for his famous work on the conduct of a bodhisattva, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Shravaka. Literally “those who hear,” meaning disciples. A realized Foundation Vehicle practitioner (*arhat*) who has achieved the realization of the nonexistence of a personal self.

siddha. An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

siddhi. The spiritual accomplishments of advanced practitioners. The common siddhis are magical powers such as the ability to fly, paralyze an enemy, attract a lover, and find buried treasure. The “supreme siddhi” usually refers to the complete accomplishment, enlightenment.

Six Dharmas of Naropa (Tib. *naro chö drug*). Six special yogic practices that were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa including the practices of Subtle Heat, Illusory Body, Dream Yoga, Luminosity practice, Ejection of Consciousness (*Phowa*), and Bardo practice.

six paramitas or **perfections**. These are six stages a Mahayana bodhisattva must go through to reach enlightenment: generosity, morality, patience, exertion, meditation, and developing intelligence (*prajna*). They are called “perfections” because they are not ordinary qualities, but extremely vast or transcendental qualities.

six realms of samsara. The innumerable beings in samsara are traditionally divided into six main groups: the god realm in which gods have great pride, the asura realm in which the jealous gods try to maintain what they have, the human realm which is the best realm because it has the possibility of achieving enlightenment, the animal realm characterized by stupidity, the hungry ghost realm characterized by great craving, and the hell realm characterized by aggression.

six refuges. The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, guru, yidam, and the Dharma protectors.

Six Yogas of Kalachakra (Tib. *jordruk*). The Kalachakra is the highest tantras of the Vajrayana. The Six Yogas (or Unions) of the Kalachakra are: individual withdrawal, stabilizing the mind, energy control, retention, subsequent mindfulness, and empty body.

spiritual song. (Tib. *gur*) A religious song spontaneously composed by a Vajrayana practitioner. It has a definite number of syllables in each line and can be sung in one of several melodies.

subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*). These are not anatomical channels but pathways in which subtle energies or “winds” (Skt. *prana*) travel. The major central channel goes from the crown of the head to below the navel with two subtle channels running from left and right from the nostrils to just below the navel, where they join the central channel. See [Appendix E](#).

subtle drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *tigle*). Subtle drops of energy which travel along the subtle channels.

Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*). An advanced Vajrayana practice for combining bliss and emptiness which produces heat as a byproduct. This practice is usually taught in the three-year retreat.

subtle winds (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *Jung*). The energy that flows through the subtle channels.

Sukhavati (Tib. *Dewachen*). A pure land of the Amitabha Buddha. Ordinary persons who have great devotion and recite Amitabha’s name with great sincerity can be reborn there. This land is described in the *Amitabha Sutra* and *Sukhavati Vyuha Sutra*.

sutra. The Foundation and Mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha’s Vajrayana teachings and the shastras which are commentaries on the sutras by great scholars.

tantra. One can divide Tibetan Buddhism into the sutra tradition and the tantra tradition. The sutra tradition primarily involves the academic study of the Mahayana sutras and the tantric path primarily involves practicing the Vajrayana practices. There are four classes of tantra texts: the kriya-tantra, the carya-tantra, yoga-tantra, and the anuttarayoga-tantra.

Tara. A well-known deity and who is widely practiced in the Buddhist world. Originally a deity of sailors to keep them from drowning, later Tara was expanded to offer people protection from many kinds of fears such as poisonous snakes, being unjustly imprisoned, and so on.

Tashi Namgyal (1512-1587). This famous teacher wrote many texts and became Gampopa's regent by presiding in later years over Gampopa's Dakla Gampo monastery.

Tashi Tseringma. The head of the five Tsering sisters of long life. She is depicted as white with one face and two hands holding a nine-pronged vajra and life long flask riding a snow lion. She and her sisters have helped Gampopa, Rechungpa, the Karmapas, and many other lamas.

thangka (Tib.). A Tibetan religious painting on a scroll.

Third Karmapa. See **Rangjung Dorje**.

Three Jewels. These are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha.

three realms. There are three realms of samsara: the desire realm in which beings are reborn based on their karma into physical bodies in the six realms of samsara; the form realm in which beings, due to the power of their meditation, are born with immaterial bodies; and the formless realm in which beings with meditative absorption have entered a state of meditation after death. In this realm thoughts and perception have ceased, and there are thus no bodies. These beings remain in this state for many eons after which they return to lower states within samsara.

three roots. These are the lamas, the yidams, and the Dharma protectors.

Tilopa (928-1009). One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas and the guru of Naropa. He is credited as being first member of the Kagyu lineage.

torma. A ritual shrine object made of dried barley and butter and used as a symbolic offering to the deities.

Tranquility meditation. See **Shamatha meditation.**

Tsang Nyön Heruka (1452-1507). Known as “the madman from Tsang,” he studied traditional Buddhist subjects and practices in the Kagyu tradition. After a long solitary retreat, he became a *nyönpa* or wild tantric practitioner with unconventional behaviors. While staying in Lapchi Snow Mountain, where Milarepa had reached

enlightenment, he wrote the *The Life of Milarepa* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*.

Tsultrim Nyingpo (1116-1169). Gampopa's nephew and student who became Gampopa's Dharma heir.

turning of the wheel of Dharma. The Buddha's teachings correspond to three levels: The Foundation, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana vehicle of teachings with each one being one turning of the wheel.

twelve deeds of the Buddha. The major accomplishments of the Buddha. These are descending from Tushita Heaven, entering the womb of his mother, taking birth, becoming skilled in worldly arts and demonstrating physical prowess, enjoying his retinue of queens, renouncing the world, practicing austerities and renouncing them, going to the Bodhi tree, subduing Mara, attaining full enlightenment, turning the wheel of the Dharma, and passing into parinirvana.

Ü Nyön or Madman of Ü. Kunga Zangpo (1458-1532) was a famous Tibetan Buddhist ascetic of the Kagyu sect. Kunga Zangpo renounced the world and practiced as a monk. Later he took up a unique tantric asceticism that entailed dressing in human remains, wandering from place to place, and provoking others to attack him physically. Because of this asceticism, he became known as a madman, a *nyönpa*.

Upasaka. A Buddhist lay person who has taken the five layperson's vows to avoid killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicating liquor.

Vaisheshika. One of six school of Indian philosophy that believed that all valid knowledge came from the Vedas. They proposed that all objects in the universe were reducible to atoms and the qualities of phenomena came from the arrangement of these atoms.

Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*). The name of the dharmakaya Buddha. Many of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage came from Vajradhara.

Vajrasattva. The Buddha of purification. Vajrasattva practice is one of the four preliminary practices.

Vajrayana. One of the three major traditions of Buddhism (Foundation, Mahayana, Vajrayana) The Vajrayana, sometimes called “the secret mantrayana,” is based on the tantras and emphasizes the luminous clarity aspect of phenomena and is the main Buddhist practice of Tibet.

Vajrayogini or **Vajravarahi.** A semi-wrathful meditational deity who is a consort of Chakrasamvara. She is the principal deity in the Karma Kagyu tradition.

Vidyadharas (Tib. *rigdzin*). Often translated as “awareness holders.” There are two sets of high level practitioners — the eight vidyadharas of India, including Vimalamita and Nagarjuna, and

the eight vidyadharas of Tibet, including King Trisong Detsen and Yeshe Tsogyal.

Vipashyana or **Insight meditation**. This meditation develops insight into the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmata*). Also see **Shamatha meditation**.

Wangchuk Dorje (1556-1603). The ninth Karmapa is known for writing some of the important Kagyu texts on Mahamudra including *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, and *Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance*.

wisdom of the variety of phenomena (Tib. *jinyepa*). This is the transcendent knowledge (Skt. *jnana*) of knowing all the aspects of the variety of phenomena.

wisdom of nature of phenomena (Tib. *jitapa*). This is transcendent knowledge (Skt. *jnana*) of the true nature of reality, not as it appears to individuals in samsara.

Yogachara school. This school that descended from Maitreya and Asanga. It taught that there were eight consciousnesses, instead of six consciousnesses, and supported the view of the Mind Only school that everything is mind.

yogi. A Buddhist practitioner who has chosen an unconventional path of practicing.

yidam (Tib.). A tantric deity that embodies qualities of Buddhahood. The yidam is the personal protector of one's practice and guide to enlightenment. Traditionally, yidam practice is the main practice that follows the preliminaries in the Vajrayana.

Glossary of Tibetan Terms

Pronounced	Spelled	Meaning
bakchak	bag chags	karmic latencies
chingwa	bying ba	mental dullness
chö	dharms	phenomena
chonyi	chos nyid	dharmata
chod (chö)	gcod	Cutting Off practice
dak	bdags	self
dakme	bdags med	no self
döchak	dod chags	desire
drenpa	dran pa	mindfulness
drol lam	grol lam	path of liberation
dutsi	bdud rtsi	blessed substance
gangzak	gang zag	individual
döchag	'dod chags	klesha of desire

Glossary of Tibetan Terms

Pronounced	Spelled	Meaning
göpa	rgod pa	excitement or agitation
gur	mgur	spiritual song
gopa	rgod pa	mental excitement
jinlap	byins rlaps	blessings
jitapa	ji lta ba	wisdom of dharmata
jinyepa	ji snyed pa	wisdom of variety of phenomena
jordruk	sbyor drug	Six Yogas of Kalachakra
kunzop	kun rdzob	relative reality
lhengche	lhan chig	coemergence
marigpa	ma rig pa	ignorance
mila gurbum	milamgur 'bum	100,000 Songs of Mila
mila namtar	mi la rnam tar	Milarepa's biography
ménlam	smon lam	aspiration
mukpa	rmugs pa	dullness or lethargy
namtar	rmam thar	spiritual biography
namtok	mam parrtog pa	discursive thoughts

Glossary of Tibetan Terms

Pronounced	Spelled	Meaning
naro chö drug	naro'ichos drug	Six Dharmas of Naropa
nönpa	smyon pa	crazy person
nyön mong	nyon mongs	disturbing emotion
phowa	'pho ba	transference of consciousness
repa	ras pa	tantric adept
salwa	gsal ba	luminous clarity
sangye	sangs rgyas	buddha
sheshin	shes bzhin	alertness
sinmo	rin mo	a type of demon
tashi	bkra shis	good fortune
tendrel	rten 'brel	auspicious coincidence
thap lam	thabs lam	path of means
tigle	thig le	subtle drop
tonglen	gtong len	Sending and Receiving
tong pa nyi	strong pa nyid	emptiness of phenomena
tépaga	thos pa dga'	joyful to hear

Glossary of Tibetan Terms

Pronounced	Spelled	Meaning
trong jug	grong 'jug	transfer of consciousness
tonglen	gtong len	Sending and Receiving
tsa	rtsa	subtle channel
tsampa	tsampa	roasted barley flour
trilkhor	'phrul 'khor	yogic exercises
tulku	sprul sku	incarnation
tummo	gtum mo	Subtle Heat practice
tupa	thub pa	sage (muni)
yidam	yi dam	meditational deity
zer	gzer	crucial point

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Sutras And Tantras

Amitabha Sutra

This sutra is the basis of Amitabha practice and also for the Prayer for Dewachen. A translation of this text from the Tibetan is available on internet: <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-051-003.html>

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Wayman, Alex. *Yoga of the Guhyasamaja Tantra*. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1977.

This tantra ascribed to Asanga describes a mandala with the Buddha Akshobhya in the middle with other four wisdom buddha surrounding with thirty-two deities. It is seventeen chapters long

and exists in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese. Marpa brought this tantra to Tibet.

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The White Lotus of the Good Dharma translated by Peter Alan Roberts and available at: <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh113>

Not to be confused with the *Lotus Sutra*, this sutra describes Shakyamuni Buddha, who out of his immeasurable compassion, was not born in a pure land, but in a troubled part of samsara to save people. He is compared to the beautiful white lotus flower.

Other Works

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