

རི་ཆོས་

KARMA CHAKME'S
MOUNTAIN DHARMA
VOLUME THREE



AS TAUGHT BY
KHENPO KARTHAR RINPOCHE

Using this eBook

In addition to the electronic Table of Contents and other features commonly found in eBooks and interactive PDFs, this eBook is enriched with additional features:

1. The Table of Contents on the first pages of the eBook now has links and by clicking/tapping on a title it will take you to the corresponding section of the text.
2. Glossary references are in color and also have links. Simply click/tap on the colored text to jump to the glossary and then click/tap again on the glossary term to return to the page where you left off.
3. Links in color are also used wherever we have a reference to online content, simply click/tap on the colored text to open the website in your browser.

KARMA CHAKME'S MOUNTAIN DHARMA

VOLUME ONE

Entering Dharma's Gate (the four ordinary foundations) • Renunciation • Various Greater and Lesser Vehicles • How to Keep the Three Vows • Taking Refuge • The Generation of Bodhichitta • Protection of the Three Jewels Through Meditation • Dispelling All Obstacles • Purification of Karma, Vajrasattva Practice • Offering the Mandala • Guru Yoga

VOLUME TWO

How to Recognize the Arising of Experience and Realization • Love and Compassion • A Brief Explanation of Geomancy • Instructions on Retreat • Chö Practice • White Tara and Tseringma • Kriya and Charya Tantra • Yoga Tantra for Those Skilled in Ritual and Mudras • How to Purify the Obscurations of the Dead

VOLUME THREE

A Concise Liberation Through Hearing: Introduction to the Bardo • Signs Arising Through Practice • Avoiding Deviations • Dispelling Obstacles and Removing Impediments • Instructions on Improvement to Increase Experience and Realization • Five Poisonous Kleshas

VOLUME FOUR

Instructions on Conduct in Order to Behave in Accord with the Victors' Dictates • Instructions on Benefiting Beings • How the Best, the Intermediate and the Least Practitioners Die • Choosing a Pure Realm • How to Reach a Pure Realm

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

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

རི་ཚོས

KARMA CHAKME'S MOUNTAIN DHARMA

VOLUME THREE

As taught by

KHENPO KARTHAR RINPOCHE

Translators:

LAMA YESHE GYAMTSO

CHOJOR RADHA

NAMGYAL KHORKO



KTD Publications

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

[illegible]

OM SWA STI KARMA KA BI DZA YA

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

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

May your boundless activities be blazingly glorious and
spontaneously accomplished.

Aspiration by the Twelfth Gyaltschap Mingyur Gocha. Mangalam

Published by:

KTD Publications

335 Meads Mountain Road

Woodstock, NY 12498, USA

www.KTDPublications.org

Print edition distributed by:

Namse Bangdzo Bookstore

335 Meads Mountain Road

Woodstock, NY 12498, USA

www.NamseBangdzo.com

© 2008 Karma Triyana Dharmachakra

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-934608-01-2

Ebook edition 2020 by dharmaebooks.org

Dharma Ebooks is a project of [Dharma Treasure](http://DharmaTreasure), which operates under the editorial guidance of the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. The proprietary rights of Dharma Ebooks belong to Dharma Treasure Corporation.



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Contents

Preface

Advice from Khenpo Rinpoche

Introduction

Short Biography of Karma Chakme Rinpoche

Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma: Volume Three

A Concise Liberation Through Hearing: An Introduction to the Bardo

Shade of the Ashoka Tree: How to Avoid Robbers and Death While in Retreat — The Practice of Marichi

All Connection Has Meaning: Definitive Methods, Both Simple and Elaborate, for Burning a Living Inscription

The Hook of Compassion: Visualizations to Guide the Dead

Thunder of Mantra: The Outer Practice of a Yidam or Dakini

Magic Mirror: Miraculous Signs Arising Through Practice

Showing the Unmistaken Path: Cutting Through
Deviation

A Shower of Ambrosia: The Dispelling of Impediments
or Obstructions

The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel That Brings Progress:
Instructions on Improvement

The Great Peacock That Conquers Poison: The Nature of
the Five Poisons

Dedication

Precious Garland: A List of Contents to Prevent Disorder

A List of Mantras

Glossary

Index of Stories Told by Khenpo Rinpoche

About KTD Publications

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maureen McNicholas and Peter van Deurzen

Advice from Khenpo Rinpoche

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

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

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

...

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

...

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

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

...

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

...

It is best if these practices are done by someone who has finished ngondro because the function of ngondro, as its name indicates,

is to prepare you for other practices. However, there is no rule that says you cannot perform these visualizations until you have completed ngondro. In the case of the practices to benefit others, it is best if you have the seed of empowerment and the required **mantra** recitations, but it is most important that you have compassion.

...

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

...

I would like to say something about this whole question of signs or indications in practice. Sometimes it happens that practitioners will experience some positive signs in their practice, some indication that the practice is taking effect. They assume that that means they are done, that they have attained the result, and they therefore stop practicing. This is incorrect. Signs in practice do not indicate that you have reached your destination. They indicate that you are heading in the right direction and that therefore you should continue to practice as you have been.

...

You have to understand that the ultimate nature of thoughts is empty, but you nevertheless have to make a choice and attempt to strengthen and reinforce positive thoughts and get rid of negative thoughts.

Ultimately what you want to be able to do is simultaneously accumulate both merit and wisdom. This is the best type of practice, and this is done when you accumulate merit by doing meritorious things such as inviting deities in front of you, prostrating to them, presenting offerings, and so on, and you simultaneously accumulate wisdom by realizing their non-

existence. But this is something we usually cannot do. In the beginning, we cannot practice the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom at the same time. We can only practice them in alternation.

...

Obscurations are not lasting; they are adventitious, not only in the sense that they are not intrinsic to the nature of the mind, but also because they are constantly shifting. For example, a certain amount of the obscurations that an individual has accumulated will be purified through their different activities, such as practicing dharma and so on; at the same time, they are accumulating other obscurations that replace those they purified. It is more like fleeting clouds passing through the sky than a block of solid stuff; this is why we think of this whole process as being like a constantly spinning wheel, which is the source for the term *samsara*, which means “spinning.” As each obscuration arises, in reaction to it we develop *mental afflictions*, which become the cause of the next obscuration, which inspires more mental afflictions, which become the cause of further obscuration and afflicted action, and so on.

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Short Biography of Karma Chakme Rinpoche

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

རི་ཚོས

KARMA CHAKME'S MOUNTAIN DHARMA

VOLUME THREE



NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SARVA SIDDHI HUNG

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

A Concise Liberation Through Hearing: An Introduction to the Bardo

In the context of this teaching, the specific **bardo** or **interval** we are concerned with is the period that begins with the dying process and ends with subsequent rebirth. In terms of understanding the significance and implications of the bardo experience, particular emphasis is given to recognizing its various aspects. We may use the term *bardo*, “interval,” to collectively describe these aspects and experiences, but nevertheless *bardo* is still merely a word.

Although at the time of death every sentient being necessarily experiences the bardo, there is no possibility that animals, for example, could recognize the bardo or its significance. Among human beings, only some have a connection to Dharma and possibly some training in Dharma practice. These individuals are given introductions and empowerments based on their genuine understanding of Dharma. The bardo teachings are intended especially for them.

Karma Chakme first pays homage to the deity of great compassion with the Sanskrit invocation, NAMO MAHAKARUNIKAYE. The great compassionate one being addressed here is Arya **Avalokita**,

who serves as the guide for all beings without exception. In this way, Chakme Rinpoche offers his respect and veneration to Avalokita, or Chenrezik (Tibetan).

Not all individuals necessarily require bardo teachings. A highly accomplished practitioner who passes away in a state of authentic meditative absorption requires no introduction at that point because he or she has already actualized the **clear light** nature of mind. Or if a guru or spiritual guide of great capacity successfully performs **phowa** for a deceased person, that person does not need to recognize anything per se, because once consciousness has been transferred, rebirth in either a **pure realm** or a **deva realm** is imminent. For those who are not capable of dying in a state of meditative absorption or for whom phowa has not been successfully performed, the consciousness will proceed onward to wander in the bardo state. The instructions pertaining to the bardo experience should therefore be given especially to those individuals.

One might ask, “If phowa has already been performed for someone, or if they may have already recognized the clear light, will exposure to these teachings pose any danger to them?” No, it will not; in fact, as Chakme Rinpoche explains, receiving the teachings at this point will serve as a supportive reminder

that further insures a favorable outcome, so there is no fault whatsoever in giving instruction to the deceased.

As to when the introduction should be given, the prime opportunity is during the chirdok ceremony, where the name of the deceased person is inscribed on paper, read aloud, then ritually burned. At this time the deceased can be addressed in the following manner, “You are now a bardo being, an interval being. These are the methods you should implement in order to recognize this.” In this way the chirdok ceremony becomes the ideal opportunity for introducing the deceased to the bardo teachings.

Take the example of our close friend Michael Doran. On the third day of his death, a **sur**, or **singed offering** ceremony, was performed. During this ceremony his consciousness was summoned from the bardo state and dissolved into a piece of paper inscribed with his name, which represented him. Following that, dedication prayers were made for his benefit and purification. Whenever Vajrayana rituals or empowerments are performed following someone’s death, one should take advantage of the opportunity to assist the deceased by introducing them to the circumstances of the bardo.

In the course of doing so, when addressing the deceased person you should call their name with a pleasant and gentle voice. A bardo being is already in an uncomfortable situation, and if they are spoken to in a harsh or abrupt manner, they will probably become frightened. This will immediately provoke disturbing thoughts, creating further danger for them. For this reason, their name must be called with a kind and pleasant tone. Karma Chakme illustrates this with KYE MA KYE HÜ, KALDEN (name of deceased), an endearing way to address the deceased.

The first thing they should be told is, “You are now dead and because of impermanence you have departed and are passing on to the next world. Having left behind the experience of being human in the previous world, you are now in the bardo or interval state. You are unable to tell whether you are dead or not.” The bardo, or interval, being is obstructed because they are not able to grasp what recently happened, and therefore it seems to them that they are still alive. Due to the force of previous habit, a bardo being thinks they still possess the body of their previous existence, and because this body appears to them as real they cling strongly to this notion. The experience is something like a dream in which one feels a great sense of need, but when that need is not fulfilled the fixation on the idea of one’s own individual reality becomes intensified with a sense of desperation or anxiety. In the same way, although a bardo being

no longer possesses an actual body, their previous body seems to appear to them, and therefore they will be unable to believe for certain that they have died.

You should explain to the deceased, “You no longer possess the corporeal, substantial body comprised of flesh and bone that you used to possess. It seems to you that this is your body now, but this is only a **mental body** — the appearance of a body produced by your mind. You have no form apart from this mental body, and the scope of your understanding is now limited to that of an eight-year-old child.” This is one way of introducing the deceased to their present condition as a being in the bardo state.

Four Signs Characteristic of the Bardo State

The first sign characteristic of the bardo state is that different colors may appear. The particular color indicates which of the six types of beings the individual will eventually take rebirth as. The **appearance** of white, for example, corresponds to rebirth as a deva, and similarly rebirth in lower realms will be indicated by the colors that correspond to those realms.

A second sign that can be conveyed to the deceased is that the light of the sun and moon in the sky will not be visible to them.

It may also seem to them that their own body is radiating light, although in fact no such light is being produced. If this is happening, it is an indication that the deceased is still clinging to the concept of being alive. Those kinds of appearances are the same as the visible forms you would perceive in the dream state. When you are dreaming, you are not actually seeing anything you seem to be seeing because you are only sleeping. Similarly the sun and moon will not be visible to the deceased because the only visible appearances they seem to perceive are unreal.

A third sign characteristic of the bardo state is that as soon as a specific location comes to mind, one is miraculously and instantaneously transported there. For example, in my case, if I were to recall my homeland of Kham in eastern Tibet, I would immediately find myself in Kham. Or if I were to think of India, I would actually arrive there in that very instant. In the same way, a bardo being miraculously and instantaneously arrives at whatever realm or place occurs to them without making any actual journeys, and this serves as a third indication that the deceased is now passing through the bardo state in the form of a mental body.

That being the case, the bardo being has no certainty as to where they might be at any time, as they are driven about impulsively from place to place — as Karma Chakme says, “at the peak of a

mountain or on the shore of an ocean.” They might claim to have a fixed abode somewhere, but there is actually no certainty at all. Whatever places they might have gone to or stayed at while they were alive are instantly arrived at when recalled during this bardo period, and as such there is no secure place where they can remain. Likewise they have no definite companions. They may recognize specific individuals as friends, and those friends will then accompany them, but what they are seeing is other bardo beings that appear as though they were still alive and accompanying them. For that reason, there is no certainty as to who those companions really are.

Food is also an indefinite matter, as bardo beings can only obtain nourishment in the form of scents or singed substances that are specifically consecrated for them as part of a sur offering. In the bardo state there is no solid food, nor is there any means by which such beings could consume it. It is for the benefit of beings in the bardo that we chant the sur liturgy and dedicate the singed offerings to them. If no one were to perform such rituals, those beings would be powerless to consume any nourishment. These conditions serve as a fourth indication of passage through the bardo period.

Sometimes in this state one might experience a defiled form of **supercognition**, a kind of defective prescience that has not been

obtained as a result of previous practice, but is rather another phenomenal occurrence inherent to the bardo. Visions regarding one's previous, present, and future existences will become evident. For example, a vision might convey messages such as, "In a previous life I was a dakini, I am presently a dakini, and in the future I will again appear as a dakini." This form of clairvoyance is erratic and unstable — as soon as the next instant occurs, these impure visions are completely forgotten, and one surrenders to confusion again.

One might also discover the ability to instantaneously travel throughout any of the billion-world realms. With only a mental body, in the span of an instant a mere thought can transform one's apparent environment into any location in any realm. Furthermore, if the deceased looks into a body of water or a mirror, their reflection will not appear to them. Similarly their body will cast no shadow, and if they were to walk on sand or soft soil, no trace of their footsteps would appear where they had walked. These are all further signs that someone is wandering through the bardo state.

The Appearance of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

Once the bardo being has been introduced to the fact that they are dead, and once they become aware that they are nothing more than a mental body in the bardo, they will be overcome with severe despair. They will grow anxious as they think about finding whatever means they can to take rebirth in another body. At this time they will feel tremendous regret about having failed to take advantage of the opportunity to practice Dharma before they died, and they hope that by taking rebirth in another body they will be able to practice Dharma and thereby free themselves from this experience. At the same time, they will now clearly and vividly recall whatever wrongdoings and transgressions they committed in the past. Thinking of this, they will become terrified as it becomes immediately evident that **Yama**, the Lord of Death, and his henchmen are now inexorably chasing them down.

Seeking some source of protection for themselves, the deceased will think of their parents and any other loved ones they have left behind with intense anguish and bereavement. Desperately hoping to be acknowledged, in their distress they will cry out to their loved ones for help. Although they will be able to hear

whatever their loved ones might be saying, those family members — or any other beings outside of their present situation — will not hear anything they say, and because of this the deceased's misery will only be further intensified. At the same time, when they see how upset their loved ones are, crying and mourning over their death, they will try to comfort them by calling out, "I'm right here!" Yet when the deceased attempts to come back to their loved ones and embrace them, their family and friends will not see them or perceive anything they are saying or doing. Their loved ones will continue to cry, and as the deceased realizes that the others cannot see them, the deceased will again become fully aware that they have died and are now a bardo being, and their anguish will become even worse.

At this point the only recourse that will be of any real benefit and the only sources of **refuge** to turn to are the gurus and the lineage holders of the sangha. What can happen however, is that the bardo being will clearly perceive the shortcomings of all those individuals, regardless of whether they appear as gurus or ordained monastics. Whatever impure **samayas**, whatever erroneous recitation of sutra texts or ritual liturgies there might have been, and especially the failure to remain in one-pointed **samadhi**, as well as whatever afflicted thoughts and ideas ever arose for them — all of these will be clearly perceived by the deceased. Seeing all of these shortcomings, the deceased will

think, “These people are misleading me,” and they will become suspicious and agitated.

In reaction to this, they will start searching everywhere to find a body for themselves as soon as possible. They will not be concerned whether that body is favorable or unfavorable; their only intention will be to obtain whatever body they can find as quickly as they can. The guru should intervene at this time and instruct the deceased, “No one can obtain any of these bodies you seek — they are the appearances of your own bewildered mind, appearing only to you. Furthermore, from the fourth day of your death onward, the universe will appear to you as being filled throughout all directions, above and below, with spheres of iridescent light. The numerous retinues of the peaceful deities will appear within those spheres of light, pervading the entirety of groundless space. The bodies of the deities will appear majestic in bearing, radiant, and dazzling with intensely brilliant light, such that it will be almost impossible to look directly at them.”

You should then explain to the deceased, “Light rays of five different colors will shine from the heart centers of all the deities — stainless, clear light as intensely powerful as that of the sun, and these lights will penetrate your own heart center. At the same time, six other kinds of very weak, dim lights representing the pathways to the six types of rebirth will also appear. None

of these different lights are being produced by any source apart from yourself. The assemblies of deities have always been present as the sugatagarbha within you. The positive qualities in your continuum will arise individually as the natural expression of that nature in the form of the deities, with their bodies of colored light and various distinctive implements. The six dull, weaker lights arise from the six **afflictive emotions** in your continuum. At this point you will be faced with two choices: If you choose the lights of overwhelming brilliance and intensity, you will proceed onward to the joy and happiness of a favorable future. If you choose the dull, muted lights, you will be cast downward to lower forms of rebirth, and you will continue to wander in cyclic existence. You must choose the former to ensure rebirth in the pure realms of the five families of the victors!"

After the peaceful deities have made their appearance, they will be followed by the assembly of pure **vidyadharas**. The yidams, dakinis, and dharma protectors from the eight great charnel grounds will appear, dancing in a contorted manner and playing various types of musical instruments. The sounds of syllables such as HUM! and PHAT! will be heard, along with deafening sounds like a thousand thunderclaps resounding simultaneously. It will appear that the clamoring, overwhelming presence of these deities is causing all of the world realms to move, shuddering and quaking as though the ground everywhere is shifting. The

deceased should be told, “These assemblies of deities are coming for the purpose of protecting and escorting you on the pathway of the bardo that you are now traversing. Do not fear them and do not be intimidated by them; they are your yidams. You must try to recognize them as they are! If you can recognize one of them as your yidam, you will be reborn in the pure realm of that deity.”

This is what is meant by the term *liberation through hearing*. By hearing the words and the sound of the guru’s voice giving the introduction as described, the deceased is prompted to recognize any one of the deities that appear, and in that very instant of recognition they can thereby attain rebirth in a pure realm. Being in the form of a mental body, the deceased is in a position to seize the opportunity for liberation. These are the instructions presented in the *Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*.

Two stories give examples of liberation through hearing. There once was a family where the mother tended animals, going back and forth each day to collect milk and so on. She was sponsoring a lama to recite the text of the *Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*. While she was going about her work, she overheard him chanting the words, “Red hoopoe, red hoopoe with a bow and arrow.” At first she thought, “He must be trying to tease me, saying something sarcastic.” She heard him chanting this

all the time and as this went on she thought, “Whatever he’s saying must actually be part of the book! That’s really strange.”

Later the woman died, and in her after-death experience the light rays of the assembly of wrathful deities appeared to her. One of those deities appeared in the aspect of a red *yogini* with the head of a hoopoe, wielding a bow and arrow — Kama, the “red hoopoe-headed yogini.” When the deceased mother saw this deity she realized, “Oh, now I see what that lama was referring to in his chanting!” At that moment she immediately attained liberation in the realm of a pure vidyadhara.

Similarly there was a shepherdess who took her sheep out every day to pasture near the mountains, close to the ruins of an old monastery. The shepherdess would have lunch inside the ruins, which had an old mural still intact that depicted a protector with the head of a deer and a greenish-red, female body, holding a vase in one hand. While the shepherdess was having lunch, she would say to the mural, “Here, you take a little of this food,” and she would then offer some of her food, putting it in front of the wall. She did this whenever she came by to have lunch.

After the shepherdess died, this protector — Vasuraksa, the “deerheaded yogini holding a vase” — appeared to her during the bardo period. As soon as the deceased shepherdess saw the

deity, she was overjoyed, remembering, “Oh, this is the deity that I used to offer food to!”, and she was immediately liberated.

These stories demonstrate why liberation through hearing carries such great blessings. Through hearing these teachings, or even just making contact with them, it is actually possible to achieve liberation. As we have seen, if you can successfully recognize one deity, you will achieve liberation in that same instant.

The Appearance of the Wrathful Deities

First in the sequence of appearances are the peaceful deities, who are then followed by the semiwrathful deities, or pure vidyadharas. Next the wrathful deities will appear. It must be understood that none of these deities are actually angry. Their fearsome appearance is the expression of the intensity of the wisdom qualities that are present in your continuum, as well as the intensity of your afflicted thoughts and emotions. The wrathful aspect of these deities arises as the display of those underlying conditions.

The deceased should be introduced to the wrathful deities by saying, “Then the assembly of blood-drinking wrathful deities will come to receive you and guide you upward, away from the

pathway of the bardo toward rebirth in a pure realm. They will be terrifying in appearance and unbearable to look at. Once they appear they will be shrieking and uttering cries of ‘HUM! PHAT! THUK!’ ‘Strike! Strike! Kill! Kill!’ There will be deafening sounds like a thousand thunderclaps resounding simultaneously. The entire firmament between earth and sky will be completely filled with the appearances of these wrathful deities. As they shout cries of ‘Strike! Strike!’ and ‘Kill! Kill!’ they will be radiating a diverse array of light rays while brandishing arrows, spears, and other weapons. The experience will feel as though you were a heinous criminal being surrounded and imprisoned by armed soldiers with no possibility of escape whatsoever. At this point it is crucial that you recognize these appearances! They are not coming from any source other than yourself! The assemblies of peaceful and wrathful deities are none other than the deities of your own body. They are the aspect of pure awareness innately present within your body, arising as the display of its own intensity.”

Chakme Rinpoche says this is like a situation where you are facing a threatening enemy. In response to the danger a large army is dispatched to come protect you, but on seeing them approaching you mistakenly think, “Those people are my enemies!” In the same way, this is how you will apprehend the wrathful deities in your bewilderment; therefore the instruction here

is, “Do not fear them, do not be scared, do not flee from them. They are the deities of your own body; give rise to recognition of them with faith and respect.”

Helping the Deceased Eliminate Fixation

Following the first two weeks of the bardo, the degree of the overall intensity of the frightening experiences will subside to a level closer to that of the first week or first four days, but from that time onward there will be a point during each week where the deceased will again experience a sudden ordeal of overwhelming fear. They might find themselves in the midst of a violent blizzard or hailstorm, or they could be lost in darkness. They might see soldiers, wrathful deities, or predatory animals chasing after them. When they try to flee any of these pursuers, a gaping abyss will appear in front of them, blocking their way. With nowhere to run to, everything will suddenly appear obliterated by whiteness, redness, or blackness. All of these appearances are created through the deceased's own individual **karma**, as well as being manifestations of their afflictive thoughts of desire, anger, and bewilderment. They do not arise from any other source whatsoever.

At this time the deceased must be reminded, “You must completely relinquish your fixation! You no longer possess a composite physical body of flesh and blood — you are now a mental body. As you are only a mental body, none of these weapons can strike you, nor can any of these appearances of water or fire destroy or harm you in any way.” Here the important thing is having the certainty to recognize this. For example, if you dream that you are encountering dangerous animals or are about to be burned with fire, but then you realize, “Oh, this is a dream,” then all fearful or threatening appearances are recognized to be nothing at all. The same holds true in the bardo state; in this situation, the deceased needs to let go of all fixation and recognize their actual condition of being a mental body.

Beings in the bardo can be protected and benefited by means of purification ceremonies such as those of Vairochana or Amitabha. **Buddha Shakyamuni** said that in the age of degeneration he would appear in the form of these emanations for the purpose of guiding and protecting sentient beings. For this reason you must explain to the deceased, “Any misgivings you have about the correctness or authenticity of the gurus and their capacity to perform these rites — whatever thoughts you have that the gurus are somehow impure or defiled — are unjustified. The appearance of impurity is a distortion caused by your own bewilderment. For example, even the Buddha, the Transcendent

Conqueror, was viewed as being inauthentic or impure by people like Devadatta and others, only because their way of seeing was flawed and deluded. Now you are seeing the gurus in a similarly mistaken way. If you give rise to faith and respect, then there is no possibility that you will be deceived. Be certain that the intention of the Omniscient One is to bring great benefit to you!

“Not only that, but you think that you are on the verge of finding a way to obtain a human body for yourself. Your intention in searching for a human body is erroneous. If you do acquire a human body, you will continue to wander endlessly in the vast ocean of cyclic existence in the three realms, and therefore you will not attain liberation. Your desire to wander in samsara shows that your thinking is mistaken. This is because, on the basis of having a human body, you will experience the suffering of birth, the suffering of illness, the suffering of death, and the suffering of the bardo — all of the suffering entailed by obtaining a human body. In other words, if you proceed as you are thinking of doing, you will only bring about further experience of suffering; therefore abandon your thoughts of wanting to obtain a human body!

“Listen to what the guru is saying now. This is the authentic activity of the Buddha, being performed for your benefit. This is the truth of the Buddha’s path, these are the words of the path

to liberation as a buddha, and these are the actual methods that will lead you to a pure **buddha realm**. This buddha activity is like the chariot that serves as the means to convey us, and its driver is the guide who leads us away from lower existences and toward the pure realms. Now, because the guru and dharma companions here are Buddhist practitioners, you must give rise to genuine faith and respect, and listen carefully without distraction to the meaning of the words I am saying to you!

“By means of profound secret mantra, I will now be performing the *chirdok* or purification ceremony. At this time you will be receiving the empowerment of either Vairochana, Akshobhya, or Amitabha. On the basis of receiving this empowerment, the obscurations you have accumulated since time immemorial will be purified in an instant. Do not harbor any kind of attachment or clinging to anything of this world! Your rebirth in the realm of **Sukhavati** will be certain, and once established you will never again regress to lower states of rebirth. This is why you must now focus your attention on achieving the western pure realm of Sukhavati. You must keep the buddha Amitabha in mind, and do not forget the teachings that you have received!”

Once these instructions are given to the deceased, the purification ceremony is performed, and the sur is dedicated for the deceased's benefit in order to ensure the relinquishment of all

clinging and attachment. Along with this, the deceased is given an introduction describing the manner of proceeding onward to the pure realm of Amitabha and the details of the experience to come, as well as specific secret mantra instructions pertaining to this. Finally, the consciousness of the deceased is transferred to the pure realm.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: What is the best training to undertake in preparation for death?

RINPOCHE: Dharma. There is nothing better than that.

STUDENT: When you die, is there a particular way to affect that experience so you can reach a state where you can achieve enlightenment after death?

RINPOCHE: Yes, I can say a few things about what you can truly do in this regard. The primary cause for ensuring that you will obtain an excellent physical support after you die is moral discipline. Without moral discipline, there is no cause at all for taking a favorable rebirth in the future. When you maintain

good moral discipline, you are securing the principal cause of taking rebirth in the realms of devas or humans.

Aspiration prayers are another important factor in creating a favorable future. Whenever you do virtuous things, you can make an aspiration such as the following: “In my future lifetimes may I obtain precious human rebirths. May I always have a connection with the Buddhadharma, through which I may encounter spiritual teachers. May I continue to improve and develop beyond my current situation, such that with better social status, greater intelligence, and greater love and compassion, I may bring benefit to all sentient beings.” On the basis of establishing both the causal accomplishment of virtue and the intention of aspiration, the perfect results you wish for will ultimately be obtained.

STUDENT: Because we encounter many challenges to *equanimity* when we die, I believe that can pull us aside from achieving this goal. Is that correct?

RINPOCHE: I do not understand what you mean by equanimity. A concept of neutrality in which there is no significant difference between right and wrong would not constitute any kind of virtue or wrongdoing either way.

STUDENT: An experience of death is very frightening — is that correct?

RINPOCHE: Certainly, the time of death can be a very frightening and disturbing experience. Ultimately, the means of helping yourself at that point is the training you have already done; that is to say, however much Dharma you have practiced will serve to minimize the experience of fearful and terrifying appearances at the time of death. Let's say, for example, someone is chasing you with a knife. What would you do? Would you try to flee?

STUDENT: Probably.

RINPOCHE: Why would you flee?

STUDENT: To avoid conflict.

RINPOCHE: That's very good thinking. As for me, I would not have the chance to avoid conflict — I would already have taken off because this person wants to stab me or kill me!

STUDENT: So when you die, you should run?

RINPOCHE: Even an example like that is enough for us to understand fear right now, isn't it? At the time of death, however,

there is no escape from whatever terrifying experiences might occur. Therefore the best means of escape is to engage in the practice of Amitabha with the aim of achieving rebirth in his pure realm of Sukhavati. If you do so, I can guarantee that there is no risk involved, but rather it will only serve to increase your qualities.

STUDENT: One of the things that concerns me deeply is not dying well, such as in a car wreck — I've walked away from so many of those it's amazing. I'm not sure what to put in my will, because I would like whatever is done after my death to be done in a Buddhist way. I'm finding it very hard to get information on how to do that in this country. How do I say, "Could you please light a candle for me?"

RINPOCHE: As you say, people do not die well — they die in horrible ways, in this country as well as throughout the world. Whether you can really die well or not is largely dependent on the power and strength of your practice. In that sense everything is in your hands right now. If you make aspiration prayers and make offerings such as incense or lamps with the thought, "May I die in a comfortable, peaceful way," then to that extent there will be corresponding results. If you do not limit this aspiration to yourself alone, you can then expand your prayers to embrace all sentient beings with the wish that they may also be free

from horrible, traumatic, and unfortunate ways of dying. This altruistic way of thinking includes both your own intentions and the intentions of others, and carries the power and efficacy that will lead to the best results in the future. It will be good for you, therefore, to make aspiration prayers, as well as supplicate the buddhas and make various offerings to the **Three Jewels** with this motivation.

STUDENT: I hope that as my practice continues, things will reveal themselves, because so many of these talks I come to leave me a little bit mystified. That probably does not surprise you, but I guess I'll just keep on keepin' on, and hope that things will become clear.

RINPOCHE: Yes, just do the best you can. If you have not done so already, you can gradually become familiar with and practice the *Meditation and Recitation of the Great Compassionate One*, which is the Four-Armed Chenrezik **sadhana**, and you can pray to Chenrezik with the aspiration that you and all other beings may die well with a peaceful transition and not fall into lower realms of existence. If you do this again and again over time, it will definitely be of benefit.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, this is a question about the bardo. Using the example of what we're doing for Michael Doran after his

death, KTD and all the centers have been asked to do Chenrezik and Amitabha for the first three days. I wanted to know what was important about the first three days. Also, tomorrow will be the twenty-eighth day and there'll be another long Amitabha sadhana, and on the forty-ninth day there'll be another. Can you tell us what is important on the first three days, what is important on the twenty-eighth day, and what is important on the forty-ninth day?

RINPOCHE: In general, the third day is actually considered to begin when the sun rises on the morning of the fourth day, following the first three days after death. Around that time the “clear light of the time of death” will appear to the deceased. If the person is able to fully recognize this clear light nature, they will immediately be liberated; if there is no recognition, they will again lose consciousness. On failing to recognize the clear light, they will be unaware of whether or not they have actually died, so this particular time is crucial. Once they have lapsed into a confused state of sporadic consciousness, it may appear to them that they are still alive and still engaged in whatever activities they normally did before. For those reasons, the third day is the first major opportunity following death to effectively assist the deceased by providing introduction and guiding them toward a pure realm.

As we discussed earlier, the appearances of the peaceful deities, the semiwrathful deities, and the wrathful blood-drinking deities will arise in sequence from one week to the next. By the end of the fourth week, the twenty-eighth day, the majority of the terrifying experiences will subside in intensity. Also appearances indicative of future rebirth and other experiences will not be as strongly evident to the deceased at this time. For those reasons, the consciousness is temporarily relieved of such influences, and the deceased is therefore more receptive to any Dharma practice done for them, such as making dedications for their future benefit or giving rise to **bodhichitta**. This is why the twenty-eighth day is considered to be the second opportunity for successfully guiding the deceased toward a pure realm.

The end of the last week, the forty-ninth day, is very important because for the majority of sentient beings the bardo period will be completed by this point. If the deceased has not already taken rebirth, whatever form of rebirth the deceased is going to take will happen at this point. Sometimes good practitioners who have previously accomplished a great deal of virtue can achieve great liberation here and not have to go through a transition. However there is no guarantee that this will happen. There are some beings who will be reborn in a higher realm within three or four days following the forty-nine day bardo period. Some will proceed onward to a future existence in one of the lower or

higher realms for an indeterminate length of time. For others who harbor strong attachment to sense pleasures or material wealth and possessions, even forty-nine days is not sufficient — they might wander around in the bardo state for years on end. Nevertheless in the majority of cases, the bardo period will be completed within forty-nine days.

When you regard any deceased sentient being with loving-kindness and compassion and engage in virtuous activities for their benefit, it will definitely be of great help to them. Milarepa himself stated that this was true. At one time Milarepa was in a snowed-in cave in the mountains at Lapchi for six months, unable to leave because the snow was impassable. His disciples thought, “Nobody can be snowed in for six months and survive without food! Milarepa must be dead already.” Under the assumption that he had died, they performed a ganachakra and specifically dedicated the offerings to him.

After six months the snow melted, and Milarepa emerged. When he saw his disciples he asked, “What were you doing to me on such-and-such day and time? For a whole month after that I experienced no hunger for food, my complexion improved a great deal, and I felt fine. What did you do?” They explained, “We thought that you had passed away, so we offered a ganachakra and dedicated the offerings for your benefit.” Then Milarepa

affirmed, “If such actions can benefit living beings in this way, then they will certainly be of benefit to the dead as well.” In this way, whatever virtues you can perform for the deceased will definitely be very beneficial for them.

STUDENT: Is there ever a situation where someone is fortunate enough to die and have the assistance of a lama and a sangha to help them? If the lama does phowa, or on the third day does Kunrik or Amitabha, can the lama know that this person has moved on from the bardo? If so, is there ever a situation where they don’t do the rest of the forty-nine-day practices? Or do you do them just as insurance?

RINPOCHE: Generally speaking, with regard to the accumulation of merit, there is no limit to the potential quantity of merit that can be accumulated. For that reason, even if the deceased individual has already passed on to a pure realm, the store of merit accumulated on the basis of offerings and so forth made specifically for the benefit of the deceased will automatically benefit both the living and the deceased. If it were somehow necessary to weigh the benefits in terms of either the living or the deceased, the deceased definitely has no power to decide what is most beneficial, so what you do as a living person is very significant. The amount of merit that can be accumulated on

behalf of those who have died really cannot be figured in terms of days or months.

As well, when you consider all those dying or dead beings that you have never even seen or met, if you think about it logically you understand that the numbers are completely beyond estimation. Therefore it is with all of those beings in mind that we engage in the practice of virtues for the deceased. When we recite texts, at the beginning we say, “All sentient beings.” You practice with the intention that you are not doing this for just one deceased person, but rather for infinitely many other beings who have died as well, and so they all will definitely receive great benefit. The more meritorious activities you can engage in, the better. There is no reason to stop.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I look after an older woman. I’ve known her for a long time and she’s never been interested in religion or anything to do with it. Now she’s ninety-two years old, and she thinks she’s going to live forever. She never considers the fact that she’s going to die soon. I feel worried about what’s going to happen to her when she dies. What can I do to help her now? I’m probably going to be with her when she dies, so what I can do to help her then?

RINPOCHE: You should treat her with loving-kindness and compassion as much as possible, and you should try to recite **OM MANI PADME HUM** within her hearing — it is important that she hears the mantra clearly. If she asks you what you are saying, then you can say you are singing something, or you might tell her that you are reciting something for her long life and prosperity. While doing this you should secretly visualize Chenrezik actually present above the crown of her head. Then as soon as she dies, you should think that her consciousness travels upward through the crown aperture and right into the heart of Chenrezik.

If you tell her much else besides that, for example if you say, “I’m practicing Dharma, which will be beneficial to you,” she could get a little offended or angry with you. Being angry will not help her and may in fact do some harm. With that understanding, even though telling her that you are singing or saying something else might seem like a white lie, it really is not. Rather, you are making effective use of skillful means in order to avoid upsetting her.

STUDENT: If I understand this correctly, when the body dies the consciousness continues on, and up to a certain point before it becomes reincarnated we can still technically communicate to that consciousness through prayer or mantras. At what point do we stop? At what point would you be considered to be hanging

on? I've read that when you hang on to a person who has died, you generate negativity because it holds them back. Is that true?

RINPOCHE: Ordinarily whenever any sentient being dies, they will subsequently have to take rebirth in one of the six different realms of cyclic existence. Given this situation, any virtue dedicated for that being's benefit will definitely be helpful to them while they are in the bardo.

Once they have taken rebirth in some form, it is too late to guide them away from samsaric rebirth and toward a pure realm. Even if you actually had the capacity to hang on to them in some way, once they have already taken another rebirth you would then have to kill them in order to influence their consciousness, and that obviously would not help. This is why making dedications on their behalf is so important.

As a little tangent to that, there is a saying in Tibet: there are times when you just feel happy and carefree for no apparent reason, but actually the goodness you enjoy at those times is due to the positive karma of previously dedicated virtue. In the same way, sometimes things seem terrible and you feel awful and depressed for no apparent reason, but it is said that such times are also the effect of your previous karma, some kind of

wrongdoing or negativity you were involved with in the past. This is what they say, and it really is true.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, for those of us who are not highly realized, how much of an element of choice is there for our rebirth? That is to say, how much influence can we have in picking the particular circumstances of our next life?

RINPOCHE: As long as a bardo being has not accomplished sufficient virtue, there will be no possibility of exercising choice with regard to future rebirth. Nevertheless even if a deceased person has already taken rebirth in another form, virtue practiced on their behalf will still continue to benefit them.

I have a short story to tell you. In the eastern part of Tibet, outside the area of Derge there is a specific place called Dorshul. There was a woman from that area known as Dorshul. She was a delok, which means “someone who returns from death.” Each year she would die once and then come back. While I was a young monk at Thrangu Monastery, she died and remained dead for seven days. I saw her myself. When she came back to life she would bring a lot of messages to different people, such as, “While I was dead I visited the hell realms and saw people that you knew from before. Your father died and he is now in this particular hell realm, so you need to do certain practices to

help him. Such-and-such people have been doing this and that in various hell realms. In order to help them you have to do this many prayers and practice these virtues,” and so on. She was always busy running around advising everyone in this way. She did not encounter just one or two individuals in this manner; it happened countless times. This is true.

Then one time she brought a message about someone named Pogen who had previously been an old hunter with no family. While he was alive, he used to hunt in the mountains all the time. He would eat the flesh of whatever animals he was able to kill, then collect money by selling off the remaining body parts — horns, pelts, flesh, or whatever. He lived in a rocky cavelike dwelling near a large mountain, where there was a triangular arrangement of three stones in a grassy spot. He buried all the money he had managed to save up under the ground in the center of these three stones.

After the hunter died he was reborn in one of the hell realms, where he was suffering tremendously. Dorshul Khandro encountered him there, and he said to her, “I have left some money buried in a certain place — I will tell you where to find it. Please take my money and use it for printing the *Sutra of Great Liberation*. I also have faith in Thrangu Monastery, so if there is some money leftover, give it to Thrangu Monastery for butter lamp offerings

and aspiration prayers. If you do this, it should definitely help liberate me from the lower realms.”

Dorshul Khandro came back to life and told some people about what happened. They searched for the place with the three stones, and they actually found the money there some time ago. It was a very old kind of archaic Chinese money, altogether about forty coins, and it was offered according to Pogen’s wishes. This story demonstrates how even if someone is dead, if you continue to pray, make offerings, and dedicate your virtue to them, it can definitely bring benefit.

Dorshul Khandro is still in Tibet. The last time I went to Tibet I saw her there, and now she is about ninety-four years old. Nowadays she does not have to die as before, but she has a clairvoyant faculty with which she can see beings in various locations, and wherever she stays she still advises people in the same manner that she used to in the past. While I was there it was very hard to understand what she said because she had no teeth. There was a nun who was constantly helping her; the nun knew what Dorshul Khandro was saying, and she would then translate for her: “She said this; this is what she means,” and so on. At that time she was living in a place called Serkok. At the moment, I am not sure if she has passed away yet or not. In any case, she is not the only delok — there are many other people

who have actually come back from death. She was just one such individual who I personally happened to meet in my own life.

Shade of the Ashoka Tree: How to Avoid Robbers and Death While in Retreat — The Practice of Marichi

In this world we may encounter enemies, bandits, and robbers as well as various other kinds of antagonists. For the yogi or yogini, the means of protecting oneself from all such potential threats is through the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion. This method is also applicable to any individual engaged in the practice of dharma, as well as one's spiritual teachers.

Those who would seek to cause trouble and who are unvirtuous or harmful in their intentions may create numerous outer, inner, and secret obstacles for us. For the purpose of protection from all such entities, we will learn about the visualization practice of the deity Marichi (in Sanskrit), or Lhamo Öserchenma (in Tibetan).

When one is subjected to the ripening of negative karma accumulated in previous lifetimes, nothing can be done to avert this simply because it is the karmic law of cause and result. There are, however, many other situations that are adventitious

or circumstantial in nature. Danger, suffering, and adversity may come about due to the coinciding influence of negative conditions, and when this is the case it is definitely feasible to do something about such circumstances.

The title of this chapter refers to the importance of protection from external sources of suffering while in retreat. Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins by paying homage first to his own root guru, and then to the dakini Marichi with equal respect.

As to the purpose of including this particular chapter in the text, Karma Chakme's disciple Lama Rupa Tsonдру Gyamtso, who possessed exceptional qualities and wished to practice in solitude, explains that he is living in poverty alone in an isolated retreat dwelling. In such a situation, it can certainly happen that enemies, predatory animals, or a variety of other dangers may strike. With this in mind, Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso requests Karma Chakme to give a teaching on the practice of Marichi in order to guard against such potential dangers.

In response to this request, Chakme Rinpoche bestowed these special instructions. Speaking directly to his disciple, he says, "Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, you are greatly learned and possess many excellent qualities. This being the case, you do not really have to be in total isolation without any monastic attendants to

help you. If you live alone without any monks, all your time will be taken up; on the other hand, if you do keep an attendant he will require a lot just by being under your supervision. Whichever way you may live, if you have riding horses, attendants, stored goods, livestock, housing, and so on, it is not the case that trouble will not come to you — you can be robbed, and if you have a great deal of such things it is like signaling an open invitation for enemies to approach you; therefore it is very appropriate that you should bear these things in mind.”

For instance, in these degenerate times there are many people who are involved in perverse or harmful activities. There are people who are inclined to abuse sentient beings; there are people invested with power, such as monarchs, who are responsible for some of the worst acts of wrongdoing; there are people who take pleasure in creating conflict amongst others through slander and malicious rumor. In the same way, for any yogi or yogini there is the danger that someone might try to take their life even though they have done nothing wrong. With the aim of safeguarding the life of the practitioner, Karma Chakme proceeds to transmit these special protective instructions.

In general, there exist a great number of methods and special instructions dealing with protective measures. Out of the entire corpus of literature comprised of the New Translation and

Old Translation systems of mantra, the sutras of the Buddha, the tantric literature of secret mantra, and the treasure teachings, the practice of Marichi is said to be the very best without exception, and this is why these unique instructions are being presented here.

With regard to the various forms of sadhana practice, according to the numerous descriptions of her extensive mandala that are found in tantras such as the *Vajramala*, Marichi can appear with many faces, many arms, a large retinue, and so on. The form of the deity with one face and two arms presented here is concordant with the transmission of knowledge obtained through individuals' realization in actual practice. As an extract from the ocean of sadhanas connected with the root tantras, this form is also said to be the best of all the related practices found in the Sky Dharma thought-treasure literature.

You might ask, “Who is this deity essentially?” Essentially Marichi is Shridevi (in Sanskrit) or Palden Lhamo (in Tibetan). The mahakali Palden Lhamo is also known as Rangjung Gyalmo. Additionally, in the extended protector practices we find a reference to “the fourteenth one who averts robbery, Marichi.” Fourteenth here refers to the fact that there can be up to thirteen or fourteen emanations of Shridevi; of these, Marichi is the fourteenth.

Karma Chakme continues, “As such, I will now begin this teaching. Before one may practice such profound oral instructions as these, it is necessary to first receive the empowerment as well as the reading transmission.” Once you have received the empowerment and reading transmission, you can put these special instructions into practice.

Marichi Practice to Be Done in The Morning

In the practice to be done in the morning, you first rest in **even placement** within **emptiness**, complete in the instant of recollection. From emptiness there appears a white lotus flower with many petals, in the center of which is a moon-disk seat. Atop this seat visualize your own body in the aspect of the deity Marichi. Her body is a brilliant golden color and she is extremely beautiful, with the appearance of a youthful, sixteen-year-old girl in the prime of life. She is seated in a semi-crosslegged posture, similar to Green Tara’s posture, but reversed. Marichi’s right leg is fully withdrawn and her left leg is partially extended. She has two arms, and in her right hand she holds a needle and in the left hand a thread. She has one face with a peaceful smile; her crown is adorned with a topknot of hair and jeweled ornaments, and she is adorned with bracelets, anklets, and various jeweled

articles. She is clothed in an upper garment or mantle made of divine blue fabric, and she wears two types of skirts, both white: the inner skirt is an angrak and the outer one a shamthap. She rides a very large, yellow, wild pig.

While you clearly visualize yourself in this way, visualize all those whom you wish to protect gathered around you. You are within three different concentric spheres of light, each comprised of a half-sun and a half-moon. The innermost sphere — the one immediately surrounding you — has the moon hemisphere above and the sun hemisphere below, and is very spacious inside. Outside of that sphere is the intermediate sphere, with the sun hemisphere on the left and the moon hemisphere on the right. The outermost and largest sphere consists of the sun hemisphere on top and the moon hemisphere on the bottom. These three different concentric sun-and-moon spheres emit such fearsome and tremendous light that whoever might seek to harm you from the outside cannot even bear to look at you, but inside the spheres it is very peaceful and quiet for you and all those whom you are protecting.

Outside of these three protective spheres there are three more protective barriers. These three concentric barriers consist entirely of huge, yellow pigs, each as big as a mountain. The pigs in each of the three concentric barriers are lined up side by side, facing

outward. All of the pigs make a forceful snorting sound that is earpiercing to any outsiders who seek to harm you. Altogether there are six different layers of protection surrounding you and those whom you are protecting.

Visualize yourself as Marichi at the center of these six different protective layers. At your heart center there is a white moon-disk, atop which rests the yellow seed-syllable MAM. That syllable is surrounded by the mantra garland OM MA RI CHI SVA HA. A tremendous yellow light radiates from the seed-syllable and the mantra syllables, and travels to the Ashoka Tree in the Land of India, which is the natural abode of Marichi. The light strikes the tree, invoking innumerable forms of Marichi identical in appearance to yourself as Marichi.

As the light returns to you, think that along with the light countless wisdom deities dissolve one after another into yourself and into all those whom you are protecting. As the principal deity Marichi, you should also visualize the buddha Vairochana adorning the crown of your head. While you are meditating in this way, count as many recitations of the mantra OM MARICHI SVAHA as you can.

This visualization and protection mantra recitation is the form of practice primarily intended to be done in the morning, al-

though it is fine to do it at other times of the day as well. After completing many repetitions of the short mantra alone, it should then be augmented with a protective mantra extension. This is inserted after OM MARICHI and before SVAHA, resulting in OM MARICHI ÖSERCHEN DAKCHAK MI NOR THAMCHE LA KYOP SHIK SVAHA. This means, “OM Marichi, deity of light, please protect us and all of our people and wealth SVAHA.”

Marichi Practice to Be Done in The Evening

In the evening, when there is an increased likelihood that enemies and robbers may try to take advantage of your situation, the method of deterring such a heightened level of danger entails a different mantra and visualization practice. When you do the practice in the evening, meditate on yourself in the form of Marichi as before. Another Marichi deity emanates from your heart, and countless other emanations of Marichi, identical to yourself, are also invoked from her pure realm. The appearance of all these emanations — including the posture, the positioning of the hands, and so on — is identical to your own appearance. This visualization is the same as the one described earlier.

The emanated Marichi deities ride yellow pigs and pervade this entire universe, running like bursts of wind and bolts of light-

ning throughout all directions. Think that all of these Marichis, mounted on pigs and holding needles and threads, stitch up the mouths and eyes of all those who are ready to harm you and your objects of protection — any enemies, bandits, robbers, thieves, verbal abusers who seek to denigrate you or spread malicious rumors about you, and any other entities who intentionally obstruct your Dharma practice.

At this time the mantra you recite is also a little different: OM MARICHI VADRATALI VADALI VARALI VARAHAMUKHE SARVA DUSHTRA PRADUSHTRANAM NÖCHE DRA JAK CHOMKUN THAMCHE CHAKSHU MUKHAM BANDHA BANDHA SVAHA. The amount of mantra recitations to be done depends on your individual circumstances. If you have determined that a serious threat is definitely imminent, you should do as much recitation and visualization as possible. Under more normal circumstances or if the situation is not so dangerous, you can do less.

Marichi Practice in Retreat

The previous two methods are to be employed on a daily basis as regular protection. For those individuals who intend to do

an intensive retreat and accumulate mantra recitations, the practice is to be done according to the morning instructions for visualization together with the **six-syllable mantra**, as described earlier. In this case, the requisite number of approach recitations to be accomplished is 600,000.

For someone who has not completed a Marichi retreat specifically, but has otherwise completed an approach retreat on another female deity such as White Tara, Kurukulle, Lomachen, or the protector Rangjung Gyalmo, it is not necessary to practice Marichi in particular; the essential aspect of these deities is the same, so accomplishment of any one of them is essentially equivalent to accomplishment of any other.

Even if you do not complete any such retreat or accumulation of mantras, regularly engaging in the practice of Marichi is the best means of protection from enemies, bandits, thieves, oppressive rulers, and any other such dangerous or threatening forces. Ideally you would do it at every practice session, or at least occasionally, and you should especially do the recitation at times when it is most appropriate and necessary, with a very clear visualization and numerous repetitions.

As a means of protection from dangerous forces, you cannot find anywhere in this world realm a more profound or exceptional set

of special instructions than these. For the purpose of protection, the practice of Marichi is number one.

Protecting Animals

When it becomes necessary to safeguard animals such as horses and mules from the danger of being attacked or killed by wild predators, the following procedures should be implemented whether the animals belong to you or someone else. A special protective thread should be made and tied around the neck of each animal to be protected. Ideally a young maiden should be entrusted with the task of making this thread — cleaning and carding pure wool, then spinning the thread from the wool by hand. If such a girl is not available, it is fine for the yogi to make the thread himself. Whether the thread is made coarse or fine does not matter; whatever thickness seems right will be good. As to the length of each thread, it can be anywhere from about two feet to the length of an arrow, or the breadth of a fully extended arm span.

When the threads have been made, they are ready to be consecrated by the yogi. First he meditates on the deity Marichi as in the morning practice described earlier, then he recites the mantra

for a while, perhaps twenty-one or a hundred times. Then with eyes and mouth completely closed and while holding his breath, he has to tie twenty-one knots in the thread. For each knot tied he must mentally recite the mantra OM MARICHI SVAHA once. This must not be chanted aloud, and the mouth and eyes must remain shut without breathing or looking at anything. Having performed twenty-one mental mantra recitations and tied twenty-one knots in this way, the yogi can breathe normally again until consecrating the next thread.

After preparing each thread like this, he should visualize each knot as representing Marichi herself. The long mantra given above should also be recited as many times as possible, a hundred or a thousand times, for each protective thread. While doing so, the yogi should think that countless forms of the wisdom aspect of Marichi are being invoked, and melting into light they come and dissolve into the thread. Finally the thread must be consecrated by reciting the Essence of **Interdependence** dharani.

Once these procedures have been completed, the threads are ready to be tied to the animals that need protection. This is the best of all possible methods for safeguarding animals against the dangers of enemies, bandits, thieves, and predatory animals.

Further Words Of Instruction

Karma Chakme then explains that the teachings he is presenting here are not just something he made up. Rather, he has compiled and arranged this collection of work in accord with the teachings found in numerous tantric texts of secret mantra, and also in reliance on various special instructions of authentic gurus. Chakme Rinpoche also says that Marichi is one of his own principal yidam deities, and that he has completed Marichi retreats not merely once or twice but many times. He explains, “Although during my retreats I kept these restricted teachings very secret, at this time, Lama Tsonдру, as you are one of the closest of my heart-disciples I must now give these special instructions to you. The essence of all the ten million different forms of instruction found in both the New Translation and Old Translation schools of mantra, as well as in the oral lineage of dictates, treasure teachings, the Sky Dharma thought treasures, and so on, is entirely condensed within this single teaching like a relic. The words of these instructions are few, but the meaning and purpose therein is great. Put them into practice, and through your experience the actual signs of accomplishment will be achieved.”

Ordinarily these teachings are to be kept secret and not revealed to others, and for that reason Chakme Rinpoche acknowledges the impurity of his actions here. Even when authentic gurus practice these teachings, they should still be kept concealed. On this occasion, however, Chakme Rinpoche has fully disclosed them to his disciple, and knowing that he may very well be incurring fault, he makes a confession to the wisdom deities.

He then makes a dedication and aspiration: “Through whatever merit arises from the disclosure of these teachings, may all gurus, spiritual friends, and yogis engaged in the authentic practice of holy Dharma in these degenerate times be safe from enemies, robbers, and all such harmful and dangerous entities. May yogis and dharma practitioners be free from rumor, criticism, disputation, and quarreling.”

Chakme Rinpoche then explains, “These instructions were given in the Shukchang Year, in the evening at dusk when the sky was the color of ruby. It was the Dog Year, which is good for protection from thieves and enemies, on the twenty-eighth day of the month — Mahakala’s and Mahakali’s day — when the presence of death and harmful forces are especially active. At night when visibility was lowest, under cover of darkness and before sunrise the next day, the black *tantrika Raga Asya* gave these instructions to Lama Rupa Tsonдру Gyamtso, who copied

and arranged the text.” In this way, Karma Chakme describes the special effort he made to transmit these secret teachings at an efficacious and carefully chosen time.

Signs that Trouble Is Imminent and Indications of Accomplishment

Signs may become evident to the yogi indicating that trouble is imminent. If the practitioner is unaware that others are plotting to harm him or create problems in some way, a sign may appear such as encountering a creature such as a snake, either in actual waking experience or within a dream. Other types of animals could appear as well — a monkey, a cat, a donkey, a horse, an elephant, a buffalo, a grizzly bear, or a dog. When the encounter with the animal erupts into some kind of struggle where you are being attacked, you will be left fearful and shaken. An episode like this can be taken as an indication that someone is going to try to harm you. If such signs occur, the previously given numbers of mantra repetitions should be augmented at least two or three times in your practice.

On the other hand, there are positive signs that indicate genuine accomplishment of these practices. You might dream that you

are able to freely cross to the other side of an ocean or a great river without impediment, or that you can effortlessly ascend to and abide at the peak of a mountain. You might directly encounter an arya-being such as a buddha or bodhisattva. You might be greeted by a beautiful young woman adorned with jewelry who speaks to you with a sweet and encouraging voice. The best possibility is to actually see Marichi herself and directly receive a prophecy from her.

If indications such as these do not arise in your dreams, then other signs may occur in everyday experience when you are practicing. Here the text says, “Saffron water remains diffuse, or a butter lamp stays, and so on.” Normally butter lamps will burn out after a few hours or by the end of the day, but as evidence of accomplishment it is possible that you would see a butter lamp burning continuously for two or three days. Similarly, because it is often so cold in Tibet, after a set of seven offering bowls of saffron water is offered in the morning, they gradually freeze up within an hour or so. On certain occasions, however, nothing happens — the saffron water remains unfrozen for days when it would otherwise have frozen almost immediately. All of the above signs are indications of accomplishment in your practice.

Three Ways to Practice Marichi

The approach practice for Marichi is here delimited in three different ways: you can accumulate the mantras in terms of a large number of repetitions, you can accumulate the mantras for an extended period of time, or you can do the practice until the aforementioned signs of accomplishment manifest. Of these three different approaches, the last option is the best. Nevertheless if you want to complete the approach according to a specific length of time, the best would be to practice for six months, the next best would be three months, and if not that then at least twenty-one days. In terms of accumulating a certain number of mantra repetitions, the best would be 2,400,000; if not that, depending on your level of commitment you should do a million or more, and if not that then at least a minimum of 600,000. Fulfilling any of these approach recitation requirements will constitute accomplishment of the practice.

With regard to the varying lengths of the mantras, the six-syllable mantra is the essential one. Although there is also the extended form with the insert as well as the very long mantra used in the evening practice, when you recite any of these three different mantras the six-syllable essence mantra is included, and therefore they are all fundamentally the same in their function.

Chakme Rinpoche further explains that he did not invent these different mantras himself, but rather they are actually found in older texts for the approach practice. He consulted the *Precious Garland of Pujas*, which is a textbook containing guidance and instructions pertaining to various sadhana practices, and from there he extracted all three of these mantras included here.

Having completed his presentation of the Marichi practice, Karma Chakme closes the chapter with one final remark: “For the sake of helping those who may be ignorant (of Sanskrit pronunciation), I have added a footnote to the sadhana instructions here.” Regarding pronunciation of the mantra OM MARICHI SVAHA, which in Tibetan reads OM MARITSYE SOHA, some people will try to prolong the fourth syllable, resulting in an exaggerated “tse-yay.” This is incorrect. He says that the “tse” and “ye” should be recited quickly — that is to say fluently, as one syllable rather than two separate syllables.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Since I moved to New York two years ago I have seen nothing but a series of rip-offs by human beings. I know a lot of it is my own stupidity, my karma, but a lot of it is just evil, and I

don't know what to do about it. The thing that truly discourages me is that a practitioner who I've known for twenty years — a sadhaka, a very highly trained Buddhist — stole a great deal of money from me, lied about it, and then confessed. It's a felony, and everybody I've talked to, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, has said, "Send him to jail." I personally cannot see doing that. So I'm not worried about being harmed by jackals and wolves, but it's people who freak me out, particularly this one Buddhist. I can't see sending him to prison, but I can't find it in myself to forgive and let it go. Tell me what to do.

RINPOCHE: As you know, in general sentient beings have a very selfish character. Because of this selfish disposition, the behavior of all beings tends to be motivated and informed by self-interest. Regardless of differences among sentient beings, and no matter what methods they might use, they are generally concerned with trying to fulfill their own aims. If you think about it, this is just the way sentient beings are.

Under all circumstances we are responsible for protecting our own body, speech, and mind. These are the three possessions that we can protect, and we should do so however we can and in whatever ways are necessary. Once you have lost control of the possibility of safeguarding your three gates, you can be victimized very easily by others. Then it can be difficult to retrieve

the freedom or control that you had before, and you might be further harmed as your problems continue.

Now in your case, as to whether this person was a Dharma practitioner or not, or if you knew him for a long time or not, I have no knowledge of those details. Of course, it would have been best if you had adequately protected yourself in advance. In a case like this, if he did not actually rob you, if he did not physically take your money by force, then most likely he managed to steal it by somehow talking you into going along with his scheme, and then you made a mistake and fell right into his trap. At that time, if you had been firmer in safeguarding your body, speech, and mind, you probably would not have been deceived.

If you think that there is a possibility of getting your money back in a reasonable way, then I would encourage you to do so. If there is no such possibility of reclaiming the money you lost, then there is really no point in remaining angry and distraught over it. Continuing to feel troubled about this will do nothing but create more and more negativity, and harming yourself in that way also does nothing to change or benefit the person who stole from you. If nothing can be done to retrieve what you lost, then I would advise you to just let it go and try to take care of yourself, reflecting on past misfortunes as an incentive to be better prepared to protect yourself in the future.

STUDENT: That is good advice and I am following it, but I am in a pit and I am trying to dig my way out of it. He stole checks and forged my name on the checks, and then I started writing checks and found out I had no money. Chances are I would have loaned him money, but instead he chose to steal my checks and wait eight months before he cashed them, okay? I can't send him to prison; there is just no way I can send a fellow sangha member to jail. I don't think it would be beneficial for him. Although other Buddhists have said, "Well, it's his karma," and I thought, "Well, what's it gonna do to my karma to lock him up where he'll have no access to the Dharma?" I can't do that. I guess I should just give it up. I guess that's the only choice I really have.

RINPOCHE: Yes, what you say is true. If there is no way to get the money back, if the only kind of revenge or compensation you can take is to put him in jail, then I don't think that will do any good. This being the case, it may be a good idea to let go and take this experience as a lesson so you will be better prepared in the future.

At the same time, you do have a choice. You are capable of deciding what to do and what not to do, and I can see two possibilities: one is to take action against him in revenge, and the other is to forgive him with loving-kindness and compassion.

It is entirely up to you. I cannot really speak on your behalf as to what you should do and what you should not do.

STUDENT: Since Rangjung Gyalmo is a part of my practice, does that mean that I should be able to have a close relationship with Marichi? I feel especially close to the protectress in my own practice, so does that mean I should practice my own practice and just assume that it will cover the same ground as the Marichi practice?

RINPOCHE: In general there are two ways you can look at this. One is that through practicing dharma well, your obscurations will be purified and all favorable qualities and knowledge will arise, and as this happens it is likely that a certain protector will become evident as being suitable for you. On the other hand, if you have already identified with a specific guardian or yidam such as Palden Lhamo (Rangjung Gyalmo), then that can also be good, because the essential identity of Palden Lhamo is the same as that of all the others.

With this understanding, through properly engaging in the practice of any one of these protectors, you are naturally going to accomplish all of the others, and that is ideal. Although you practice on the basis of your understanding of words in the

sense of using different names or identities, apart from those distinctions the practice is more or less the same.

STUDENT: I have a couple of questions about the visualization that you described. I was a little bit confused about the different suns and moons. Are they supposed to be visualized individually, or are they all supposed to be together?

RINPOCHE: There are three different concentric combinations of sun and moon. The innermost sphere is the smallest. For this one the lower half is a half-sun, the upper half is a half-moon, and they are combined as one complete unit or entity without any joint or seam. Ordinarily we think of either the sun or moon as being a complete circle in shape. This is not like that; you have one hemisphere above, one hemisphere below, and inside the whole protective sphere it is empty and spacious. This is how you visualize the sphere. Otherwise the sun and moon would crush each other, right?

Outside of and surrounding that sphere is the intermediate sphere, the next larger one, in which the sun hemisphere is on the left and the moon hemisphere is on the right. Then you have the outermost sphere, the largest one, in which the sun hemisphere is on top and the moon hemisphere is on the bottom.

The pigs are all positioned outside of the spheres, encircling them. They form three more concentric barriers: inner, intermediate, and outer circles of pigs.

The purpose and meaning of protection here is to create fundamental stability. Usually when you meditate on protection circles or chakras there are multiple layers — six or nine or some other number.

STUDENT: In the practice at night, what's happening with the needle and thread?

RINPOCHE: All of the different forms of Marichi are represented with a needle and a thread. She will appear holding the needle in her right hand and the thread in her left hand. This actually signifies pacification because Marichi protects you from harm by preventing your enemies from being able to say anything with their mouths or see anything with their eyes. In a situation where someone is going to harm you or create negative circumstances for you, when you do the practice of Marichi those who would say harmful things about you will become unable to speak, and those who would try to harm you will become unable to see anything. Therefore they will not be able to do anything harmful; they find no opportunity to engage in harm because Marichi

stitches up their eyes and mouths with the needle and thread. This is the symbolic significance of her hand implements.

STUDENT: When we can identify our enemies as armies or something like that, they're easy to define. Yet sometimes there are negative energies that might come from friends or someone that you know, where for whatever reason the end effect is that your energies are being ripped off. In such cases do we use the same methods or is there some special way of dealing with these situations?

RINPOCHE: As we have seen, when you rely on the protectress Marichi you remain untouched by harm, and you generate loving-kindness and compassion for your enemies. For the purpose of pacifying harmful forces, this is a definite method of protection.

If you really understand the fundamental meaning of this practice, it carries twofold benefit. The benefit for yourself is that you will not be affected by the harmful actions of others. The benefit for them is that, being unable to do anything harmful to you, they will not accumulate negative karma. From a genuinely dharmic perspective, this kind of protective method serves to benefit and protect both oneself and others.

As explained earlier, if you have first received the empowerment and reading transmission and you understand how to do the visualizations correctly, it will definitely be effective when you integrate the meaning of all this and properly engage in extensive practice. Whoever the harmful entities in question might be, regardless of whether they have been your friends or enemies, it is certain that they will be unable to harm you. Nevertheless if you do not have all of the necessary elements just mentioned, it is impractical to say that you will obtain any kind of immediate results.

STUDENT: Can we also apply this to sicknesses and plagues that come down on to the earth?

RINPOCHE: Sure, that is fine.

STUDENT: You talked about how Marichi would be effective practice for circumstantial events, but not for karmic events. I was a little unclear about the difference.

RINPOCHE: In general, circumstantial or conditioned events are situations that do not result from the ripening of previously accumulated karma. Since they are adventitious in nature, it is possible for problems such as obstacles or accidents to occur. This is especially true in times of degeneration such as the

present, when things in general are heavily influenced by changing conditions. Previous karma, on the other hand, refers to a situation produced by something you did to another sentient being in the past. If the present situation is the result of a karmic precedent, there is really nothing you can do about it; in other words, something harmful done to a sentient being in the past will sooner or later be experienced as some form of harm. As the fully ripened result of previous negative karma, there is no way to avert or protect yourself from the inevitable ripening of that karmic event. You simply cannot do anything about that.

In order to purify your karmic obscurations, practice the meditation and recitation of *Vajrasattva*. Likewise, if you engage in intensive practice of any yidam deity, over time you will purify your negative karmic obscurations. For example, although Jetsun Milarepa killed a lot of people, he later purified the obscurations of his own negative karma and attained complete awakening. From this point of view, there is a lot you can do. Some people such as thieves and criminals who initially did terrible things later embraced spiritual practice and actually purified themselves of their faults and defilements. Through genuine understanding and Dharma practice, it is absolutely possible to purify karmic obscurations, which is the real means to prevent future karmic events from occurring.

In any event, the use of devices such as the visualization of protection circles or barriers is not sufficient on its own to avert whatever obstacles arise due to the ripening effects of negative karma, and this is because the karmic obscurations have not been purified in the first place.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, in this teaching you said there's a practice you do in the evening where the visualization is the same and millions of forms of Marichi go out from your heart. Then you used a name to describe some beings who are harmful, and I just totally missed that.

RINPOCHE: In the evening practice you are meditating on yourself in the form of Marichi with the yellow syllable MAM in your heart center. Light radiates outward from the MAM, penetrating beyond the protective barriers you have visualized and traveling throughout all directions. Each emanated ray of light transforms into another Marichi, each riding a large pig and carrying a needle and thread. You visualize all of them running throughout the universe in all directions. As you do this, the instruction is to think that the Marichis riding the pigs stitch up the mouths and eyes of all those on the outside who are trying to harm you so that they cannot say or see anything. What a marvelous thing to see all these Marichi deities averting your obstacles like that!

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said that when a dream is involved with snakes, monkeys, donkeys, cats, and dogs, especially when the encounter with the animal erupts into some kind of struggle where you are being attacked, it is an indication of potential harm coming to you. What about just seeing them in real life, is that different?

RINPOCHE: If you happen to have such a dream once or twice, it does not necessarily mean anything. However if you see these things happening again and again in your dreams, this indicates that a situation of great danger is imminent. Dreaming about them may not be so crucial, but it becomes more important if you actually encounter any of these animals trying to attack you.

STUDENT: The rumor around the monastery this afternoon is that the United States has begun an attack against Afghanistan. As Buddhists, how do we relate to this? What is the role of compassion in relation to justice or vengeance?

RINPOCHE: In this situation we have to have compassion for everyone involved, and in the case of any kind of military action this means we have to have compassion for the people who are the targets and also for the people who are doing it. Obviously when people are targets of military action, whether it is the result of their own previous actions or whether they

are just caught in the cross fire, they are suffering. If the people who engage in military action do so through anger, they are accumulating negative karma and will themselves suffer in the future. It is important to have compassion for everyone, and to dedicate your merit so everyone involved in a military conflict can become free of mental afflictions and attain buddhahood.

STUDENT: This question is in the context of what constitutes compassionate action. I have received messages on the internet where different lamas have said different things about this. Connected with this particular military action, what should we actually do?

RINPOCHE: The most effective compassionate action we can take is to practice and to be motivated in our practice by the wish to pray for all beings in general, and especially all those who are suffering, have suffered, or are accumulating in the present situation causes of future suffering. We need to dedicate ourselves and our practice to the liberation of all these beings from their present suffering and from the seeds of their future suffering.

With that motivation, do the Chenrezik or the Medicine Buddha practice and recite as many of the appropriate mantras as you can, with the motivation that you pacify and remove the causes and results of suffering for all of those involved. If you dedicate

the virtue of the practice completely to those beings and to their awakening, thinking that you give them all of your virtue without retaining even the slightest amount for yourself, this is the best form of compassionate action because it will benefit others and yourself.

As you said in your question, compassion alone is good, but it is not enough. We need to actually accumulate some virtue through the motivation of compassion and then dedicate it to those people.

STUDENT: In relation to the last question, if we are doing a practice that is not Chenrezik, is it better to spend that time on the practices that we usually do, or should we take time out to do Chenrezik practice as well?

RINPOCHE: You should do your usual practice, but dedicate the virtue to those beings. We dedicate all of the virtue from the past, present, and future — all of it summoned together and wrapped into one — to all beings in general, especially focusing on the beings in this conflict. In short, anything you do that is virtuous, provided it is properly motivated and properly dedicated, can be used for their benefit. What is important is that you do a little bit more than usual. If you are someone whose main practice is Chenrezik meditation, then you would

say more mantras than otherwise and dedicate it to them. If you are someone who is doing ngondro, then you would do more of your part of ngondro than otherwise and dedicate it to them. Any practice, whether sutric or tantric, can be used in this way.

All Connection Has Meaning: Definitive Methods, Both Simple and Elaborate, for Burning a Living Inscription

In the chapter title, the word *simple* means that the sole object of concern is sentient beings — that is to say, any entity possessing a mind — and specifically the purification of obscurations in the minds of those beings through the invocation of wisdom deities. The word *elaborate* further entails empowerment, explanation of special instructions, actual ceremony, and puja practice for the purpose of purifying wrongdoing and obscurations as well as increasing good qualities and longevity. *Living inscription* refers to the particular method employed by and for living persons in this context. Definitive means certain or authentic. *All connection has meaning* means that wherever a relationship is present, you will also find meaning or significance.

The chapter opens with the Sanskrit invocation NAMO BUDDHA BODHISATTVAYE, “Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.” Chakme Rinpoche says, “In the sky of the compassion of the victors together with their children, the thousandfold light of these instructions appears, bringing an end to the darkness of

the two obscurations of beings.” Buddhas and bodhisattvas have utterly pure compassion for all sentient beings, who suffer endlessly in samsara. In their compassion, they undergo numerous hardships for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings, and the scope of their aspirations is as vast and limitless as the sky. These special instructions, shining with a thousand rays of light like the sun rising in that sky, are the true result of the previous aspirations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and have been directly revealed now for the benefit of other beings.

As the analogy suggests, once the sun has risen in the sky, its light enables us to see all forms. In the same way, through the pure compassion of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, these special instructions appear like the rising sun, endowed with the means to finally bring an end to the suffering of sentient beings — suffering that is the result of ignorance, dualistic fixation, and the disturbing afflictions of desire, hatred, bewilderment, and so on, accumulated in their minds since time immemorial. Chakme Rinpoche further says that for spiritual teachers who are authentic but inexperienced, who lack perfect intelligence and compassion, seeing these instructions will serve to open the lotus blossom of their minds.

“KYE MA!” He continues with an exclamation that generally carries two connotations. On one hand it is a cry of sadness,

seeing the pointlessness of suffering in cyclic existence. On the other hand the physical support of a human body is very difficult to obtain, yet once it has been obtained, if one has great purpose the human body will be a tremendous asset in accomplishing that aim. Without great purpose, however, samsara consists of nothing except everything that is wrong. This expression conveys both a sense of great astonishment as well as a sense of anguish.

Precious Human Birth

The first reason why a human body is so difficult to obtain is that there is a limited availability of places that embrace a virtuous or dharmic view. If you are not born in such a place, but are instead born in a barbaric or uncivilized society, then the necessary causes for being born with a human body again in the future will be absent altogether.

Even if you are born in a place where Dharma is present, if you fail to practice authentic Dharma then nothing will help you at the time of death. Although you might very well be next to a river, if you do not drink any water you will eventually die of thirst. In such cases, there will be no causes for obtaining a human body in the future.

Furthermore, even if you do engage in the practice of Dharma, particularly practicing generosity and other virtues, you still may not achieve all of the requisite causes for taking birth in a human form.

This is because observing strong morality is the essential way of insuring that you will later obtain the physical support of a human body. With regard to moral discipline, if there is no basic understanding of how or why it is to be protected, then even though you have taken some kind of vow, once you fail to maintain and protect this vow, you will fall prey to the afflictive emotions. At that point the concept of morality does nothing to insure that you will acquire a human body again.

By failing to understand and practice Dharma, the value and usefulness of this human body is compromised. If this happens, you are living life in an afflicted state and you are not accomplishing virtue at all. This is another reason why obtaining a human body endowed with freedoms and opportunities is so difficult. However if you have accumulated a great deal of merit and maintained good moral discipline in previous lifetimes, there will be nothing to prevent you from achieving human rebirth.

Purifying Wrongdoing

Having obtained a human life, it is then necessary to purify previous acts of wrongdoing. For example, if you develop an attitude that food and wealth are just for your own use with nothing to spare for anyone else, you become attached to those things and react with resentment toward anyone else who might enjoy them. Rather than merely keeping such things for yourself, you should approach a spiritual guide with a small offering of your money or food and then make the request, “I need a sönshok, a living inscription” — a purification ritual for a living person that is done in order to purify wrongdoings and increase good qualities. You are going to present your offerings to the teacher and request the living inscription ritual to be performed with the wish to benefit others by contributing to their future happiness and well-being.

Keeping this as your motivation, describe to the teacher all the wrongdoings that you have not redressed. Considering the store of merit you will accumulate by the effort to purify those wrongdoings, the small amount of food or money you are parting with is a relatively tiny sacrifice. Present your offerings to the teacher and then make the request, “Please help me in bringing about my wish for future happiness — not merely for myself,

but most importantly for others.” Chakme Rinpoche remarks, “What could possibly be more beautiful than to have such an intention as this?”, emphasizing the necessity of generating great compassion in order for these instructions to be effective.

Simple Methods For Purification: The Outer Procedure

Next we turn to the procedure that the guru must perform. For him in particular, compassionate intention alone will not be sufficient; it must be implemented in actual practice.

The first part of the procedure is the simple or unelaborate aspect. The guru performing the ritual begins by visualizing himself instantaneously in the form of whatever his principal yidam is — for example, Gyalwa Gyamtso (in Sanskrit, Jinasagara), Chenrezik, or Amitabha — and meditating for a bit. Then he imagines inhaling through his nose whatever wrongdoings and obscurations the person who is sponsoring the ritual has accumulated throughout their entire beginningless succession of lifetimes. If the guru is meditating on himself in the form of Chenrezik, for example, he would clearly and with conviction dissolve all of the person’s wrongdoings and obscurations into his heart as the deity Chenrezik. This is like the “taking” part of

taking and sending practice. When he dissolves the negativities and obscurations into himself, the force of his compassion produces tremendous power in the heart-syllable of the yidam deity, and with the same brilliant intensity of light as that visualized in a deity invocation, the wrongdoings and obscurations are instantly annihilated.

Following this, the guru exhales the breath. This exhalation carries the entire store of all the merit the guru has ever accumulated in the form of light. The power of the yidam deity's compassion sends the merit and qualities of the guru back to the sponsor of the living inscription ritual. The guru does this with the immediate aim that the recipient will enjoy physical and mental well-being, with the future aim that he will accumulate an abundance of virtue, and then with the final aim that he will attain the ultimate result, which is the state of buddhahood. This is a form of taking and sending practice found in the sutra tradition.

Next we turn to a method from the tradition of mantra. The sponsor of the ritual visualizes a black syllable PAM in the center of his heart. In a single instant of recollection, he thinks that all the wrongdoings and obscurations he has ever accumulated dissolve into the PAM. Then on the sole of each foot he visualizes a green syllable YAM. The two YAM syllables produce a powerful

gust of wind that rises up to the navel where there is a red RAM syllable. The wind causes the RAM syllable to generate heat and burst into flames, as if the air is fueling the fire. The combined effect of the heat of the flame and the strength of the wind forces the PAM syllable upward and out through the right nostril. This PAM syllable carrying all of the person's wrongdoings and obscurations emerges in the form of a scorpion.

Then the guru and the sponsor think that in between them is a spontaneously arisen red mandala blazing with fire. They visualize Vajradakini in the center of the mandala. She is blue in color with wrathful implements, holding a vajra and bell with her two hands crossed in the mudra of union. Her entire body is blazing with flames, and her mouth is open, facing upward toward the sky. The scorpion that embodies all of the sponsor's negativities and obscurations goes into the open mouth of Vajradakini and is utterly burned up in an instant. The wrathful female deity and the flame mandala then vanish together like a rainbow disappearing. This particular means of purifying wrongdoing and obscurations comes from the teachings of secret mantra.

Following that, the sponsor thinks that the RAM syllable is still burning in the area just below his navel. As the flame burns, all of the impure aspects of his body — all the negativities and obscurations present in the aggregates, elements, and sense

bases — are burned up, but the pure wisdom aspects of the aggregates, elements, and sense bases remain untouched. The quality of this separation is like the process of extracting gold from ore: the purity of the gold is left intact as the other rock and mineral impurities are removed. These wisdom aspects then transform into the form of the yidam deity. If the guru has been meditating on himself in the form of Gyalwa Gyamtso, the sponsor now thinks that he has also become Gyalwa Gyamtso, or likewise if the guru has visualized himself as Amitabha, the sponsor meditates on himself as being likewise transformed into Amitabha.

The guru maintains the clear visualization of himself in the form of the yidam, and from his heart center a diverse array of light rays radiates outward throughout all directions. The light rays fall on the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions as a vast offering to their body, speech, and mind, and they are deeply pleased by it.

As the light returns, the buddhas of the five families are invoked. First the light returns from the eastern direction, invoking Vajrasattva and all other deities whose nature is white-colored light. They are dissolved into the body of the sponsor, who continues to clearly visualize himself as the yidam deity. All of the karma, afflictions, wrongdoings, obscurations, and habitual

tendencies in his continuum are purified, and he obtains the pacifying siddhi of Vajrasattva's body.

Then the light rays radiated in the southern direction return, invoking Ratnasambhava and all other deities connected with the quality of enrichment. In the same way as before, all of the enriching deities dissolve into the sponsor, and the guru thinks that they become inseparable like rainwater falling into the ocean, maximizing longevity, merit, and wisdom.

Next the light rays travel to the western direction, invoking all magnetizing deities. As before, the light returns with the deities and dissolves into the sponsor, as his wind energies, his mind, and all appearances of the abiding nature of mind — which here refers to appearances experienced within the state of even placement — are magnetized, and he obtains all magnetizing siddhis.

In much the same way, the light rays then radiate toward the north, invoking Chakrasamvara, Vajrapani, and all other such forceful deities who are blue in color. As they return and dissolve into the sponsor, the guru thinks that they destroy all **maras**, **obstructors**, and any other obstacles to liberation, and that he obtains the powers of forceful deities.

Next the sponsor clearly appears as the deity himself seated on a moon-disk seat, his form ablaze with the flames of the **five wisdoms**. The crown of his head is marked with the white syllable OM, his throat with the red syllable AH, and his heart center with the blue syllable HUM. These three syllables represent the **nirmanakaya**, the **sambhogakaya**, and the **dharmakaya** respectively, and each serves as a means of protection for each of his three gates.

These are the visualization stages of the outer sönshok or living inscription. Up to this point we have looked at the simple or unelaborate procedures originally mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. They are described as such because they only involve the practitioners' visualization techniques — no ritual vases, implements, or any other material items are used in this portion of the ritual. Chakme Rinpoche explains that he did not make any of this up himself; these visualizations come from the tradition of mantra and are in accord with the Chakrasamvara and Vajradakini tantras. If one were to inquire, “Your texts may be valid, but what lineage do you hold?”, Karma Chakme confirms that he received authentic oral lineage transmission for these visualizations from his own root guru, Chökyi Wangchuk.

Simple Methods For Purification: The Inner Procedure

Next we turn to the inner sönshok or living inscription. A distinction is made between outer and inner methods as an accommodation toward the different degrees of compassion, knowledge, and practical experience of different gurus. For a guru whose qualities of compassion, knowledge, and practical experience are generally very good, but who has not yet attained a definite level of realization, the outer purification method is appropriate. If a yogi or yogini has achieved a higher level of realization and practice, the inner form of living purification can be employed.

In this procedure, the body of the sponsor and that of the guru are meditated on as mixing into one entity; there is no difference or separation between them. At this time the guru meditates on the form of his principal yidam, whichever one it may be — Gyalwa Gyamtso, *Vajravarahi*, or any other. Within that form the guru visualizes the three main channels and four chakras. Below the level of the navel there is a short AH, which is the AH syllable alone with no subscript. The guru thinks that the fiery heat of this syllable AH instantly burns up all of the wrongdoings and obscurations present in his own continuum as well as any impurities present in the aggregates and sense bases.

While retaining his breath using the *vase breathing* technique, light rays radiate from the AH and invoke all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, *viras*, and dakinis of the ten directions in the aspect of spheres of white light for the males and spheres of red light for the females. The guru and the disciple are both identified as one deity, at the crown of which is a white syllable HAM. The buddhas, bodhisattvas, and so on descend and dissolve into that syllable. Having generated the experiences of well-being, emptiness, and warmth, he then rests in the state of even placement.

One might ask, “Is this just something that Karma Chakme made up?” He explains that everything here comes from the Guhyasamaja father *tantra*, and incidentally it is also clearly explained in the instructions for *chandali*, the yoga of inner heat generation.

Simple Methods For Purification: The Secret Procedure

Next the guru thinks that the uncreated qualities of the awakened body, speech, and mind of all the root and lineage gurus and the assemblies of yidam deities, buddhas, and bodhisattvas become inseparably mixed with the body, speech, and mind of the yidam that both he and the sponsor are identified with. He then rests

in even placement within the experience of mahamudra, with the recognition that while no inherently existing essence can be found therein, at the same time it is not merely an empty void. This is resting in that which is called “empty, lucid, and unimpeded in its display.” The quality of that same experience is also equally described by the term *bliss-emptiness*.

Although we use such words in speaking about this nature, a statement like, “the true nature is empty, clear, and unobstructed” does not suffice to capture it whatsoever. The inner experience of what emptiness, *lucidity*, and unlimited display is really like arises through the actual practice of meditation. Consider an image reflected in a mirror. The form of the image appears directly, with clarity free from obstruction. However the appearance of that image has never truly existed to begin with, and it is therefore empty. This is a simple way of relating to the emptiness, lucidity, and unimpeded display of the mind.

If we have at least an understanding of these words as they are used in such an analogy, then even when dualistic fixation and bewildered thoughts arise for us, they need not have the capacity to affect us. If the thought, “This is a good thought” arises, you can acknowledge that those words do not truly exist; if the thought, “This is a bad thought” occurs, you can recognize it as the unimpeded quality of mind, arising like the wind in the sky.

Without entertaining or blocking the thoughts either way, you can simply rest in even placement, recognizing that thoughts essentially have no power of their own. Otherwise everything that is created as the display of your mind becomes the notion of an apprehended object and the notion of an apprehending cognition, as well as the fixation on that duality.

Regardless of whatever way this dualistic fixation is conceived, whether in terms of “self and other,” “real and not real,” “existent and nonexistent,” or any other such pairs of conceptual opposites, if we recognize their lack of intrinsic identity, then the occurrence of dualistic fixation instead becomes nonduality. Such fixation on characteristics — conceiving that “This is tea,” “This is stone,” “This is the ground,” “This is real,” “This is hard,” “This is sharp,” and so on — is really a state of disturbance; in other words, it is conceptuality. When fixation on reality and fixation on characteristics are fully recognized, the perfect qualities of the abiding nature of mind will be revealed.

For instance, the sky is limitless. It is so vast that it cannot be measured. Nevertheless someone could try to quantify it by saying, “There are five stars here, there are ten stars there; there is this much space here, there is that much space over there,” and so on. This is like treating something with no inherent nature as if it were a concrete thing, and that just creates problems.

In the same way, although the true nature of all phenomena is free from confusion or bewilderment, we are mistaken in our view as long as we have intellectual concepts based on fixation on reality. This is why the gurus give the instruction, “Do not pursue the past, do not invite the future. Rest in even placement within the present moment without thinking about or fixating on anything.” To do so is to be in accord with the abiding nature as it is.

While resting in even placement, all kinds of thoughts can naturally arise. If you become involved in evaluating each thought as it arises by thinking, “This one was better,” “That one was worse,” and so on, this does not serve to help you, and it is also not meditation. If thoughts arise, remain undisturbed. If they do not arise, remain without delight. To be unmoved by whatever pleasant or unpleasant thoughts may arise and to remain in the state of even placement within that nature — this is the authentic method of practice. About this Padampa Sangye said, “Thoughts leave no trace, like birds in the sky.” We see birds flying around in the sky, but they leave no print or trace in their wake and so the sky remains undamaged and unmarked. In this way, regardless of whatever thoughts may arise for you, if you simply rest in even placement within that essential nature, free from fixation on the duality of apprehended object and apprehending cognition, the thoughts will not become a conceptual focus or defect, nor

will they disrupt your experience of meditation. If you cultivate your practice in this way, it will lead to realization.

When practicing meditation most of us develop a kind of rigid notion that we are not going to have any thoughts, or that we will refuse to be disturbed by thoughts. Attempting to forcibly block thoughts in such a manner is not meditation. Clinging to the idea, “I refuse to be agitated” is just another form of fixation, as is the concept, “Thoughts are the problem, I have to stop them.” This is not meditation at all. Without trying to eliminate flaws or disturbances, and while remaining stable in the essential nature, if you do not lose yourself to the influence of thoughts, then the thoughts do not present a problem.

Next Karma Chakme Rinpoche says, “The fire of emptiness burns up fixation on reality as well as the two obscurations.” Resting in even placement within the essential nature that is emptiness serves to nonconceptually purify all fixation on reality, the afflictive obscurations, and the cognitive obscurations, along with their karmic latencies. This practice of even placement within the essence of mahamudra is itself the definitive tradition of Mahamudra, and it is also the definitive tradition of the **Great Perfection**. It is thoroughly and clearly presented in the textual and oral instructions of both Mahamudra and the Great Perfection. The form of even placement described

here constitutes the secret sönshok, which is called the “living inscription of that-alone.” This secret level is inseparable from the outer and inner levels presented earlier, and it is the ultimate means of purifying wrongdoing and obscurations.

In employing any one of the outer, inner, or secret that-alone methods given thus far, there is no actual inscription of anything, no writing on paper, no transmission of empowerment, nor any other additional trouble you need to take that would qualify these methods as elaborate. Everything here is dependent on the meditation and realization of the yogi himself. When his achievement of even placement in the natural state and his meditation on the channels and winds in the inner method of burning a living inscription are correctly done, this is the best way to purify the yogi’s own obscurations. For the patron as well, there is no better means by which to purify obscurations. Nevertheless in order for this to be the case, it is necessary for the yogi to have as much realization as possible. For example, when a bird flies in the sky it has no need of a road, and it is not concerned with water, fire hazards, or ravines. It is just free. However it definitely requires wings to be that way; without wings, it cannot fly at all. These two wings represent emptiness and compassion. The guru must possess both attainment of the direct realization of emptiness as well as unceasing loving-

kindness and compassion for other sentient beings. With both of these qualities, he can fly like a bird.

Apart from the techniques pertaining to the practice of even placement in the context of mahamudra, the instructions in this chapter are given as an introduction for your knowledge and consideration. For now our most important practice is to rest in the nature of mind. Apart from basic knowledge and continued meditation practice, it is not the time for us to implement these special purification instructions.

You may wonder, “Then why are you giving these teachings? What good will they do us if we don’t actually put them into practice?” I am making use of this fine opportunity to speak to you with the help of an excellent translator, and having said these things, it is my hope that in the future these teachings may contribute to your gradual progress in Dharma. This is planting a seed of Dharma so that if these instructions do become necessary in the future, there is a possibility that you will have at your disposal knowledge of the details and particulars of these methods.

In Tibet there is a tradition of performing special purification ceremonies for the benefit of deceased beings. This is a means of providing assistance and guidance to those beings in the bardo state in order to increase the possibility of liberation from the

bardo and achievement of a better rebirth. The practices being presented here are similar to those, but they are done specifically for people who are alive in order to promote increased longevity, pacify severe illness, and magnetize other physical and mental energies. Although there are differences in terms of texts and procedures, the same essential methods are used.

These practices are intended for teachers. For beginners, these teachings are being introduced primarily as information; for instance, the teachings are useful in the event that you attend such a ceremony and wonder how the ceremony relates to the increase of longevity, success, health, and so forth. At present, the occasion to actually implement these instructions in practice is rather far away for us, but they may be useful for teachers or those involved in retreat.

Elaborate Methods of Purification

Having considered the simple or unelaborate methods of purification for a living person, which primarily employed visualization techniques, we now turn to the elaborate methods. They are elaborate because additional elements are involved in the procedure. The sponsor of the ceremony should be physically present, or if that is not possible a physical representation of

that person, such as a picture, will be sufficient. Here the actual living inscription will also be used, so the sponsor's name should be written down on paper. Then you perform the appropriate sadhana, such as those of the buddhas Vairochana, Akshobhya, Amitabha, or of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

One of the differences between doing the practice for a person who has died and doing the practice for someone who is still living is that, in the case of a deceased person, an attempt is made to summon the consciousness of the deceased out of the transition state of wandering in the bardo. You try to bring the consciousness back into the place where you are performing the sadhana. In the case of a living person, there is no need to bring back the consciousness because the person is already physically present. If the sponsor for whom you are praying cannot be present physically — for example, the person is in California and the ritual is being performed in New York — then the guru visualizes either Vairochana or Amitabha as colossal in size as **Mount Meru**. Then below the visualization of the deity, the guru simply feels the presence of the sponsor, regardless of the actual distance between that person and the location of the ceremony.

Further differences between doing this kind of purification ritual for a deceased person and for a living person are as follows: When addressing or referring to the person who has died, you

say “the deceased,” whereas in the case of a living person, you say “the living person.” In the case of a deceased person, a sur is performed in which an offering of singed food substances is dedicated specifically for the deceased’s benefit. Since a deceased person is in the bardo state, it is also necessary to provide guidance by clearly indicating to them the path to liberation from the bardo, as well as to make use of the opportunity to effect **transference of the consciousness**. With a living person, these three procedures do not apply.

After the guru generates the visualization, burn the paper with the name of the individual for whom the purification is being done. Since you are performing the ceremony for a living individual, burning the paper with the sponsor’s name written on it increases their longevity. They will enjoy long life, good health, and freedom from illness, as well as an increase in their accumulated store of merit and the removal of all hindrances and obstructing conditions.

Karma Chakme explains that this method of benefiting others — performing a purification ceremony to increase longevity, eliminate obstacles, and so forth — is not something that he invented himself. This method is found in the *Vajradakini Tantra*, in the tradition of Path and Fruition, and in fact it exists in all applications of mandala rituals. Not only has Karma Chakme

performed these rituals himself, but through his own experience he has come to the realization that these procedures are definitely beneficial to those individuals for whom they are intended.

In order to properly effect such purification, he says that according to the *Vajradakini Tantra* you should obtain some black sesame seeds and burn them. The recitation of the sadhana and mantra, together with burning the black sesame seeds, is definitely beneficial to the individual sponsoring the ceremony.

You might wonder about the origins of this method apart from what has already been mentioned. Within the Karma Kamtsang tradition, it was presented by one of the Kagyu eminences, the great Gyaltsap Drakpa Chokyang, and in the Drikung Kagyu lineage, it was taught by Drikung Shapdrung. On the basis of these two great masters' presentation of the method, it is now commonly used by all teachers.

This method can also be used to treat severe illness that cannot be successfully cured with medicine or other forms of treatment. It is also used to avert serious obstacles that pose a danger to one's life. As these obstacles can be the result of evil or adverse circumstances coming together, it is possible to eliminate them by reversing the conditions responsible for causing them. All such adverse conditions connected with otherwise incurable

illness or life-threatening obstacles can be transformed, and implementing these instructions in this particular sense is known as “averting misfortune by changing the face of the mandala.”

For example, if the person is drawing closer to death, his mandala is said to be facing toward death, but through performing a purification ritual such as this, his illness will be cured, obstacles will be eliminated, and thereafter he will be facing away from death. In that way the ritual is like changing the direction of the faces of the mandala. This method of averting obstacles and effecting purification is utilized by both practitioners and gurus.

Although the basic sadhana is very similar when you are doing the ritual for either a living person or a deceased person, when doing the practice for a living being, you do not summon the consciousness, dedicate singed food substances, or attempt to transfer the consciousness as you would for a deceased being because your purpose here is completely different. You are eliminating sickness, dispelling obstacles, and giving a longevity empowerment at the end.

Gurus have demonstrated that this method will definitely bring benefit to beings. Karma Chakme says here that on various occasions he has witnessed people who were sick become completely healed, and he has seen many people who faced severe obstacles

or adverse circumstances have those conditions eliminated. This is one of the best methods to heal illness, pacify obstacles and evil spirits, enrich life, vitality, and good health, and overcome any mental or physical difficulties.

In employing this method, the teacher or guru is primarily making use of a practice known as the “five deities sadhana.” In Tibet there is a place called Nyemo, and in Nyemo there is a very small area known as Tsangchok, and at one time some gurus there applied this practice to help an individual who sponsored the performance of this sadhana. In mentioning this, Karma Chakme again reminds us that with this particular method of benefiting a living person, you omit the summoning of the consciousness, the dedication of the singed food substances, and the transference of the consciousness — the three elements that would be necessary if the person were deceased.

Benefits of Purification Ceremonies

Regarding the benefits of purification ceremonies such as these, there is some disagreement from the point of view of the common vehicle.

According to the *Sutrayana* presentation of the *four truths of the noble ones*, you alone are responsible for your actions. Because you are responsible for whatever karma you have created and because each individual's karma is separate and distinct, someone else's actions cannot be applied to your karma. Some uphold the argument that even if someone makes an aspiration prayer and dedicates the merit to a deceased individual, unless that individual has already attained the *bodhisattva levels*, the dedicated merit of the prayer cannot actually help the deceased person because that individual alone has to deal with his or her own karma and its purification. They concede that although such efforts may not help the deceased, those who perform the *sadhana* practice and make aspiration prayers will definitely benefit and will accumulate merit themselves.

Jetsun Milarepa said that if you realize this morning that somebody stole a precious jewel last night and then try to throw stones at the thief, you will be unable to hit him because he is already long gone. Similarly, common vehicle adherents assert that such prayers and ritual practices will not help others overcome their negative karma, but they do serve as a means for the practitioner to accumulate merit.

In spite of this argument, Karma Chakme says there is no contradiction in what is being presented in this teaching. Although

it is basically true that the individual has to purify her negative karma herself or overcome the cause of her illness herself rather than have someone else do it for her, according to the higher level of the teachings, when a sadhana is performed for a living person's benefit, as in this particular context, it is not contradictory because in any case it is necessary to engage in practice in order to effect purification. In terms of purification and development toward buddhahood, you have to progress through the five paths: the path of accumulation, the path of juncture, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of fulfillment or no more learning. Part of the necessary development of the first path — the path of accumulation — is learning. *Learning* means that you first have to be exposed to the teachings, and on that basis you gradually develop familiarity with them. When a guru is performing these sadhanas for a living person, it serves as an opportunity for that individual to develop this familiarization, and in the long run this will help them to progress through the stages and paths. Furthermore, while the sponsor is still alive, if the guru provides an introductory explanation of the pure realm of Sukhavati, this will also be of certain benefit because inevitably the individual will die some day. At the time of death, by virtue of having previously heard the guru's introduction to the experience of death, everything that appears will be familiar and in agreement with that explanation. This is just like having directions to a destination that you have never been to before.

If someone has already described the way or provided you with directions, then when you recognize what you see corresponding with what you have been told, you will feel confident as to how to proceed. By cultivating the habit of familiarity with the teachings in this way, there is no contradiction at all in the instructions or performance of the sadhana. Chakme Rinpoche again stresses that because here you are doing the practice for a living person, you do not transfer consciousness. Instead of transferring consciousness, which is done for a deceased person, you should include prayers of longevity and auspiciousness, saying for example, “May this individual live for a hundred years.”

Around the time when Karma Chakme was giving this teaching, which he originally received from his root guru Chökyi Wangchuk, there was much disagreement among different teachers regarding the existence of this particular teaching in the scriptures. Some teachers argued that this sort of method is not found in any sutra or tantra, and others said that yes, the sönshok method does exist there. Because of this dispute, Karma Chakme asked Chökyi Wangchuk about the source of these instructions. Chökyi Wangchuk explained that they are derived from the *Vajradakini Tantra*. Because of the tantric nature of the source text, the teaching is not explained there in explicit terms but rather indicated implicitly. In any case, it is definitely present in the *Vajradakini Tantra*.

The Inner Meaning of the Teachings

Because of the great profundity of the Tantrayana teachings, the words sometimes carry an implicit or hidden level of meaning. For example, if the guru says that you will have a long life, it may actually mean that your life will be short. If the guru says that he will be born today, it might really mean that he is going to die. In such a context, this is automatically understood. The imminence of death or of a short life span is to be inferred from such statements, and therefore it does not have to be explained directly in literal terms, such as saying that someone is born and therefore must also die someday. A teaching does not have to be presented in an explicit manner because the Tantrayana is partly characterized by hidden meaning. That is why it is called “profound.”

Songtsen Gampo, one of the great kings of Tibet who was also regarded as an emanation of Chenrezik, is an example of someone who properly understood the profundity of the hidden meaning of the Tantrayana. During his lifetime he composed a purification sadhana intended to be performed by oneself for oneself. After completing it, he practiced it again and again for himself and taught others how to do it. For Tibetans it was somewhat awkward because normally a ritual practice like that was done only for the deceased. Some people criticized the king,

saying that this was a purification ritual intended for deceased individuals, and the king was performing it on himself while he was still alive. Actually, at the moment when King Songtsen Gampo died, this particular practice helped him tremendously, and those who had received instruction from him were able to carry on with the practice. His method proved to be very beneficial, and therefore doing this kind of purification while you are alive is not harmful in any way.

It is not necessary to doubt whether this practice is helpful or not because its benefit is twofold. First, by implementing this method you burn up your own obscurations, and second, you also cultivate the seed that will serve to burn away the obscurations of others. Knowing this, it is not appropriate to harbor doubts, or to think or say that such a practice is not beneficial or might even be harmful.

During the time of the Tenth Karmapa, when many eminent teachers were performing this sadhana, there were other gurus and monastics who believed that doing so would be detrimental to the Karmapa's life span. There was a lot of skepticism at the time. Those doubts were unfounded because through doing this kind of practice for highly realized beings, you actually invoke the energy of profound samadhi. This increases the life span of the teacher because due to the power and strength of the sadhana,

the samadhi you are invoking is of an unchanging quality, and therefore the sadhana stabilizes the health and life span of the teacher for whom it is performed.

There are still others who claim that the life span of the person who sponsors this type of practice will be shortened. This is also untrue. The reason why some people make such excuses is because they are miserly and therefore unwilling to make offerings of their wealth and possessions for such practices. Rather than decreasing the life of the sponsor, one can expect the opposite effect, an increase in life force. Normally when performing this type of ceremony, certain deities are emphasized. In connection with Ratnasambhava, the person's merit is increased; with Amitayus, the person's longevity is increased; and with the wealth deity, Jambhala, the person's wealth is increased. Therefore there is no real possibility of decreasing life span, but rather everything that is done serves to increase merit, longevity, and wealth. With the help of the guru the visualized deities are dissolved into the sponsor, who will then experience these benefits.

When the ceremony is performed, a special kind of **torma** is offered known as *lütör*, which means “ransom offering.” You make lumps of dough and squeeze them by hand, creating a certain impression with your fingers. There is also purification through ablution, as well as the practice of conquering poisons.

The purpose of doing the tormas offering and the purification through ablution is to eliminate all hindrances and obstacles. “Conquering poisons” refers to the fact that you are trying to uproot all of your mental afflictions such as attachment, anger, jealousy, and pride. When all mental afflictions, harmful spirits, and adverse conditions are absent, you are free of all negativity. Additional practices may be included for the promotion of longevity, good health, and spiritual development.

This purification practice for the living and the practice for the deceased are similar to one another in that they share the common aim of eliminating obstacles and purifying the mind. Apart from some differences in the texts and in recitation of certain lines in the liturgies, the rest is very similar. With that understanding, both fulfill the same purpose in terms of accumulating merit.

The teachings Karma Chakme has presented here were requested by his disciple, Lama Tsondru Gyamtso. In response to that request, Karma Chakme gave the teaching from memory, and Lama Tsondru Gyamtso wrote it down immediately. Because he was requested to give the teachings on short notice, Karma Chakme clearly explains that he was not 100 percent sure about the quotations and root teachings from the *Vajradakini Tantra*. If there is any doubt, those who wish to check for accuracy should consult the text of the *Vajradakini Tantra* and make sure

that whatever was cited is completely accurate. Nevertheless Karma Chakme affirms that the essential meditation is clear, accurate, and free from error. The reason why it is so vivid and unmistakable in his mind is that he himself has performed this meditation for the benefit of many sentient beings again and again, and therefore there are no mistakes in the teaching. The teaching was written down by Lama Tsondru Gyamtso in the Year of the Wood Snake, at sunset on the twenty-ninth day of the twelfth month, when Karma Chakme was performing gutor. Gutor is a practice that is done just before the Tibetan New Year, so most likely he was extremely busy.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: I understand, at least intellectually, that there is no real way to tell how long the bardo is for some people, that they can instantly plummet to the lower realms, they can be there for forty-nine days, or they can be there for seventeen-thousand lifetimes. I understand that, but my question is: when a close family member dies, do we just pray for them and dedicate for them in perpetuity? If not, how long is it appropriate to do those practices for them?

RINPOCHE: There is no definite period of time spent in the bardo, and this is because the duration of the bardo is based on the karma of the sentient being experiencing it. The positive and negative karma of every sentient being is individually distinct, and the length of time spent in the bardo corresponds to that. We can categorize the duration of the bardo according to three different types of beings: an individual who has extremely heavy negative karma; an individual who has extremely positive, virtuous karma; and an individual who falls somewhere in between those extremes.

In the case of the person who has extremely heavy negative karma, the moment they die they fall directly into lower realms such as the hell realms or **preta** realm without even passing through the bardo state. Compared with those realms, the bardo state is much better because in the bardo there are always opportunities to achieve liberation, whereas such opportunities do not exist in the hell realm or the **preta** realm. Since the suffering in those realms is so intense, liberation is far less of a possibility.

By contrast, there is the case of an individual who has accumulated a great deal of merit and virtue. At the moment they die, without wandering through the bardo state, they instantaneously experience rebirth in a pure realm. Both of these types of individuals experience immediate rebirth without wandering in the bardo.

The third type of individual is somewhere in between, having neither heavy negative karma nor strong positive karma. Because they still have some attachment to worldly possessions, family, and so forth, they tend to wander in the bardo for a longer period of time. The more attachment you have to things from your previous life, the longer it tends to make you wander in the bardo, and you will be unable to experience liberation from that state.

According to the *Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, forty-nine days is the standard view of the duration spent in the bardo. It can last even longer due to strong attachment on the part of the deceased individual, but forty-nine days is the general duration given. Traditionally in Tibet, when a family member or friend dies, forty-nine days of prayers are considered to be especially helpful. It is believed that after forty-nine days the deceased person will either leave the bardo and proceed to a higher, pure realm, or experience another rebirth. This reflects the general understanding in Tibet, so traditionally after forty-nine days all the prayers, chanting, and so forth are concluded and discontinued under the assumption that the deceased has left the bardo state by that point.

STUDENT: I need some clarification on something you said earlier. You said that we can do bardo practices for ourselves.

One of my greatest fears is that I am going to die in a gutter somewhere and my body will be taken to a morgue. I would like some clarification on how to do this for oneself and how to go about arranging it properly so that when death happens, things go well.

RINPOCHE: Generally speaking, any form of meditation or Dharma practice that we do is intended to help us in the bardo state after death. We practice Dharma with knowledge of the fact that we all have to die, and that the bardo state after death is not peaceful but rather a frightening and painful experience, after which you might take rebirth in lower realms, such as the hells or preta realm, where extremely intense suffering will ensue. All Dharma practice serves as a preparation for the time of death, so that rather than wandering in the bardo you have the possibility of being liberated from it. Even if complete liberation and awakening is not achieved, you at least want to avoid falling into lower realms and instead obtain rebirth in a higher state where you can continue with your study and practice of Buddhadharma in order to come to the eventual realization of buddhahood. All dharma practice is ultimately aimed toward that end.

STUDENT: I wanted to ask about something I heard, although not in a teaching context. I have heard that the result of suicide is an immediate rebirth in a hell realm. Is that correct?

RINPOCHE: It is not necessarily the case that a person who commits suicide will fall directly into the hell realms. The outcome of an act of suicide is related to the life span you would have completed if you had not killed yourself; any number of years could be left in your life. In the bardo state, you might be forced to repeatedly experience the act of killing yourself again and again. The actual duration of such an experience cannot be determined exactly, but it is related to how prematurely the preceding life span was cut short. For instance, suppose that you would naturally have lived for five more years, but since you committed suicide those remaining five years are instead spent in the bardo. Under those circumstances you could not be liberated from the bardo, and you would repeatedly and ceaselessly undergo the experience of killing yourself, along with the attendant frustrations that lead to such an act. This is a state of immense suffering.

I myself witnessed an instance of this in Tibet. At one point I was staying at a house somewhere overnight. While sleeping, I had a dream where a young monk appeared near the ceiling, hanging himself with a rope. Suddenly the young monk, who

was skeletal and feeble with a very sad-looking face, fell to the ground with the rope still around his neck. When he hit the floor, I woke up. I asked people about this later, and they explained that twenty years previously a monk had committed suicide at the house by hanging himself. Since he was young at the time, it seems probable that he would spend many years in the bardo in this way. Everyone who slept there had the same kind of dream. When I visited this place and had this dream, the length of the rope around the monk's neck was about the length of a forearm. At that point, the rope was getting shorter. When the rope finally disappeared altogether, the monk would be able to leave the bardo state. This is the kind of ceaseless suffering and entrapment in the bardo that can happen to people who commit suicide.

STUDENT: When we are in the bardo, who are we karmically indebted to? Are there demons in the bardo specific to us? Lama Norlha said that this was a real issue, that it was something that we needed to address in our lifetime, and that the three best practices to address these karmic debts were **chö**, the morning water tormas practice, and the noon offering of the dough with the imprint of the hand. I do not know the names of all these practices. What are these debts, to whom are they owed, and are there demons collecting them? Also, if one is not doing those

three practices, how does one work with that? Are there other practices for this purpose that I am not aware of?

RINPOCHE: We accumulate karmic debt through connections. For instance, if you have a friend who has been very kind and helpful to you, and you do not repay their kindness by means of virtuous practices, Dharma, and so forth, then your inability to repay that kindness creates a karmic debt with that individual. In a similar way, we accumulate numerous karmic debts through material wealth and other forms of connection. If someone gives you money with the intention that you use it properly for virtuous things, for dharmic purposes, but instead you use it improperly for unvirtuous things, then even if this person is unaware that you have disregarded his wish, a karmic debt forms automatically.

This formation does not start and end with the span of a single lifetime. We have built innumerable karmic debts with other beings throughout our previous lifetimes. In the bardo, which is not reality as we perceive it now, your experience is that all these beings with whom you have outstanding karmic debts appear to you and ask you to repay them. The worldly parallel is a situation where you are indebted to many people; eventually your creditors will demand reimbursement. In the bardo, you encounter the appearance of those beings to whom you owe

karmic debts — appearances that are merely the projection of your own mind, but which nevertheless seem real. These projections can prevent you from achieving liberation in the bardo since you will be focusing on their apparent demands for repayment. Although these appearances are not external to you, they are like a negative force that binds you in the bardo state.

The means by which you can purify your karmic debts, whether they have been incurred during the present lifetime or in previous ones, are as follows: One is the morning water tormas practice that you have mentioned. In the liturgy for that practice, one of the things you are essentially saying is, “May my karmic debts of many previous lifetimes be repaid through my performance of these virtuous actions.” You recite the liturgy and mantras while performing the water offering using the appropriate materials.

The second is the practice of chö, or “**severance**.” If done truly and correctly, chö is beneficial in repaying karmic debts because you are giving away your body without any feeling of attachment. The practice is an invitation to those beings who would enjoy consuming your flesh, blood, and bones to come and partake of it. There is no clinging to concepts of “me” and “mine” because you have let go of attachment to yourself completely. In this manner, you make offerings to the higher deities while also

practicing generosity toward beings in lower realms. This is another way of resolving karmic debts.

The third practice is the sur, or singed offering. In this practice, which is done in the afternoon or evening, consecrated food substances are singed while the accompanying liturgy is recited. You dedicate the merit and virtue that arise through the practice to the benefit of all beings. The dedication of singed offerings is of particular benefit to beings without physical form who are wandering in the bardo. These beings are unable to partake of any form of nourishment apart from the smell of offerings specifically dedicated for their benefit, so in performing the sur you are fulfilling their needs while also fulfilling your own karmic debts. These three practices in particular are the best means by which to purify karmic debts.

STUDENT: Does it also apply that, whether we are doing those practices ourselves or not, if we sponsor them it fulfills the same function?

RINPOCHE: Yes, but I have to qualify my answer and be very clear and honest, because I care very much for all of you. The result depends on the lama whom you are sponsoring. The mere title “lama” can be easy to use, regardless of whether or not that person is actually qualified. If the lama in whom you have put your

trust is highly realized and has genuine strength of compassion in his mind, then the result might be as you intended. Sponsored offerings made to an individual who is not advanced and who has not really cultivated compassion may result not in a decrease of your karmic debts, but rather in the further increase of that individual's own karmic debts.

In order to be able to purify karmic debts through sponsored ceremonies, the guru in question really needs to have some degree of realization. In Tibet there is a story of a person known as the “Lama from Tsang with the black horse,” so named because he was from Tsang and rode a black horse. He was somewhat charismatic and because of his charisma everyone believed that he was an advanced teacher. Many people made offerings to him with requests to do prayers for their deceased loved ones and for the elimination of karmic debts. This lama became extremely rich, and although people believed he was an authentic teacher because of his charisma, in fact he had no actual foundation in practice.

There is a huge lake in Tibet called Yamdrok Yutso, the Turquoise Lake. Sometime after the black horse lama died, a gigantic fish of very abnormal proportions was discovered in the lake. The body of this fish was slowly and constantly being eaten by smaller fish, although not to the point of death. When people asked

authentic lamas about this fish, they explained that by taking offerings intended for the performance of practices beneficial to others, especially the deceased, the black horse lama took on a great deal of karmic debt and was unable to truly effect any results. As a result, following his own death he immediately took rebirth as this fish that constantly experienced the suffering of being eaten up by countless other beings. This was due to the karmic debt he had accumulated. In that way, not every individual with a title such as “lama” is necessarily able to help you purify your karmic debts.

STUDENT: I have a question regarding the last story. How much of the karmic debt is paid out of the faith of the people who make offerings, and how much from the people to whom offerings are made? Is any of the karmic debt repaid through faith and devotion?

RINPOCHE: The irony of this last story is that some of the innumerable small fish or insects eating the body of the huge fish could be the people who originally made offerings. Realizing later on that the supposed lama had not actually done anything to fulfill the intentions for which the offerings were given, the person who made the offerings takes rebirth as a being that is consuming the being with whom a connection was made. The sponsors could therefore later have become the small creatures

eating away at the lama who had previously taken their offerings without having the ability to perform authentic practices and bring about results.

STUDENT: I did not understand how the Tantrayana view does not contradict the fact that a person's karma is inescapable, and yet at the same time you actually can benefit someone by doing these practices.

TRANSLATOR: What do you mean by “inescapable”?

STUDENT: An individual's own karma is inescapable; it cannot be mitigated, but at the same time these practices are beneficial. You said that according to the Sutrayana view the person's karma is viewed as being inescapable, so these practices would not actually benefit them.

RINPOCHE: The Sutrayana tradition emphasizes the importance of the individual's need to be directly involved in the practice. If someone else is practicing on your behalf, it will not really be beneficial in removing your karma because you yourself are not involved in the practice. The Buddha emphasized this teaching in the hope that people would apply the practice to themselves.

When you climb up to the Tantrayana level of teachings, the power and efficacy of the Tantrayana is such that even when someone else practices on your behalf, especially if you have built some connection with them, their visualization and state of mind can still benefit you by removing your negative karma and accumulating merit. This is the difference with the Tantrayana approach, whereas in the Sutrayana you have to accumulate merit and remove negative karma by practicing yourself.

We must keep in mind that even in the powerful practices of the Tantrayana, a connection is definitely necessary in order to be of benefit — whether the connection to the person performing the practice is positive, negative, or otherwise. The Buddha is a completely awakened being who has practiced and presented the Tantrayana teachings. All sentient beings have not yet come to the realization of buddhahood, and this is because they have not built a connection with the Buddha. Those who have built such a connection are actually liberated. We do not see this with our eyes, but they have come to complete liberation by virtue of any form of connection that they have built with the Buddha. This connection is necessary in tantric practice.

STUDENT: I have a question about mind and emptiness. You said that mind could be likened to the sky. Does that mean the

mind is like empty space? Or does that mean that the mind is empty of any characteristics or labels you could put on it?

RINPOCHE: With regard to all forms, the first thing that must be understood properly is that although forms appear, those appearances do not exist in the absolute sense. On the other hand, it is an error to come to the conclusion that because all appearances of form are nonexistent they are nothing but empty space. This is a form of fixation on reality. In other words, despite the apparent presence of appearances, thinking that they are entirely void is one way of mistakenly fixating on them.

Having said that, as space is devoid of any intrinsic identity and the mind is likewise devoid of intrinsic identity, when you rest in even placement within that essential nature, you discover there is no difference between “mind” and “space.” Through doing so, you will understand that while that nature is not substantial, it is also not insubstantial. That is exactly why we describe this as the “mixing of mind and space.”

However when we make use of this term it does not mean that we regard mind and space as being like two separate things, because that would constitute fixation on substantial reality, and here the insubstantial aspect is what needs to be recognized. At the same time, “insubstantial” is not meant here in the superficial,

bewildered sense of a concept. The point is that any notions about the true nature itself being empty, such as “It is” or “It isn’t,” are misapprehensions.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, would you please explain the difference between realization of mind and buddha nature? Is there any difference?

RINPOCHE: Buddha nature or sugatagarbha is the universal basis. *Universal basis* or *all-basis* means that sugatagarbha is the very ground and root of both samsara and **nirvana** in their entirety. In fact, this sugatagarbha has been present within the continuums of all sentient beings in cyclic existence since time immemorial. It is because sentient beings do not recognize their own sugatagarbha that they are forced to wander in samsara. Although beings inherently possess this seed of buddha nature even while they are wandering through samsara, the seed itself is not directly responsible for that predicament. When this same sugatagarbha is revealed or realized as it is, this constitutes the attainment of nirvana. For that reason, what we call the “omniscient wisdom of perfect buddhahood” is the full manifestation of sugatagarbha.

Although one might attempt to rationalize samsara and sugatagarbha by saying that one serves as the cause and the other is

produced as a result, in terms of an individual being's essential nature the distinction between “cause” and “result” is irrelevant. This is because the individual equally possesses the potential to be either a buddha or a sentient being, and therefore there is really no inherent change or distinction to be made in terms of good or bad, or on the basis of precedence. This is what is referred to by the term *sugatagarbha*.

To draw an analogy, a huge deposit of gold lying underground will not be evident on the surface. Nevertheless it is there, and once discovered and extracted from the earth the gold will be readily accessible. Then by gradually refining it, polishing it, and so on, the beautiful luster and all the qualities that gold is known for will be revealed. Yet regardless of how much gold there is underground, as long as it remains unproduced and hidden under the earth, no one will see it or be able to use it. Sugatagarbha is like that.

A distinction can be made with regard to this. The buddha nature that is present within the continuum of a sentient being can be called “stained buddha nature,” whereas that same buddha nature as found in the mind of a buddha is called “immaculate buddha nature.” The stained buddha nature of a sentient being is rendered immaculate by removing adventitious stains or defilements — ignorance, desire, hatred, jealousy, and all other such

mental afflictions. On the basis of acting under the influence of these afflictions, negative karma is accumulated. As long as negative karma continues to ripen, the sentient being's buddha nature will remain obscured. Once the afflictions are completely gone, the accumulation and ripening of karma will also cease, and as a result all fundamentally perfect qualities will be revealed.

STUDENT: Does the practice of **guru yoga** have some sort of a method that can help us realize this inseparability?

RINPOCHE: It will bring about realization of this inseparability, but right now we need to approach things in the proper sequence. First it is necessary to begin with refuge and prostrations, followed by the confession of wrongdoing and purification of obscurations through Vajrasattva practice. Next is the gathering of the accumulation of merit through mandala practice, and after that you do the practice of guru yoga.

To draw an analogy in familiar terms, if you want to prepare food, first you need to have some kind of cooking vessel and a stove. Without those, you have no way to cook anything. If you have the right kind of vessel, then you can prepare some food — this is like refuge and prostrations. Once you have a cooking vessel and a stove, in order to use the stove you will need to get a fire going. Also before you put anything in the vessel, you

wash it thoroughly inside and out. This is like the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva. Then you collect the firewood and other fuel supplies for the stove, and you collect and prepare all the various food ingredients and combine them in your vessel. This accumulation is like gathering the accumulation of merit. Once you have all of these things in place, then you start the fire, the stove heats up, and you are ready to cook. This is like guru yoga. Having said that, it is essential that these practices be approached in that same order.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, can realization happen during thinking?

RINPOCHE: Initially you think and then meditate. Gradually, without necessarily trying very hard to bring it about, the thinking will decrease over time, and eventually realization should arise. The actions of hearing and thinking go no farther than hearing and thinking.

Actual realization must be produced through meditation. As long as conceptual thoughts have not been eliminated, nonconceptual wisdom cannot arise. In other words, that which is conceptual cannot be nonconceptual. *Conceptual* and *nonconceptual* are opposite in meaning. Conceptual thought obscures or conceals nonconceptual wisdom. As long as conceptual thoughts have not been exhausted, nonconceptual wisdom will not arise.

STUDENT: Aren't thoughts also empty?

RINPOCHE: We might say they are empty. What do you think thoughts are like; how do you describe your thoughts, your thinking?

STUDENT: What do you mean, how do I describe it?

RINPOCHE: Just say whatever you know about thoughts.

STUDENT: I understand that thoughts are empty, so therefore isn't it possible to realize emptiness through thinking, during thinking?

RINPOCHE: Who is thinking that thoughts are empty? You see, it is not the case that we don't understand this idea. We arrive at the essential point here by examining the inner dimension of awareness. To that extent, the problem is not simply, "I don't understand thoughts." In terms of the essential nature of thoughts, there is no awareness of them being one way or another at all. Ordinarily we are thoroughly involved with external things as if they truly exist in reality, and the reaction of constantly thinking of them in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, has a detrimental effect on us. In the essential nature of thoughts there is no conceptual understanding in terms of "It is this" or

“It is not this.” That absence of conceptual understanding itself is the true reality.

To consider this from another angle: We see forms with our eyes. Right now I am seeing you and you are seeing me, very clearly. We see each other, but who or what is it that is seeing? Try to look at your eye with your eye — what does it look like? On the basis of such investigations, things do not simply cease to exist as mere appearances in terms of their conventional definitions or characteristics. When we say something about the mind such as, “It is not established in reality,” we are just using words. To maintain ideas such as, “I have thoughts” or “The eye sees through itself” without subjecting them to further examination is a very strong habitual tendency. Every time you think thoughts like, “This is real,” “This exists,” and so on, you are involved in fixation. For that reason, until this propensity is no more, you will not completely realize that thoughts have no intrinsic reality.

What we are dealing with here is a literal understanding. With only an understanding of words, an idea like, “Oh, things do not really exist” can lead to all kinds of assumptions. Taking such ideas for granted will not be of benefit, but will only reinforce habitual tendencies. Only through repeatedly and continually practicing meditation over time will you come to see with increasing clarity that things have no intrinsic reality,

and in the process authentic wisdom will also arise in greater and greater degrees.

STUDENT: Why is realization always spontaneous?

RINPOCHE: When we speak of “spontaneous” or “effortless” realization, we are basically using a metaphor for the purpose of discussion, because we are talking about realization while we are not yet realized ourselves. To illustrate what spontaneous realization is like, I will give you an analogy. If you place a mirror so that a city is reflected in it, all the details of the city’s reflection appear in their entirety, instantaneously, within the mirror. You do not first see one building, then another, followed by colors, and then shapes, and so on — everything appears simultaneously. Since this reflection automatically happens when the appearance of the city and the mirror come into contact with each other, no effort is required at all. Effortless realization is exactly like the analogy suggests: it is complete and includes all the utmost qualities.

Your questions are good, and they show that you have been thinking carefully about these things, which are indeed difficult to know how to describe.

The Hook of Compassion: Visualizations to Guide the Dead

This chapter of *Mountain Dharma* is aimed at benefiting beings who have died by liberating them from the bardo state into the omniscient state of awakening. It describes the power and strength of great beings' compassion as being like a hook that can liberate bardo beings into that omniscient state.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins by paying homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, whose knowledge and wisdom is as vast and limitless as the sky. The aspirations of buddhas and bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings and their compassion toward all sentient beings is also vast and unlimited. These instructions are so powerful and beneficial that they are like the thunder in summer, which can be heard clearly by all beings. They are also very effective, like ambrosia that quenches the thirst of the beings suffering in samsara. Having exalted the awakened beings and bodhisattvas as well as their compassion and instructions, Karma Chakme makes the aspiration, "May currents of ambrosia rain down, dispelling the tormenting heat of samsara for sentient beings."

Buddha Shakyamuni presented the four classes of tantra at the great Vajrasana, the abode of awakening itself. Of these four classes, the highest is **anuttara yoga tantra**. According to anuttara yoga tantra, the practice of visualization is to be done in a manner that is “complete in the instant of recollection.” This means that in the highest level of tantra, when you are practicing the **generation stage** visualization of any deity, such as Avalokiteshvara or Amitabha, rather than developing the visualization in a sequence, you become that deity instantaneously. The analogy is like looking at a mirror; your reflected image does not unfold gradually in steps, but rather it automatically appears in its entirety in an instant.

All doubts are to be abandoned regarding this approach to deity meditation. Some people think that anuttara yoga tantra is not really as effective and beneficial as it is purported to be. Such doubts are not only unnecessary but also obstructive, and therefore they should be eliminated. As a result of our accumulation of merit and our observation of moral discipline in previous lifetimes, we have obtained a precious human existence. It is considered to be precious because a human life is the ideal tool with which to attain buddhahood. However this precious quality depends on whether you fully utilize this tool in order to attain buddhahood or if you fail to make use of the opportunity and allow it to be lost. While it is described as a precious human existence,

at the same time one should remember that it can disappear as easily as last night's dream. It is not permanent and will not last forever. The impermanent nature of this human existence, as well as its great value, should therefore be recognized because in a moment it can all be lost.

Once that precious human existence is lost, the deceased individual proceeds to wander in the bardo and undergo an experience of ceaseless fear. This means that all kinds of frightening experiences characteristic to the bardo — such as fear of the sounds you are hearing that you have never heard before, and fear of the visions you are seeing that you have never seen before — will continue uninterrupted until you either take rebirth or achieve liberation from the bardo state. There is also the danger of falling into any of the three abysses. The three abysses correspond to the hell realms, the preta realm, and the **animal realm**. Whether the person who passed away was a family member or a friend, it is very important to protect and guide them so that you can prevent them from falling into the abysses of the lower realms.

Sutrayana Method of Benefiting Beings in the Bardo State

In order to assist beings in the bardo, especially those whom you knew personally, you practice as follows: When you exhale your breath, think that all your merit, happiness, and the roots of all the virtue you have accumulated are dedicated in particular to the deceased person and in general to all beings in the bardo state. This dedicated merit, goodness, and virtue in the form of light radiates outward to those beings, eliminating the causes of their being in the bardo, including all obscurations and negative karma. As you inhale, think that all of their wrongdoing, negative karma, and obscurations are drawn back into your own body with the breath and then dissolve into you. In this way you help bardo beings become free of all suffering, misfortune, defilements, and negative karma. This particular means of benefiting beings in the bardo state is called “taking and sending,” and is done in accordance with the Sutrayana.

Tantrayana Methods of Benefiting Beings in the Bardo State

The Tantrayana methods of benefiting beings in the bardo are to be done according to the anuttara yoga tantra as described earlier. One technique is as follows: complete in the instant of recollection, visualize yourself as the buddha Vairochana. The emphasis here is placed on the instantaneous quality of the visualization; in an instant you are simply transformed into Vairochana. There is no gradual development of yourself into Vairochana. It is accomplished in an instant like a reflection appearing in a mirror — the moment you come into range of the mirror, your complete reflection appears clearly. This visualization should be generated in the same way.

In speaking of Vairochana as one of the five buddhas appearing in sambhogakaya form, you might wonder how it is feasible for an ordinary human being to really identify with such a perfect, awakened being. The affliction of ignorance is present within all sentient beings. As long as ignorance has not been transformed into its pure aspect, we relate to it as a poison. Once transformed, however, the pure aspect of ignorance is none other than the wisdom of the expanse of reality, and the display of that wisdom takes the form of the buddha Vairochana. He is the pure wisdom aspect of the impure affliction of ignorance.

We all possess this inherent potential to become Vairochana, and therefore when you visualize yourself as him, you are not creating something that is not there to begin with. Visualize yourself as Vairochana in sambhogakaya form, seated on a throne supported by snow lions. Chakme Rinpoche explains that since this is anuttara yoga tantra, it is not necessary to supplicate or invite the jnanasattvas to come merge into the samayasattva because the jnanasattvas and the samayasattva are understood to be primordially inseparable. As Vairochana, visualize a white syllable HUM in your heart center. The mantra of Vairochana encircles the HUM in a clockwise direction. From the mantra syllables surrounding the HUM in the center, five-colored light rays radiate. They fill your body and then shine forth from the point between your eyebrows. The five-colored light rays penetrate the deceased person, as well as all sentient beings of the three realms who have died and may be experiencing the bardo — a limitless number of beings.

By performing this visualization, the three or **five poisons** that would otherwise serve as the causes of rebirth in samsara and especially in lower realms are eliminated. The three poisons are desire, hatred, and bewilderment; if we speak of five poisons, we add pride and jealousy to those three. However enumerated, think that all types of mental afflictions are being purified by the light rays as you recite the mantra of Vairochana. After

purifying all beings in the bardo state, especially those beings that you know, the light rays finally return and dissolve back into your heart center. This method is concordant with the formal visualization description for Vairochana given by the son of the victors, Asanga, and its usage is common to all systems.

This same technique can also be implemented with the other buddhas of the five families. In the case of Buddha Akshobhya, you transform yourself into Akshobhya, complete and clear in the instant of recollection. This can be done either in the sambhogakaya buddha form or in the nirmanakaya buddha form (like Buddha Shakyamuni). Use whichever visualization you prefer.

Visualize yourself seated on a throne supported by elephants. The deep-blue syllable HUM is standing on a lotus and full-moon disk in your heart center, surrounded by the dharani of Akshobhya. The dharani encircles the HUM in a clockwise direction, but it is not turning. In the same manner described in the Vairochana visualization, light rays radiate from the mantra syllables surrounding the **seed syllable** — in this case, deep-blue light rays. As before, the light rays travel outward and penetrate the innumerable beings of the **six realms** that are in the bardo state, especially penetrating the being on whom you are concentrating. Think that the light immediately purifies them of all karmic obscurations and defilements. When the

sun shines on frost in the morning, it makes the frost thaw and disappear. In the same way, as soon as the light rays shine on the beings in the bardo, their karmic obscurations and defilements are eliminated in an instant.

Meditating with this visualization in mind, recite the dharani of Akshobhya, which begins KAM KANI KAM KANI. You have to be familiar with the dharani because it is not given here in its entirety. For now you should just remember that it is the long mantra of Akshobhya. This visualization technique is included in the formal visualization descriptions for Akshobhya given by the Fourth Shamar Rinpoche Chengawa Chökyi Drakpa and others.

Next we turn to Vajrasattva. In an instant visualize yourself transformed into Vajrasattva. The details of the visualization — his form, scepters, and ornaments — are the same as those in the Vajrasattva practice found in the preliminaries. This should be familiar to many of you. The difference between the ngondro Vajrasattva and the Vajrasattva presented here is not one of outer appearance but rather inner appearance. Within your body visualized as Vajrasattva, the forty-two peaceful deities appear in your heart center; the pure vidyadhara deities in your throat; and the fifty-eight blood-drinking wrathful deities inside the crown of your head. All together, the one hundred sacred deity aspects are present in the heart, throat, and crown

areas. All of them appear instantly, as clearly and vividly as a reflection in a mirror.

Having adorned yourself internally in this way with the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities and vidyadharas, recite the **hundred-syllable mantra** of Vajrasattva. As you recite the mantra, multicolored light rays radiate outward from the forty-two peaceful deities in your heart center, penetrating the deceased person who is the specific object of your visualization, as well as all beings of the six realms that are in need. The light rays radiating from the peaceful deities in your heart surround these deceased beings, who have been experiencing the intolerable fear and suffering of the bardo, and envelop them in a protective aura, purifying their negative karma and defilements. The aura of light then carries them like a shooting star directly to the pure realm of Sukhavati, and once there they are immediately established in liberation.

Having meditated in this manner, you then recite other mantras. First you recite OM VAJRASATTVA HUM, the short mantra of Vajrasattva. Next you recite TADYATHA HANE HANE ARNO LE MITAYE GURUYE VAJRASATTVA HUM SVAHA. This is done in connection with your successfully establishing all bardo beings — especially the one on whom you are focusing — immediately in the pure realm of Sukhavati. This instruction

comes from the Sky Dharma cycle of treasure teachings revealed by Mingyur Dorje.

Further Options for Practice

At this point the text gives the practitioner further options. As a specific yidam is not mentioned here, you can visualize yourself as whichever yidam you prefer. Hooklike rays of light radiate from your heart as the visualized yidam and travel to the realm of the sixarmed Mahakala — the Cool Grove charnel ground in the southeast. There the six-armed Mahakala, blue-black in color, is seated atop a gigantic sandalwood tree. The hooked rays of light invoke him and cause him to appear in front of you.

Above the crown of Mahakala's head, visualize the buddha Akshobhya in nirmanakaya form. This nirmanakaya form is the simple aspect of the visualization because Akshobhya appears without a begging bowl or ornaments — he is simply seated in vajra posture with his left hand in the gesture of even placement and his right hand in the earth-touching gesture. Blue rays of light radiate from Akshobhya's body, purifying the wrongdoing and obscurations of deceased beings.

While meditating in this way, verbally or mentally recite the following supplication, “In the guru and protector inseparable, the deceased respectfully take refuge. Please shut the gates to rebirth in the six states for all deceased beings with whom there is a connection. Guide them toward Sukhavati.” Think that the person who has died is making this supplication along with you.

As you do this, think of whomever might have had any connection with the guru, regardless of what the connection might have been. In this context, since you are the person doing the visualization practice, you will be better able to benefit the deceased if you previously had a connection with them. For example, if the person was a friend or relative, the physical connection you shared will enhance the possibility of them receiving the benefit available through this method. The essential point about the guru benefiting beings in the bardo is that once a connection has been formed, regardless of whether the connection is positive or negative, this amplifies the capacity for the guru to really help those beings.

Ordinarily we would think that if there is any kind of negative connection with the guru, it will have a harmful effect in some way. If a student does not get along with the guru, perhaps even becomes angry and fights with him, then unless these actions are purified the student will carry the accumulated negative karma of those actions along with them when they die and pass into

the bardo state. Nevertheless, regardless of the overtly negative quality of the connection, due to this connection it will still be easier for the guru to help the student than it would be without any connection at all.

In Tibetan tradition, sometimes the guru performing the ceremony is given an offering of wealth or possessions that held sentimental value for the deceased person. Sometimes people do not understand why such a material offering is necessary. By offering the material wealth or possessions of the deceased person to the guru, you build a connection that helps the guru to more easily purify and liberate that being from the bardo. Therefore it is very important to establish such connections, whether positive or negative, or in the form of material offerings.

With regard to all deceased beings with whom there is any connection, think that in response to this supplication the guru shuts the gateways to rebirth in the six states of existence and guides those beings to the pure realm of Sukhavati. The significance of invoking the six-armed Makahala is that the six arms represent the ability to block the gates to rebirth as any of the six types of beings. With that understanding, visualize limitless emanations identical to your visualization of yourself as your yidam, all producing the sounds of HUM, PHAT, and the damaru everywhere. These sounds drive away the entities

who prevent beings from achieving liberation in the bardo. Such obstructing entities could be evil spirits in pursuit of the deceased, or beings to whom past karmic debts are owed. When all entities that prevent liberation have been driven away, all bardo beings — whether they have the aforementioned connections with the guru or not — are secured by the lasso thrown by the six-armed Mahakala. Think that all beings in the bardo without exception are included within the lasso, even those beings who do not feel particularly compelled to escape from the bardo. Visualize all of them being extricated from the bardo state and established in the realm of Sukhavati. This happens very quickly. You visualize this like a great flock of thousands of birds flying together, along with the sound that such a flock of birds would make.

Having visualized that, recite the mantra OM VAJRA MAHAKALA KSHIM KSHETRA VIGHANAN VINA YAKA HUM HUM PHAT. After that, conclude with the mantra OM PADME PADME PADMA SAMBHAVE MAHA SUKHAVATI GHACCHANTU SVAHA. This is a shorter, simplified version of this particular practice, extracted by Karma Chakme from the text of the Mahakala sadhana.

Visualization Practices Of Various Deities

The previous instructions constitute the outer level of secret mantra visualization methods. What usually follows at this point are the inner methods, which I will not present at this time. Karma Chakme explains that it is not permissible to publicly teach the inner practices to those who have not first received all of the necessary empowerments and reading transmissions. If I were to present these teachings in the absence of those conditions, it would be of no benefit at all to you, and therefore there is no point in doing so.

We will continue, however, to discuss the visualization practices of various deities. This will be especially beneficial in the future because it will enable you to understand the possibilities of the visualization practices given in this retreat manual.

Even when the person you wish to benefit cannot be physically present, regardless of whether they are alive or deceased, or even if their exact name is unavailable, you can still be of benefit to that person. The motivation to help not only that person but all beings is facilitated by any kind of connection — positive, negative, or neutral — that you have built with them, and this is true regardless of whether they are dead or alive. In fact, you

have established such connections with innumerable beings from beginningless time until now.

In order to benefit those beings, visualize yourself as a deity of your own choosing — whichever deity you feel comfortable and confident in visualizing. Here the text suggests Jinasagara (in Tibetan, Gyalwa Gyamtso), which is the red form of Chenrezik, or Guhyasamaja. Using Jinasagara, for example, visualize yourself as the deity without ornaments, but clothed in fine, heavenly silks, standing above the crowns of all beings, living or deceased, with whom you have made any connection from beginningless time up to and throughout this present life. With yourself as Jinasagara, in your heart center visualize the syllable HRI radiating a very powerful light. In your right hand there is a crystal rosary, and in your left a vase filled with ambrosia. Visualizing yourself as Jinasagara in this way, standing above the crowns of all beings with whom you have a connection, pour the ambrosia from the vase. As you do so, think that the negative karma of all those beings is washed away and purified while the light radiating from the syllable HRI enters their hearts, immediately transforming each of them into Jinasagara, or Red Chenrezik.

With that visualization, recite the seven-syllable mantra. The seven-syllable mantra that Karma Chakme usually refers to in this way is OM MANI PADME HUM HRI, which is the

familiar six-syllable mantra with the syllable HRI added at the end. As you recite this mantra, try to maintain a very precise, clear visualization of innumerable sentient beings. Along with the recitation of the seven-syllable mantra, also recite the same mantra with an extension added to the end that further helps by including all beings in the aspiration to benefit beings. The mantra extension is ARAPACHA MITA HRIDAYA VAHA. The full mantra then becomes OM MANI PADME HUM HRI ARAPACHA MITA HRIDAYA SVAHA.

The number of mantra recitations to be done is related to the purity, clarity, and precision of your visualization of sentient beings. If you are able to include in your visualization innumerable sentient beings while you recite the mantra just once, then that one mantra recitation is effectively multiplied into innumerable recitations. On the other hand, if you recite the mantra once with a vague, unclear visualization, the effect is simply that of one mantra recitation. The greater result, which is based on the clarity and precision of your visualization, translates into the increased showering of benefit on all sentient beings. This is a tradition that was developed through the second Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, in which there is an emphasis on clarity of visualization and consciously thinking of countless sentient beings.

There is another visualization method called “churning the depths of samsara.” Visualize yourself as Thousand-Armed Chenrezik, complete in the instant of recollection. From your body, light radiates throughout a billion realms, and you multiply yourself into a billion identical Thousand-Armed Chenreziks. The radiated light that pervades those realms transforms each being it falls on into Four-Armed Chenrezik. Then recite the long dharani of Thousand-Armed Eleven-Headed Chenrezik found in the *nyungne* sadhana, beginning with NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA NAMO ARYA JNANA; or you can recite the six-syllable mantra, OM MANI PADME HUM. As you recite either the long mantra or the short one, think that you are the chant master leading all sentient beings throughout the entire universe. Think that all beings follow and join in your recitation, causing all of the billions of world realms and pure buddha realms to resonate with the tremendous sound of the mantra recited in unison.

As in the other visualizations, think that you are benefiting all living beings, and especially those beings with whom you have made some kind of connection — whether positive, negative, or neutral — from beginningless time until now, including beings that are dead and those that are still alive. While reciting the mantra, think that all of their obscurations are purified, and that through this purification the transformation of each of these beings into Four-Armed Chenrezik is stabilized. For this

practice, keep in mind that there is no dissolution stage. Once the transformation of all beings into FourArmed Chenrezik has been completed, simply rest your mind in emptiness.

It is through the purity and clarity of your visualization that you have transformed all sentient beings throughout billions of world realms into Four-Armed Chenrezik. For example, if you are able to recite the six-syllable mantra 108 times with the utmost degree of purity, clarity, and precision in your visualization, it is actually possible to accomplish Chenrezik on completion of those 108 recitations alone. With a perfectly clear visualization of countless beings, by force of multiplication the 108 mantra recitations could effectively become billions, trillions, and beyond.

The possibility of accomplishing Chenrezik in this manner is mentioned in the practice of the Great Compassionate One, a tradition that traces back to King Songtsen Gampo, who was regarded as an emanation of Chenrezik. It is found in the treasure teachings and is also commonly practiced in both the New Translation and Old Translation schools of Buddhism in Tibet. This practice is known as the “samadhi that churns the depths of samsara” because the practitioner transforms every sentient being in samsara into Chenrezik. In doing so, you maintain the awareness and conviction that all sound is the six-syllable mantra and all visible forms are Chenrezik.

Finally, in order to further benefit sentient beings, while maintaining the same visualization and leaving the mind at rest in the state of meditation that regards all beings as Chenrezik and all sound as his mantra, you recite another mantra three times. This mantra begins with USHNISHANI. Through the power of saying this mantra three times, think that you have established in Sukhavati every sentient being with whom you have any connection from all previous lifetimes.

These techniques of meditation and visualization to benefit both living beings and beings in the bardo are accepted and practiced throughout the new and old Tantrayana traditions as well as the Sutrayana tradition. In short, these methods contain the very essence of the techniques for benefiting others found in both sutra and tantra.

Karma Chakme explains how these teachings came to be included in written form here. Knowing that these practices would be of great benefit to all beings, he himself had previously practiced them for a long time and presented them to others accordingly. However he never actually had them written down until an important official named Mipham Draklu died, and his surviving family requested these special practices to be performed on his behalf. While Karma Chakme was complying with this request, his main disciple, Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, asked if he

could transcribe the teachings. As a result of permitting Lama Tsondru Gyamtso to do so, Karma Chakme has made these teachings more widely available to others.

This was written down during the Year of the Wood Snake, on the first day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar, during a break between evening sessions. Although there are no contradictions or errors in the text, if any were to be found, Karma Chakme confesses them to the deities. Those who have doubts about the accuracy of its content should feel free to consult the relevant sutras and tantras in order to validate these instructions. Karma Chakme closes this chapter with the aspiration, “May virtue serve to promote the welfare of all sentient beings.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: I would assume that somebody like me could do a practice of the sutra tradition, such as **tong len**, to benefit others. I wonder if we are in a position to attempt to do the anuyoga practices, or are these something that we could request a lama or rinpoche to do on behalf of a friend or family member in the bardo?

RINPOCHE: Ordinary practitioners can also implement this practice, in particular by visualizing themselves as Chenrezik. In this case as before, the visualization is generated instantaneously.

In your heart center, on a lotus and full-moon disk, visualize a white syllable HRI surrounded by the six-syllable mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. While visualizing yourself as Chenrezik, five-colored light rays radiate outward from the six-syllable mantra and the HRI, striking the beings of the six realms that are in the bardo state, in particular your objective. The objective is the person for whom you are specifically doing the practice, such as someone in your family or an individual you know who has died. As you focus on your main objective, also include all other bardo beings by directing the five-colored light so it shines on them as well. The power and strength of the light purifies the negative karma and defilements of the beings in the bardo. As a result of the purification, think that you are able to liberate all of them into the state of nirvana.

It is fine for you to do this visualization. As was discussed earlier in the context of visualizing yourself as your choice of yidam, since Chenrezik embodies the compassion of all awakened beings, anyone can practice in this manner using him as the yidam.

STUDENT: Using this technique, would we then recite the six-syllable mantra? Where do you place your mind during the recitation of the mantra, and how do you conclude the practice?

RINPOCHE: While you are reciting the six-syllable mantra, you can mentally cultivate compassion toward the beings in the bardo state, particularly the beings or persons whom you have been concentrating on. With the compassion that you develop while reciting OM MANI PADME HUM, visualize the emanated light from the syllable HRI and the six-syllable mantra shining on the beings in the bardo, purifying their negative karma and mental defilements. Visualize the light purifying them through the energy and strength of your compassion.

The conclusion here does not include a **completion stage** as in other practices where the visualization dissolves into you. Once the purification and liberation have been completed in your mind, simply rest your mind in emptiness without any dissolution.

STUDENT: I have been thinking about this question for quite a while. I cannot quite understand that thoughts are created from the mind and are therefore empty. When we do our practice, such as Chenrezik or Tara, and we visualize the deity in front of us and we think that we are getting all the blessings and so forth, this is also created from the mind and is therefore empty.

Are there any explanations regarding the relationship between the practice itself and the thought that it is real yet empty? It is like a yes and no.

RINPOCHE: You are right. You have to make a distinction. You have to understand that the ultimate nature of thoughts is empty, but you nevertheless have to make a choice and attempt to strengthen and reinforce positive thoughts and get rid of negative thoughts, even though their ultimate nature is the same.

The distinction that you have brought up in your question is the distinction between the accumulation of merit, which is founded on the fostering of good thoughts and the elimination of bad thoughts, and the accumulation of wisdom, which is achieved by the recognition of all thoughts, both good and bad, as empty. From the point of view of the accumulation of wisdom, we would say that the accumulation of merit is somewhat defiled because it involves at least some token reification of the good. Nevertheless we do need to accumulate merit, so we have to engage in that reification.

Ultimately what you want is to simultaneously accumulate both merit and wisdom. This is the best type of practice, and this is done when you accumulate merit by doing meritorious things such as inviting deities in front of you, prostrating to them,

presenting offerings, and so on, and you simultaneously accumulate wisdom by realizing their nonexistence. This is something we usually cannot do. In the beginning, we cannot practice the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom at the same time. We can only practice them in alternation. The reason why we cannot practice them at the same time is because of the apparent contradiction that you brought up in your question.

Usually we first gather the accumulation of merit. While we are doing that, we visualize the deity as actually existing; we visualize that we are actually presenting these offerings, and so on. By investing the visualization and the practice with that much reality, we accumulate merit. At the end of that period of the practice, we dissolve the deity into ourselves and we meditate on the true nature, which is beyond existence and nonexistence. In that way, we gather the accumulation of wisdom as well.

Ultimately it is best if you can simultaneously view the deity as both actually present and nonexistent, and therefore accumulate merit and wisdom at the same time, but that can only be done when you have some realization of the unity of appearance and emptiness. Until that happens, we have to practice the two alternately.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am trying to understand whether I have perhaps been thinking about the purification in the Vajrasattva practice in more of a Hinayana view. I see the expelling of defilements or **kleshas** as getting rid of them, as if Vajrasattva is the exterminator that I am counting on to get rid of the pests, and although they go into the earth, they are not transformed. I can think that maybe the transformation to wisdom takes place in the completion stage, but is there a more transformative way that I should be thinking about this rather than just as klesha removal?

RINPOCHE: There is no problem with that whatsoever. There is nothing lacking; it is not an inferior view or excessively dualistic. As you implied in your question, there is a distinction between the generation stage and the completion stage, and because the generation stage is conceptual, there is always going to be a little bit of dualism in it. That is part of the process, and it is acceptable. It is not regarded as a problem.

What makes the practice free from being narrow in the sense of being Hinayana is the motivation with which the practice is done. This motivation is established at the beginning of every session through your generation of bodhichitta, along with going for refuge.

STUDENT: When one dies, if one was in the bardo and then is reborn, does language play a part in where one takes rebirth? For example, if one spoke Tibetan, would one be born into a family that spoke that language? Also, with regard to Sukhavati, does one have a body there? What language is spoken there, or is there some other form of communication that we do not have in this realm?

RINPOCHE: As far as the relationship between your mother tongue and rebirth, it would seem that if you are reborn in a place where the language you spoke in your previous life is used, you would probably learn to speak and read more quickly because of your habit from the previous life. You should not think that the habit of language is the predominant or foremost factor in determining rebirth. Other factors are far more dominant.

As far as Sukhavati goes, because of the vast number of beings that have been born there and the vast number of languages they have spoken, it seems there is a problem and communication within the realm is increasingly difficult. That was a joke! Actually, in traditional descriptions of Sukhavati, there is no description as to what language is used for communication. The general expectation of Buddhists has probably been Sanskrit simply because Sanskrit is considered to be a divine language and it is the original language of the Mahayana teachings. Nevertheless

it makes no difference because all beings born in Sukhavati have unlimited supercognition, so regardless of what language they were addressed in, they would understand it even if they had not heard a single word of that language before. Therefore the question simply does not arise.

With regard to the substance of matter in Sukhavati, the matter that forms physical bodies, the environment, and so forth, it is very, very hard to define precisely. In the traditional descriptions, including the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*, there are several things that make it sound as though the environment is composed of actual substance — not merely light, but actual substance. For example, it says that the trees are resplendent with flowers, fruits, and birds; the ground is made of gold and jewels; when you want silken pillows they are present; when you want divine food it is present; and so forth. All of this implies that there is a degree of substantiality to the things that appear in Sukhavati, not unlike what we now know or experience. Looking at it that way, you would be tempted to say that the substance in Sukhavati is more than simply light.

On the other hand, there is an equal amount of evidence in the traditional descriptions that makes it sound like the environment is not composed of anything more than light. For example, it says that the food arises just as you desire, but it leaves no residue

or sediment in your body to be urinated or excreted. There is no sickness, and there are none of the frailties or imperfections that a coarse physical embodiment would necessitate. Therefore because Sukhavati is a state where there appears to be some of the qualities of substance, but only the pleasant ones with no taint of suffering or displeasure of any kind, it is very difficult to say whether the matter in Sukhavati is substantial or not.

STUDENT: What about Shambhala in this regard, is it a realm or place? Is it more like this realm or more like Sukhavati? Also, are Shambhala and **Dewachen** the same place?

RINPOCHE: No, they are not the same place. According to legend, Shambhala is considered a nirmanakaya realm, which means that it is not a completely pure realm like Sukhavati. It is mixed. There would appear to be human society there: a monarch, ministers, subjects, and so on, all with varying degrees of realization. Those surrounding the monarch who are realized vidhyadharas would naturally have miraculous abilities and so on, but it is not a pure realm in the way that Sukhavati is.

Presently Shambhala is said to be a specific place or continent within this universe, but otherwise I do not really know much about it. On the other hand, Sukhavati is a dharmakaya pure realm and is therefore completely different.

STUDENT: It is my understanding that Shambhala is here on this planet. Is this correct?

RINPOCHE: I have no idea whether it is on this planet or not, but based on what I studied in the description of the kingdom of Shambhala in the *Kalachakra Tantra*, I think it is probably off this planet.

STUDENT: Does that mean it is really off this planet, or in another dimension on this planet? My understanding is that when times get really, really bad on this planet, the rigden king will put his foot on the planet. Could it be in a different zone of this general planet earth?

RINPOCHE: I do not think that it is a different karmic realm. I think it is a different place in the realm that we inhabit; in other words, it is a place that we could measure scientifically, but it is not on this planet.

I say this because in the traditional descriptions of what will happen when the twenty-fifth rigden comes to this planet, it sounds as though this entire planet will have become one very aggressive society. This society will discover Shambhala, invade it, and wage war against it. In response to this, the army of Shambhala will defend itself, win the war, and conquer this planet

as well. The way it is put, it sounds as though the warfare waged by the humans will be technological in nature, like the way we wage war now, and the response by the Shambhalian will not be technological but magical. They will win, and after they have won the Buddhadharma will reappear on this planet as well.

STUDENT: Are you saying that this could be like the moon or another planet or something like that?

RINPOCHE: It is very hard to know. Do not forget that when these predictions were made, there was no language to describe modern technology or the modern notion of cosmology, and so it is not put in that way. What is recorded is that at some point in human history, we will have been gathered into one totalitarian society with a unified and repressive world government, which will conquer everything on this planet and have all of the technology of our species at its disposal. They will look away from this planet with a telescope (I am interpreting a bit, but it sounds as though they are talking about something like a telescope) and they will detect Shambhala. Because they have conquered the whole planet, they will think that they have conquered everything, so when they detect another inhabited world, they will naturally prepare to invade it since this is the tenor of their regime. When they do attack, Shambhala will win using their defensive warfare. Because this is not expressed in

terms of solar systems and galaxies and so on, there is no way to know how far away Shambhala actually is, and therefore no way to know what technological means will allow us to find them.

STUDENT: The description of the rigden king is that he had a metal wheel as opposed to a silver or gold wheel, so it sounded as though he was like the king of a planet more than a whole solar system or something like that.

RINPOCHE: The reason that the rudrachakrin, the twenty-fifth rigden, is an iron **chakravartin** is because he is essentially equivalent to the ruler of one continent. It is a title — if you rule one continent, you are an iron chakravartin; if you rule most continents, you are a silver chakravartin; and if you rule all the continents, you are a gold chakravartin. Just because he has an iron wheel, it does not necessarily mean that he is from another planet.

STUDENT: How does that compare to a buddha? What would a buddha be in comparison? Is there any relationship in that way?

RINPOCHE: Buddhas and chakravartins are not the same thing at all. In this case, the rulers of Shambhala uphold the lineage of the Buddha's teaching of the Kalachakra in their country or in their world, and the monarchs and ministers are always attained in the practice of Kalachakra.

STUDENT: I was wondering because of the continent idea. I would imagine that the Buddha had mastered everything, not necessarily in a warlike or kinglike way, but somehow on another level, in a totally universal or cosmic way.

RINPOCHE: Maybe you are getting a little bit confused by the notion of a buddha being the presiding figure in a realm and having mastery over a realm. That is not a political thing. Buddha Shakyamuni never held political office, but this is considered to be his realm. A chakravartin is an actual monarch, the political ruler of a realm or a world.

STUDENT: With a physical body and a regular kingship such as we understand on this planet?

RINPOCHE: We are now in the seventy-ninth year of the present rigden, the present king of Shambhala. Each of them is supposed to live for one hundred years. At the age of fifty, they abdicate, and their eldest son is appointed monarch. He rules until he abdicates as described. The life span, and so the official reign, of each rigden is one hundred years. We are in the seventy-ninth year of the reign of the twenty-second; rudrachakrin will be the twenty-fifth, so that gives you an idea. According to the *Kalachakra*, it is about three hundred years until the war.

STUDENT: My sense of Shambhala, at least as it applies to us as individuals, is that if we perfect our own lives and are on the bodhisattva path, Shambhala could be in our home, in our relationships, and we could be in harmony with that principle. Is that a misreading?

RINPOCHE: If you vanquish all mental afflictions without exception through the bodhisattva path, that is the ultimate Shambhala. The greatest realm of Shambhala is the state of buddhahood.

STUDENT: Is Dewachen right here but we cannot see it because we have the karma of existing in the **human realm**?

RINPOCHE: There are two views as to whether Sukhavati is an external place that is different or distinct from this place. The presentation in the sutras, such as the *Amitabha Sutra*, is that Sukhavati is actually somewhere else. The way it is presented in the sutras is that it is west of this world, countless worlds away, and somewhat in an upward direction. This is the way it is explained: Sukhavati is situated according to whatever that description means and it is separate from this world. Chakme Rinpoche explains it that way in his *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*, a text that is essentially based on the sutras. He says that you cannot see Sukhavati with the naked eye, but you can

see it with the eye of wisdom. Thus according to the sutras, Sukhavati is out there somewhere, somewhere specific. The point of view that Sukhavati is external is presented for those individuals for whom buddha nature is largely unrevealed.

There is also the point of view of tantra or mantra, which is found elsewhere in the writings of Chakme Rinpoche and Namcho Mingyur Dorje. They teach that wherever you are is Sukhavati in its true nature, but you fail to see this because of your obscurations. Because this place is Sukhavati, it is appropriate to visualize yourself as Chenrezik in the presence of Amitabha as though you were in Sukhavati, and this is because you are actually there, although you cannot see it because of your karmic obscurations.

The view you take depends on your karmic residue and the resulting natural tendency to view things one way or the other. If you adopt the view that wherever you are is really Sukhavati, and that you fail to see it as it is only because of your karmic and other obscurations, then you are adopting the view of mantra or Vajrayana. If you adopt the view that this world is inferior and impure and therefore Sukhavati must be somewhere external to this world, then you are adopting the view of sutra.

From the point of view of mantra, it is definitely taught that the realms — such as the realms of Sukhavati and the realms of all five buddhas — are not external. This is because it is taught in Vajrayana that your five aggregates are actually the five buddhas and are therefore within your own body. However because the sutras are taught for those who cannot conceive of these pure realms as existing within themselves, it is usually taught that the realms of the five buddhas are external and are therefore found far above us, to the west, to the east, and so on. These two views or presentations, the external and the internal, are taught in correspondence with different levels of accumulated merit and different levels of wisdom.

STUDENT: When I hear the prayer to Sukhavati, I get a little bit of a feeling that it is quite material, and I wonder how a being in such a pleasant place could generate bodhichitta and help beings when even the words *sin* and *suffering* do not exist there?

RINPOCHE: This is because even though there is no suffering or wrongdoing in that realm and therefore the inhabitants undergo no suffering, their boundless supercognition allows them to observe all of the suffering and wrongdoing elsewhere, which inspires them to develop compassion, to generate bodhichitta, and to dispatch emanations that perform benefit for beings in other realms.

STUDENT: Is wishing to be reborn in Dewachen somehow inconsistent with the bodhisattva vow? Maybe this is my own misunderstanding about the nature of the commitment of the bodhisattva vow.

RINPOCHE: It really depends on the exact formation of the bodhisattva vow when someone takes it. In general, if one had to say yes or no, then no, the desire to be reborn in Sukhavati does not contradict the generation of bodhichitta.

Nevertheless your question does make sense because among the different types of bodhisattvas, the most courageous is called the “shepherdlike bodhisattva,” who generates bodhichitta as the aspiration that among all beings they themselves will be the very last to be liberated and attain buddhahood. While this is the most pleasant-sounding form of bodhichitta, it is extraordinarily rare, even among bodhisattvas. Such a bodhisattva would prefer to remain in the worst situation, benefiting others until all other beings are liberated.

Most bodhisattvas wish to attain buddhahood as quickly as possible so they can thereafter liberate all beings, which is based on the idea that after their buddhahood they will have the means to do so effectively. If that is the style in which you have generated bodhichitta, then seeking rebirth in Sukhavati

is most appropriate because once you are reborn there, which is not difficult to achieve, then from within Sukhavati and without difficulty to yourself, you will be able to observe directly through supercognition the needs of others and know how to satisfy those needs and bring others to liberation. Further, because you undergo no suffering yourself, you will never become fatigued or discouraged by the effort of benefiting others, and therefore you can be extraordinarily effective in benefiting them.

STUDENT: I may have misunderstood this. Does that mean that if one attains buddhahood in Sukhavati, one does not come back?

RINPOCHE: Once you are born in Sukhavati, you do not actually have to take rebirth anywhere else because you have the miraculous ability to go to any other realm. This includes the pure realms of the other five buddhas. You receive teachings and so on from them and you also benefit beings through emanations without your having to take rebirth anywhere else.

STUDENT: Does “through emanations” mean that as a buddha one can send emanations to earth, to this realm?

RINPOCHE: Sure. This is why we say this in the aspirations: “Having been reborn in Sukhavati, may I attain buddhahood there and dispatch emanations throughout the ten directions.”

When you actually achieve buddhahood, that aspiration will come true.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, do all of the emanations of a buddha share the same consciousness?

RINPOCHE: Yes and no or neither. If you mean do all the emanations of a buddha partake of the same degree of wisdom as that buddha, then the answer is yes. If you mean do they undergo all of the same experiences as the source of emanation and each other, then the answer is no. For example, all of the water in this world is the same water, but the various rivers, oceans, and lakes each have individual names.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, regarding someone who has so many kleshas and so much negative karma and absolutely no realization: you talked about going to Dewachen at the moment of death just by thinking of Amitabha, but how does that happen for someone with kleshas and negative karma?

RINPOCHE: Well, this is what makes the realm of Sukhavati and the activity of Amitabha unparalleled and unique. In general, as you implied in your question, to be reborn in a pure realm one must have purified the majority of one's obscurations. The exception to this is the realm of Sukhavati, and this is simply

because of Amitabha's unique aspiration and his therefore uniquely superior activity.

For example, generally the Buddhist tradition teaches that the most important aspiration prayer to recite liturgically is the *Aspiration of Maitreya*. This is an aspiration made by the bodhisattva *Maitreya*, and on being recited it will create a karmic connection with Maitreya. As a result, when Maitreya becomes the next Buddha — the fifth Buddha, the one after Buddha Shakyamuni — you will be born in circumstances that allow you to receive his teachings, and you will either achieve liberation under Buddha Maitreya's guidance or you will at least be well established on the path.

In the Buddhist tradition in general people emphasize the recitation of the *Aspiration of Maitreya*, but Chakme Rinpoche tells us to forget the *Aspiration of Maitreya* and instead chant the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*. His reason is that although Maitreya will indeed be the next Buddha to appear in this world, that will only happen millions of years in the future, which leaves a lot of time to suffer in cyclic existence. It is far more beneficial to pray for rebirth in Sukhavati since, as you indicated in your question, you can achieve that rebirth immediately on your death in this life, and you will not need to take rebirth in this world again or even wait for the Buddha Maitreya.

STUDENT: If you try to practice and train your mind and you do get to Dewachen, is it mostly your own state of mind at the moment of death that brings you there?

RINPOCHE: What makes rebirth in Sukhavati certain is the accumulation of the four causes of rebirth in Sukhavati. If someone accumulates these four causes, it is absolutely certain they will be reborn there. In the absence of that, if for example someone at the time of their death hears the name of Amitabha and responds with faith, or if a great teacher performs the ejection of consciousness for them, it is possible for someone to be reborn in Sukhavati, but it is uncertain. Amassing the four causes is the primary method to ensure that someone will achieve rebirth in Sukhavati.

The four causes of rebirth in Sukhavati are as follows. The first is to retain the realm in mind. Retaining the realm of Sukhavati in mind simply means to actually think that those who preside in that realm — Buddha Amitabha with his retinue of the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani, surrounded by many buddhas and bodhisattvas — are actually present. Thinking that they are actually present may involve visualizing them in the sky in front of you or, alternatively, recollecting the fact that they are actually present in the realm of Sukhavati. In either

case, acknowledging their existence and their actual presence and then supplicating them is the first cause.

The second cause is to gather the accumulation of merit and to purify obscurations. This is achieved primarily through performing the seven branches, which are found in the long *Aspiration to Rebirth in Sukhavati*: making offerings, confessing wrongdoing, rejoicing in the virtue of others, and so on.

The third cause is the generation of bodhichitta, which is forming the motivation for wishing to be reborn there by saying, “I wish to be reborn in Sukhavati so that I can bring all beings to the state of buddhahood.”

The fourth cause is to seal all of the virtue of the first three causes with the dedication and aspiration to the rebirth of yourself and all other beings in Sukhavati. According to the *Amitabha Sutra* and according to the commentaries composed by scholars and siddhas, if you generate these four causes, you will be reborn in Sukhavati.

Thunder of Mantra: The Outer Practice of a Yidam or Dakini

Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins this chapter with the Sanskrit invocation NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SARVA SIDDHI HUM. NAMO GURU is an expression of veneration addressed to the spiritual teacher, DEVA DAKINI refers to the wisdom deities, SARVA SIDDHI means “all spiritual attainments,” and HUM means “bestow.” With this invocation, Karma Chakme pays homage to the guru and expresses the wish that the guru, the devas, and the dakinis bestow the complete siddhis on himself and all sentient beings.

Regardless of whether you are concerned with the tantras of the New Translation (Sarma) schools or those of the Old Translation (Nyingma) school, the first thing you need to know is the purpose of doing these practices. It is necessary to understand the essential point of any practice as well as how to generate the visualizations correctly. Without knowing the point of the practice and its visualizations, even if you have received the necessary empowerment and reading transmission, you cannot expect to arrive at any real fruition because you lack other

necessary elements. It is therefore very important to consolidate all of these elements first.

Furthermore the higher levels of anuttara yoga tantra are presented in progressive stages of practice, known as the outer, inner, secret, and very secret or ultimate levels. With this in mind, if you really intend to achieve the fruition of the highest levels of tantra, it is necessary to perfect one stage before proceeding with the next. This means you must perfect the outer level of practice in order to continue with the inner level and so on. You cannot simply bypass the outer level and start with higher levels because there would ultimately be no fruition. Having established these conditions, we begin with an explanation of the first stage, the outer level of practice.

Outer Level of Practice

In preparation you need to have a torma called a “phuktor,” which represents the memory of your practice, and the inner offering, which refers to the kapala or skullcup. Along with the phuktor and kapala you have the seven offerings. When you have the five offerings mentioned in the text and you add the two waters (argham and padyam) as one, and gandhe (the

scented water) as another, it becomes a set of seven offerings. The higher levels of practice require much more detail than this, but the shrine offerings for the outer practice are quite simple. Having arranged the shrine accordingly, you need a damaru, a bell, and a preparatory torma in front of you. Other than that, no additional practice implements such as mandalas and so forth are necessary here.

The first thing required at the beginning of your daily session is to throw out the preparatory torma. This torma is an offering to those beings who wish to hinder or obstruct your practice, and it is made as a request that they do not trouble you. Having thrown out the preparatory torma, begin your session. In Tibetan terms, you “close your session,” which means that once you begin the sadhana, you refrain from engaging in any other activities verbally, physically, or mentally. Visualize yourself as the deity and recite the mantra until you have accumulated the desired number of mantras, then finish with the dissolution stage and conclusion. This constitutes one session.

According to the Sarma tradition, between sessions you are free to talk and verbally engage with other people. In the Nyingma tradition of tantra, you may not talk or verbally engage with anyone until you have completed the retreat in its entirety. This means, for instance, that if you are going to do a three-month

deity retreat in the Nyingma style of practice, you cannot engage verbally with anyone at all for the full duration of those three months.

At the conclusion of a day of practice, for the fourth and final session in the evening, you have a tormo representing all the visualized deities of the mandala and all buddhas, bodhisattvas, viras, and dakinis. At the end of the fourth session, if there are supports of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind present in the room where you are — supports such as statues, thangkas, and so forth — the deities all dissolve into those physical supports. If your retreat dwelling is very simple and you do not have any statues or thangkas, then all of the deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, viras, and dakinis dissolve into you.

Before you go to bed in the evening, think that the entire outer environment and all sentient beings within it dissolve into light and merge with the mandala of the **buddha field** that you have visualized. The outer mandala of the buddha field then melts into light and dissolves into the retinue of deities in the mandala. For example, if you are doing a five-deity practice, the principal deity is in the center surrounded by the other four main deities. At this point the outer mandala of the buddha field dissolves into the outer retinue of deities, who in turn dissolve into the five

central deities. They melt into light and dissolve into yourself as the main yidam in the center.

Having dissolved the entire mandala and its retinue into yourself as the main deity, your body melts into light and dissolves into the seed syllable at your heart center. The syllable then disappears from bottom to top. This is where knowing a little bit of the Tibetan language becomes important. Using the syllable HRI, for example, the body of the letter vanishes from the bottom upward into the hookshaped vowel marker (the gigu) at the top, and the gigu vanishes from the tail to the top. The analogy given describes this by saying it becomes as fine as one hundredth of the width of a hair's tip. Once it has completely disappeared, simply rest in a nonconceptual state of mind, a state free from any conceptual speculation. Do not think about good or bad, about whether or not you have completed the dissolution, or about whether you are doing it right or wrong. Resting nonconceptually in this manner is one of the best and most profound forms of **tranquillity** meditation.

As beginning practitioners, we cannot meditate on the union of the generation and completion stages because we are not able to do these things simultaneously. It is therefore necessary to repeatedly practice both the generation and completion stages again and again. This serves to build up meditative stability

through tranquillity, which in turn promotes and enhances the later development of insight meditation. These instructions come to us from **Naropa**, the great pandita.

At this point, from within the nonconceptual state of emptiness that you have been resting in, re-arise as the deity naturally free from fabrication, like a rainbow appearing in the sky. This means that you are identifying with the deity with the understanding that it is in no way different or separate from the empty nature in which you have been resting. For instance, although a ripple of water appears on the surface of a lake, the moving water and the rest of the water in the lake are not two different things. They are of the same essential nature, but since the water is disturbed it takes on a different shape in its movement. Similarly, the deity that you re-arose as is not separate in nature from the emptiness that you were resting in. In this way, you emerge with the sense that you are the deity, free from adornments, and you can continue to maintain this state of mind throughout your **postmeditation** activities as well. This kind of perception that you are the deity is referred to as “vajra pride.”

A session of practice begins at the point when you initially prepare the shrine, and ends with you reemerging as the deity. It is recommended that beginning practitioners have more frequent sessions since they need to develop experience visualizing the

deity correctly during their meditation practice. If you are new and having difficulty in the visualization and meditation, then you should apply the six-session method. Traditionally this would entail two sessions in the morning, two in the afternoon, and two in the evening. The first session would be from before dawn to dawn, so at daybreak you have already had one session. After breakfast until midday you have the second session, in the afternoon there are two sessions, and then in the evening there are two more sessions, with the last one occurring before you go to sleep for the night. The beginning and ending times for each session are specified as needed depending on the practice. As a beginner it is advisable to apply this six-session method because it will enable you to develop stronger visualizations and greater stability in your tranquillity meditation.

The importance of employing the six-session approach is clearly emphasized in the major commentaries on the tantras of Hevajra, Chakrasamvara, and others. Later as you progress in your practice, the frequency of sessions can be decreased, but the duration of each session will also be extended accordingly.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Rinpoche, when you say “outer, inner, and secret,” I have no concept of what that means.

RINPOCHE: I cannot go into much detail about this subject, so I will only comment briefly on the differences among each of these levels of practice. Outer practice refers to the beginning stages of deity practice in which you visualize yourself as the deity. While visualizing yourself as the deity, you might visualize a seed syllable at your heart center — for instance, the syllable HUM — and then from the HUM light radiates outward to all primordial buddha fields and bodhisattvas as an offering. The light returns to the HUM and then radiates again, this time shining on all sentient beings of the six realms, purifying their negative karma, defilements, obscurations, and so forth. If the deity is Chenrezik you would recite the mantra of Chenrezik, in this case OM MANI PADME HUM, while continuing to visualize light radiating outward to the awakened beings and purifying sentient beings.

Following your mantra recitation, think that the entire universe is transformed into the pure realm of that particular deity, which in this case would be Sukhavati, the realm of Amitabha and Chenrezik. You regard every form or being that you perceive as

Chenrezik, every sound that you hear as the mantra of Chenrezik, and every thought that arises in your mind as nothing other than the omniscient intention of Chenrezik. Rest in that perception in your postmeditation experience. This is called the “outer practice,” which we have gone over a number of times in the text.

The inner practice involves visualization of yourself as the deity with additional internal visualization of channels, winds, and drops. The details of your visualization become more subtle at this level of practice.

The secret level of practice builds on the inner techniques of deity visualization, including the channels, winds, drops, and so forth, by further deepening your understanding of the nature of mind. With the knowledge that every thought that arises is the display of wisdom, you apply the Mahamudra or Great Perfection aspect of meditation to your practice.

As for the inner secret and ultimate secret levels of practice, the teachings become still more detailed and elaborate. They can only be properly understood and beneficial once you have some degree of accomplishment in the preceding levels of practice.

STUDENT: Can you talk about the visualizations of the buddha fields? How do we visualize the buddha fields?

RINPOCHE: There is a detailed description of the buddha field of Amitabha in the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*. It says that in Sukhavati the ground is very smooth and even, devoid of any roughness. There is no experience of summer or winter and no struggle with temperature changes. Everything takes place according to your wishes, so whatever temperature you desire in your mind simply happens automatically. There are forests of wish-fulfilling trees and magnificent flowers growing everywhere, producing perfect fragrances. Whenever the innumerable birds sing, it is not merely birdsong, but every sound they make is actually the sound of the Dharma. All the water possesses the eight qualities of purity. The air is very gentle, and in the morning a breeze spreads out like a blanket, traveling in all directions and causing lotuses to blossom everywhere. When the breeze returns in the evening, all the lotuses are gathered up again. Whatever you might wish for, such as precious stones or anything else, simply appears right in front of you or in your hand without any effort.

The inhabitants of Sukhavati are absolutely free from any stain of mental afflictions such as attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, and greed. Because there is no effort or competition involved in obtaining the precious qualities enjoyed in Sukhavati, there is no conflict or argument. Not only are the inhabitants free of mental afflictions, they are also free from experiencing the

sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. The suffering of birth is absent because when you are reborn in Sukhavati you are actually born from within a lotus rather than from a human womb. There is no gender distinction between male and female, and everyone in Sukhavati enjoys eternal life.

In Sukhavati you have supercognition that allows you to perceive what is happening in samsara. For instance, if you have companions in samsara, you can actually perceive the situations they are going through. If they have problems you can also send your blessings to them because as a result of being reborn in a pure buddha realm, you have the power to directly benefit beings in this manner.

In addition, you also have immediate access to any of the innumerable superior buddha realms. The moment you think of one of those realms, you arrive there effortlessly and receive teachings from the buddha who presides over that particular realm. In this way, you effortlessly obtain teachings with which you can develop yourself further. This is just one example of a buddha realm. If you are interested in learning about this in more detail, you can read the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*.

STUDENT: I am thinking about being on the edge of the bardo, and about how our practice needs to be very real while we are

alive. I am thinking about the tendency of our minds to abstract the deities and I wondered if you could talk about developing the heart connection with the deities and practicing the presence of such deities so that we feel their presence as we are dying or if we suddenly have to die.

RINPOCHE: We need to develop a habit of perceiving any deity that we encounter, whether peaceful or wrathful, not as something separate from ourselves, but rather as the wisdom aspect of our true nature. This is not an exaggeration; it is the truth of our innate purity. At present, because we have not developed the habit of realizing that the appearance of peaceful and wrathful deities is actually the wisdom aspect of our being, we have the dualistic notion that we are separate from them, and consequently we react with a sense of fear.

If you repeatedly cultivate the habit of perceiving these deities as the display of the wisdom aspect of your own mind, then later when you are in the bardo you will see the appearance of the deities and immediately recognize them as such. In doing so you do not fixate on the duality of subject and object, and therefore you do not experience any fear. When you are completely free of fear and dualism, fully recognizing whatever appears as being the display of your own primordial wisdom in its pure aspect,

in that very instant you are liberated. In this sense it is easy to achieve liberation in the bardo state.

The reason why we are unable to experience liberation right now is that, as a result of the accumulation of karmic imprints in previous lifetimes, we have acquired the form aggregate that comprises our physical body of blood, flesh, and bone. Even if we were able to recognize a peaceful or wrathful deity as being the display of our own wisdom, our physical embodiment prevents us from being liberated immediately. Right now we are under the previous karmic bondage of this physical embodiment, whereas in the bardo there is no physical bondage. In that state you are liberated in the moment of recognition. In preparation for this, we need to repeatedly develop the habit of perceiving deities as being the display of our own true nature.

STUDENT: I have a couple of questions. One is a silly, personal question that I will ask first. I have a pair of birds. They are pets and I am not devoting any kind of attention to them anymore. They have become an ancillary part of my life, but I have had them for a very long time. I want to adopt them out but I am shocked at the amount of emotion I am having about these birds. It is attachment, guilt, and other emotions, but it made me think that I will be in the bardo for five million kalpas if I am attached to these two birds.

I was thinking about getting over attachment on a personal level, and that does not mean developing hatred for them, such as saying they are a nuisance since I have to clean their water and cage, their feathers are everywhere, and they squawk incessantly. From a practical point of view, just thinking about that simple little situation, can you say something about getting over attachment, but not from a negative point of view such as developing hatred or something?

RINPOCHE: In Buddhism, you are greatly encouraged to love and have compassion for sentient beings. Birds are sentient beings, so if you really love your birds and have compassion for them you should feed and look after them as part of your Buddhist practice. I do not think that practicing loving-kindness and compassion in that way is really going to cause you to wander in the bardo for five million aeons. If you care for these birds and have love and compassion for them, you should simply continue to do so.

The kind of attachment that will cause you to continue to wander in samsara is, for example, knowing you are going to die soon and having regrets about leaving your wealth behind and someone else making use of it later. That sort of clinging and attachment to your possessions and wealth, and the inability to let go when you die, is what prevents liberation from samsara. The kind of

love and compassion involved in looking after an animal or any sentient being will not trap you in the bardo.

STUDENT: Just a comment to that. Years ago, Trungpa Rinpoche said that when we go into the bardo we cannot even have attachment for a Coca-Cola. I now understand how significant that comment was. At the time I thought, “Well, I can give them up any time,” but I come to find that it is easier said than done.

My second question is regarding something about which I ask a lot. I have been concerned for some time now that my practice is just nominal. I go through the words and go through the motions, just getting in the numbers without really doing it well. One of my concerns is about trying to make practice more meaningful, more sincere, and more authentic. I have been thinking in terms of three-year retreats, particularly the awesome schedule. You have been teaching on the subject so that we would have some overview of a retreat manual, and the amount of practices is amazing. I wonder how anybody can do these more than nominally, unless they have real attainment. How do we take a practice and make it less nominal?

RINPOCHE: I remember giving a teaching some time ago on the topic of how to make any practice more meaningful, authentic, pure, and sincere. That teaching deals with three elements that

every practice should include: the preparation, the actual practice, and the conclusion. For instance, if you are doing a long sadhana practice, it may seem very difficult to consciously maintain purity of intention and perfect accuracy in your recitation and pronunciation from beginning to end. Nevertheless, although you may not have clear visualization or accurate pronunciation and mantra recitation, as long as you make sure to include these three elements from the beginning, your practice is certain to be authentic.

Briefly, the preparation at the beginning of any practice consists of generating bodhichitta. Think that you are about to engage in this practice for the purpose of bringing about the benefit of sentient beings and establishing them in the state of perfect awakening. This is how you begin, chanting the appropriate liturgy in Tibetan.

Then you come to the actual body of the practice, which could involve mantra recitation or deity visualization. While doing the practice itself, remind yourself to reflect occasionally on its purpose. When you ask yourself why you are doing the practice, simply recall your purpose, which is to establish sentient beings in the state of buddhahood. You should not be attempting to maintain this or any other concept throughout the practice from beginning to end. Instead try to remind yourself of your intention

from time to time while you are reciting the text and doing the visualization. The third element is the conclusion. Once you have reached the end of the practice, dedicate whatever merit you have accumulated, without clinging to it for your own welfare or success, toward the accomplishment of immediate happiness and ultimate awakening for all sentient beings.

If all three of these elements are fully included, any practice that you engage in becomes authentic, sincere, and unmistakable. On the other hand, if you just start reading or reciting a text without properly implementing these three elements and you get to the end of it and think, “Now I have done the work I am supposed to do for today,” it is not likely to be of much benefit because you did not begin by clarifying your altruistic intention or acknowledging the purpose of what you were about to do. In such a case, by thinking that you have done something you were merely obligated to do as a duty and failing to conclude the practice by sealing it with the dedication of virtue for the benefit of all beings, your performance becomes rather meaningless. This is why it is so important to always include these three elements in your practice; it insures that the quality of your virtuous undertaking is pure and authentic.

STUDENT: I guess part of that question was that rather than doing a lot of practices in an incomplete way, maybe we should

just eliminate all practices but one, because many times we are not taught completely. Also, when we hear about these retreat practices, we hear that you need preliminary tormas. What does that mean?

RINPOCHE: I do not really think that doing many practices is harmful. Sometimes people think, “If I reduce all of my practices down to one single practice and concentrate on that instead of doing so many different practices, that would be more effective.” What happens is that once they have gradually eliminated everything but that one practice, they finally give that up too and therefore end up with nothing. This is why I do not believe that minimizing or eliminating practices will really help; rather it becomes a kind of excuse to avoid practicing altogether.

As for preliminary tormas, this is the tormas commonly seen at the beginning of an empowerment ceremony. It is thrown out before the actual empowerment is given. You do not necessarily need to be concerned with preliminary tormas unless you are involved in a practice that requires you to have specific knowledge about the procedure.

STUDENT: You said that pure motivation is the foundation for all Dharma practice. I am concerned that I do not have enough bodhichitta or pure motivation. Right now what little I have

is mostly just a poor reflection of your bodhichitta. How do I generate more myself so that I can do Dharma practice?

RINPOCHE: First of all, you too possess the potential of buddha nature, and therefore you have every opportunity to realize that potential. You are not lacking in that potential at all. As for pure motivation, this is something we all have to work on. There is no such thing as having complete and perfect pure motivation right from the beginning. Everything requires time to work, develop, and then finally bloom.

The necessary process of growing and developing is like the analogy of cultivating crops. If you want to plant crops, first you break up the soil by digging it up. Some people might wonder why you are making such a big effort to do this. You are working hard to prepare the soil so you can plant crops in it, and there is a great deal of work that needs to be done before you even cultivate the seeds. People might also think that the seeds you are about to plant should be eaten right away so they can be of immediate benefit, rather than wasting them by throwing them on the ground. You know that this is not wasteful because by planting the seeds in the soil you previously prepared and softened, the result will be a much greater crop in the future. With this understanding, you have no reservations about scattering the seeds on the ground; you feel happy and content to

do so because you know that in the future you will enjoy the benefits that come through cultivating your crops.

In practicing any form of meditation, you are accumulating virtue or merit. As I have said repeatedly in the past, since we are human it is a normal tendency for us to become attached to and feel possessive of our wealth and material things. We are sometimes unable to give things away because of this attachment. As beginning practitioners this is normal, but since the virtue you accumulate has no material substance, let go of it. Do not feel possessive toward it, thinking, “This is my virtue” or “This is my merit.” Otherwise whatever merit you have accumulated is defiled with the afflictive sense of “mine,” and therefore that merit can be destroyed later by an instance of anger.

Rather than clinging to what you have done as being virtuous, at the conclusion of your meditation session think that you are dedicating your merit toward the benefit and awakening of all sentient beings. In that way you let go of your merit for the benefit of others, and you avoid the possessive mentality of thinking that it belongs to you. Moreover, virtue or merit that has been sealed with dedication not only increases over time, but it also becomes inexhaustible and therefore cannot be destroyed by any subsequent occurrence of mental afflictions.

If you can think this way then there is no real difficulty in cultivating pure motivation, because pure motivation is simply thinking that whatever practice you are doing is being done for the benefit of sentient beings. This thought itself is pure motivation. Sometimes we might be unable to cultivate the attitude that we are practicing for the benefit of sentient beings because we have become possessive of the virtue involved. Instead of being possessive, dedicate the virtue that you accumulate toward the benefit of others and their attainment of perfect awakening. By thinking of others in this way, your motivation will be pure.

STUDENT: I was reading that the primordial essence of mind has been stainless since beginningless time. Since it has never been stained and it cannot be stained, how is it possible to fall into a state of bewilderment? If one becomes enlightened, is it possible to fall back into a state of bewilderment? The question is, why did we fall into a state of bewilderment to begin with, and is enlightenment permanent?

RINPOCHE: First of all, when it is said that the mind's nature is primordial and stainless, this does not mean that the mind's purity in any way predates the obscurations that afflict it. When we read these explanations, we sometimes mistake them to mean that at first our minds were stainless and then after this stainless mind arose, there arose obscurations that afflicted it, but actually

there never was a time before the presence of the obscurations. In this way, the stainless nature of the mind and the adventitious obscurations that conceal this nature arose simultaneously. This is why they are called “connate” or “co-emergent.”

Therefore, when we talk about things such as primordial buddhas, we are not saying that there is any buddha anywhere who began as a buddha. All buddhas began as sentient beings. There was no one who started out as a buddha, and now the rest of us have to work to match their awakening. All sentient beings are capable of buddhahood, and all buddhas started out as sentient beings.

Furthermore, we tend to think of obscurations that conceal or obscure the mind’s stainless nature as a thing or group of things that lasts through time. They are not really like that. The obscurations are not lasting; they are adventitious, not only in the sense that they are not intrinsic to the nature of the mind, but also because they are constantly shifting. For example, a certain amount of the obscurations that an individual has accumulated will be purified through their different activities, such as practicing Dharma and so on; at the same time, they are accumulating other obscurations that replace those they purified. It is more like fleeting clouds passing through the sky than a block of solid stuff; this is why we think of this whole process as being like a constantly spinning wheel, which is the source for the term

samsara, which means “spinning.” As each obscuration arises, in reaction to it we develop mental afflictions, which become the cause of the next obscuration, which inspires more mental afflictions, which become the cause of further obscuration and afflicted action, and so on.

The reason why samsara cannot reoccur for an individual after they have attained buddhahood is because obscurations can only occur as the result of a cause — in this case, mental afflictions. When all the mental afflictions have been eradicated or transformed into wisdom, there is no longer any cause for the arising of such obscurations or afflicted actions; therefore they cannot reoccur. However since nothing can arise without a cause, and because of cause and effect this thing that we call “samsara” continues; each state of mental affliction produces a further degree of obscuration, and that in turn inspires further mental affliction, and so it goes on, ceaselessly. When we talk about samsara or spinning, we are not talking about the world spinning; we are talking about our minds spinning.

Magic Mirror: Miraculous Signs Arising Through Practice

We have skipped a few chapters that deal with the physical exercises connected with yoga practice. Such things are normally taught only when people are actually about to do the practices. At this point you are not involved in them, so I am skipping those chapters.

This chapter is concerned with signs arising through practice that indicate how well our practice is going. There are different signs that arise in the case of an excellent practice, an intermediate practice, and a lesser practice. There are signs that are positive, signs that are negative, and so forth. The image of a mirror is used because signs enable you to see things about your practice that you otherwise would not be able to see, just as a mirror enables you to see your face when you otherwise could not.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche begins with the invocation NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SIDDHI HUM, which is a supplication to the gurus, yidams, and dakinis to bestow attainment. He continues, “In the silver mirror of interdependence, carefully looking at one’s face with the discernment that distinguishes

among things, you can actually clearly see the indications of the successful attainment of the common and supreme siddhis, and indications of bad things or lack of success, which is wondrous.”

The reason why the term *interdependence* is used here is because, as we know, everything that appears is interdependent. Therefore when we create the cause for something positive or virtuous, the result will be positive or virtuous, and when we create the cause for something negative, the result will be negative. Beyond that, the arising of an expected result will be apparent in the course of observing the process leading up to it. In the case of signs or indications, it is a way of determining what kind of result you are headed for. The process of examining signs is an attempt to see what would otherwise be hidden. This chapter will describe how to understand these indications and what to do about them, especially in the case of negative indications.

First Karma Chakme deals with a possible objection to the whole question of signs and indications. He says, “Nowadays some foolish people who boast of their supremacy” — meaning some foolish people who proclaim themselves to be the most wise — “say that the examination of meditation experience, of dreams, of indications, signs, or auspices is meaningless and pointless because all of these things are *relative truths*, therefore they are bewilderment, and therefore they lead to no result.”

Some foolish individuals who proclaim they are supreme laugh at the idea of signs and indications, saying that examining and paying attention to such things is bewilderment. According to the definitive meaning, it is of course ultimately true that dreams and so forth are relative phenomena with no true existence, just as it is also true, according to the definitive meaning, that Buddha Shakyamuni never demonstrated the twelve deeds. The twelve deeds of Buddha Shakyamuni were experienced in the karmic perception — admittedly, the pure karmic perception — of those who witnessed them. As the Buddha said, he never did anything. In the same way, all of the sufferings of the six realms are unreal; they do not exist either. Thus if you say that dreams are unreal, then you also have to say that the deeds of the Buddha are unreal and the sufferings of the six realms are unreal because all of these things are bewildered appearances and relative truths. Further, what we experience in this life in our bodies — birth, aging, sickness, death, and all of the pleasure, pain, happiness, and misery we experience — is all unreal and bewilderment.

Until you reach the ultimate destination of the path, until you recognize or achieve the dharmakaya, which alone is the definitive meaning, all of these things appear to be real. Dreams, like other relative truths, partake of the nature of interdependence and therefore can be used to indicate things or serve as a basis

for examining signs. In that connection, Arya Nagarjuna said, “There is not a single thing that is not interdependent.”

All of the experiences we undergo that result from causes are relative and interdependent, but their being relative truths does not in any way prevent them from having a relative or internal consistency. For example, it is taught in the sutra called the *Sutra That Sets Forth Dreams* that the attainment of the ten bodhisattva levels is always preceded by certain indications in the dreams of the person attaining them. There are examples of this in the life of Lord Gampopa, who had certain dreams indicating that he had achieved the tenth bodhisattva level. In the practice texts of both the new and old traditions of secret mantra, it is taught that signs of practice will arise in the dreams of the practitioner.

In general there are three ways that signs or indications of practice can arise, which are normally correlated with the acuity of the practitioner. For someone of the highest level, the signs will occur in actual experience; for an intermediate practitioner, they will occur in meditation experience; and for the lesser practitioner, they will occur in dreams. Because dreams are a source of the indications of the success of one's practice, many of the great siddhas of the past such as Lord Marpa, Lord Milarepa, and Lord Gampopa relied on dreams as a basis for prophecy and predictions.

Signs for Someone of Highest Faculties

When someone is practicing in retreat, or practicing seriously or intensively in any way, the course of their practice can be indicated in three different ways. In the best case, the case of someone of the highest faculties, it will be actual experience. “Actual experience” means that as a sign of success in your yidam practice, you actually meet or see the deity whom you are practicing face-to-face, and you can converse with them freely as though you were conversing with another human being. At that time you will receive empowerments, teachings, and usually prophecies or predictions from the deity. This is comparatively rare and only happens to someone who is fortunate enough to have a strong karmic residue. “Karmic residue” here means that in their previous lifetimes they engaged in excellent practice, probably of the same deity, and so their practice in this life merely reawakened their disposition from previous lifetimes.

This has happened throughout our tradition. The example given in the text is the circumstances under which the Namchö or Sky Dharma tradition arose. The *Namchö* arose as a series of experiences or visions received by the tertön Mingyur Dorje from childhood until the time of his passing in his early twenties. Every year for thirteen years, he received one large volume’s worth of *terma* or

visions, so there are thirteen volumes of *Namchö*. Mingyur Dorje is used as an example because when he had these visions he would meet the deity; the deity would present the practice to him and give him the empowerment, and he could also discuss the whole practice with the deity. Thus for someone of the highest faculty, the vision of the deity arises as actual experience.

Nevertheless it must be questioned when someone has a vision of a deity. It has to be examined because it could be an actual vision of the deity, or it could be Mara deceiving you by masquerading as the deity. For example, if you have been doing the yidam practice of Guru Rinpoche or Chenrezik, or if you have connected with the Karmapa, a vision of the deity could actually be that figure appearing to you, or it could be Mara appearing to you in the guise of that figure in order to mislead you.

The next thing the text describes is how to tell the difference. Should this happen to you, the first thing you should do is visualize yourself as a wrathful deity, recite the forceful mantra of that deity, and burn some banishing substance or incense. If you do these three things and the vision of the deity disappears, then it was not the deity but some kind of spirit. If the vision becomes clearer and more intense, then it really is a vision of the deity.

The teachings or predictions you receive from the deity must be subjected to a similar scrutiny. You have to analyze them to see whether they are in accordance with the Buddha's teachings, the teachings of the sutras and tantras. If the predictions do not contradict the teachings of the sutras and tantras, then it is an indication that your vision is an authentic vision of a deity. If they contradict the teachings, then it is the deception of Mara attempting to mislead you. At this point the text remarks, "Nowadays this is very rare." This means not only the achievement of authentic direct visions is very rare, but even attempts by Mara or spirits to deceive a practitioner in this way are very rare. This is because maras will not bother trying to deceive you unless you are on the point of achieving awakening or liberation from samsara; otherwise they do not need to bother. Further indications of an authentic vision are feelings of being expansive, relaxed, energetic, or exhilarated, but not in a manic way. There will be a feeling of the intense presence of blessing, and that could include everything in the practice place, such as the practice materials seeming to glitter and becoming more majestic and brilliant. Your mind will be much clearer than it has been, and you will feel delighted and feel great faith in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the deity, and so forth. You will feel a great experience of the purity of phenomena, which means that through the force of the vision, you will perceive appearances as the body and realm of the deity. This perception of purity will

be unquestionable; it will come with an attendant certainty, and your certainty about the meaning of Dharma in general will increase. If the vision is genuine, then when you supplicate you will be overcome with devotion and cry uncontrollably. There are other signs as well. If this happens in the winter, especially in a place like Tibet where there is no central heating, some or all of your water bowls will not freeze as they normally would. This is a sign of the blessing called the “holding back of the water bowls” since they are held back from freezing. It could happen to other practice materials, such as tormas offerings; whereas normally they would freeze solid in the winter, they may not freeze, or some will and some will not. When the vision happens — or at the time of the practice when the vision happens, or on certain days such as the eighth, tenth, fifteenth, twenty-fifth, twenty-ninth, or thirtieth of the lunar month — you may smell a delicious scent such as incense, but it will not have any physical cause such as trees, flowers, or something in the environment, nor will it be a scent from any actual incense you are burning. There may be sparks of fire shooting out from your body or clothing, or from your drum, drumstick, or mala.

Other actual signs are that your inner offering, which is the container of amrita and rakta, may boil as though being heated over a flame and release steam. If you have samaya substances that are not dissolved into liquid but are left as pills or solids, they

may increase or multiply inexplicably. Other signs are frequent rainbows near or right beside your retreat — in other words, rainbows that come right down to the ground near your retreat place and form a canopy or cloud of light over your retreat. You may also hear the sound of musical instruments, or possibly you or others will hear the sound of the deity's mantra that you have been reciting in retreat.

All of your lice and nits will just disappear — this example is particularly drawn from situations in Tibet! You will have a taste in your mouth far more pleasant than anything you have ever eaten, but for no physical reason. If you are so old that all of your teeth have fallen out, one or more new small teeth will suddenly appear. If you have teeth, they will produce sharira or rinsel, little reliclike calcifications. Other things can happen, such as your practice torma melting and producing a stream of ambrosia. This happened very frequently in Tibet, as did the water bowls not freezing. Sometimes when a practice was completed, the amrita and rakta in the assembly would not freeze for several days after the practice, even though all liquids in the room should have been frozen.

All of those things, up to and including the amrita flowing from the torma, are signs of accomplishing the deity. However some of these signs are not necessarily good; it depends on the context.

For example, if your tormas melt or ambrosia seems to flow from it, it is difficult to know from that alone whether it is a sign of attainment or a sign of an obstacle. For example, the last time before the Communist invasion that the vase practice of the *Thukje Chenpo Sangwa Dupa* was done at Thrangu Monastery, the pills that were being consecrated multiplied much more than they had done so previously. They multiplied so much that they not only filled the mandala, they also filled the shrine room. At the time people thought this was either very good or very bad, and now it is considered an omen of the coming invasion. As a result, that practice was not done for a long time, although now they have started it again.

These signs are not good particularly if they arise in the house of a layperson who does not do a lot of practice, or if they arise for reasons other than intense practice. For example, one of the signs of success in practice is a butter lamp lasting much longer than it should. A wick and the amount of butter that usually burn out in eight hours may burn for sixteen. If that happens in the context of intense practice, it may be a good sign. If this happens in a layperson's house where there is not a lot of practice going on and they are just keeping a shrine, this is said to be a sign of the intervention of a powerful demonic or negative spirit, especially if it happens repeatedly. In the same way, if a person who has not done a lot of yidam practice and has not

recited a lot of mantras suddenly gets sharira emanating from their teeth, it does not mean a blessing; it either means they are sick or they are about to die. All of these things are actual signs, which means they are either physical signs or experienced as real.

The signs that are considered the best are signs of supreme attainment by someone who is diligently practicing the generation and completion stages. Because the deity they are practicing has consecrated or blessed their body, anyone who sees them will be inspired and will naturally give rise to faith and devotion. Whatever the practitioner says will naturally become Dharma, which means that everything they say will be appropriate and will be trusted by those who hear it. They can benefit someone simply by directing their attention to them; for example, they can pacify sickness or demonic disturbances by one-pointedly focusing their mind on someone. Although signs of having that blessing and power of speech and mind can be signs of supreme attainment, it can also be a sign that Mara or a negative spirit has powerfully interfered with that person.

If these signs arise suddenly out of nowhere and in the absence of intense practice, they are usually considered to be the result of the interference of Mara. For example, if someone who has not practiced can do things like tie pieces of iron into knots or completely and instantly remove sickness from someone, it is

usually not a good sign. It is usually a sign that they are being controlled and manipulated by Mara.

The way to tell the difference between abilities and apparent blessings arising from Mara from those that arise from attainment is by looking at what they lead to in the long run. If a person with abilities, and those who depend on the person, gradually move in a virtuous direction, then the blessing has arisen from a deity. For example, if the person who experiences the sign and the person whom they heal or benefit naturally become more and more virtuous and more and more involved with practice, then it is not the interference of Mara. If either directly or indirectly they somehow become more and more involved in negativity and wrongdoing, then these powers come from Mara.

In one sense it does not matter whether a sign that occurs in your practice is a sign of the deity's blessing or a sign of Mara's interference. It does not matter because you should not be disturbed or delighted in either case. When signs such as these arise for someone, regardless of whether the signs themselves arise from a deity or from Mara, if the person becomes arrogant and proud, if the signs lead them to feel somehow special or superior, then even if the signs arose through the blessing of a deity, they have become the disturbances of Mara because they

have caused the person to be arrogant, and arrogance is a cause of a lower rebirth.

Regardless of the origin of the signs, if the person remains modest regarding themselves as the least among practitioners and becoming even more diligent in their practice of the generation and completion stages and their practice of virtue in general, if they have no arrogance or vanity about them no matter how pronounced the signs or indications, then even if the origin of the signs was the interference of Mara it has benefited the person because it has not misled them but actually inspired them to greater virtue. Even if the sign began as the interference of Mara, it has become attainment for that person. Far more important than the origin of the signs is having no fixation on the signs and not allowing them to become a basis for arrogance.

If this leads you to think that the whole question of the observation of signs must be irrelevant since it does not matter whether they are signs of the blessing of the deity or the interference of Mara, this is not true. While you do have to remain free of fixation in either case, you should deal with them differently. If a sign arises that is a definitive indication of receiving a deity's blessing, then you should perform the procedure for receiving siddhi from that deity, which in one way or another will involve receiving the blessings of that deity's body, speech, and mind.

An indication that the sign is the blessing of the deity is that you will have more faith and more devotion for your teachers, the deity, and the instructions.

If a sign arises as the disturbance of Mara or a spirit, then you need to do something similar to what the text mentioned earlier in the context of testing the vision. You need to visualize yourself as a wrathful deity, recite the appropriate mantra, dispatch an obstructor's tormas, and reconsecrate or reseal the practice environment with a circle of protection.

Everything that was explained up to this point about signs arising in actual experience (which means in the waking state as we normally understand it) concerns practitioners of the highest faculties. It is very rare for these things to happen. You may wonder, "If someone is of the very highest faculties, then why should they be concerned about the deceptions of Mara?" In fact those of the highest faculties are the primary targets of Mara's deceptions because these people are the ones who most directly threaten Mara's machinations. As we saw, if that person is free of arrogance and free of fixation toward whatever signs or visions arise, then there is no way they can be deceived. As I said, nowadays such actual visions are very rare; we could even say they are barely possible.

Signs for Someone of Intermediate Faculties

For someone of intermediate faculties, signs will not arise as actual experience but as what is called “meditation experience.” In this case this specifically refers to visions that arise when you are in the hypnogogic state, which is the state in between waking and sleeping.

Within this class of experience there are two types: visual experiences and cognitive experiences. With visual experiences or visions, you are not actually seeing something because you are in a state in between the waking state and the dream state. This state is when you are not yet firmly asleep; you are slightly asleep but you could wake up. It is not really sleep because your senses may still be functioning a bit as they do when you are awake. Because you are partly asleep, the vision will seem as real as an experience in the waking state, just as dreams seem real when you are asleep. When you see something in that half-awake state, this is called “visual experience” or an “experience of vision.” This was explained by Machik Lapkyi Drönma among others.

Although you are not actually asleep, you are falling asleep and your eyes are probably closed. Do not confuse this with simply thinking of something, or something coming into your mind. In the case of a visual experience, this is something that you see

spontaneously, and it is not the same as thinking of something and then getting a visual image of it. It seems to just happen, and you see it as clearly as you would see something external or physical in the waking state.

According to the mahasiddha Karma Pakshi, when you have a vision of the deity in this half-awake state, it does qualify as an authentic vision of that deity; however do not be misled by this and think that everything that arises in that semi-asleep, semi-awake state is a vision. For example, when people are half-asleep it is not uncommon for them to see people who have already died or see places they might go in the future. These are probably arising, our text says, because you are thinking of them. A distinction is made here between something that arises as an object of thought in the semi-asleep, semiawake state, and something that arises as a visual experience in that state. According to the text, because you are in that in-between state, the things you think of that become slightly visual are meaningless. Do not confuse this with a genuine vision.

If you have a vision of a deity when you are half-asleep, you cannot test it the way you could in the waking state. In other words, when you have a vision in the waking state, you can visualize yourself as a wrathful deity, recite mantras, and so on to see if the vision is genuine or not. Here you cannot do this because

you are halfasleep. How do you test if it is a genuine vision of the deity or the disturbance of Mara? You do not appraise it by means of the clarity or quality of the vision. For example, you might think that if the deity's form appears extremely clear, lustrous, and beautiful, then it is a real vision of the deity, and if the deity's form is somewhat shoddy or vague, then it is not. This is not true. The clarity of your vision of the deity does not indicate whether or not the vision is genuine; instead it indicates the degree to which your obscurations are purified. Clarity is not a way of appraising the authenticity of the vision.

The primary way to appraise the authenticity of a vision is by the smell that accompanies the vision. If there is a very pleasant smell like perfume, but not a perfume made from animal products such as musk, this is definitely a vision of the deity. If there is an unpleasant smell, such as the smell of rotten things, garlic, or excrement, then it is the disturbance of a negative spirit.

Another way to test the authenticity of a vision is your state of mind after the vision has dissolved or disappeared. As soon as you awake from the vision, look at your mind. If your mind is clear and full of joy, then it is definitely a vision of the deity. If your mind is depressed, cloudy, and dull, then it is not.

The other type of experience in this class is cognitive experience. This may be a sense of language or words: you may perceive it as sound or you may perceive it as information. In this type of experience you do not see anything; there is no vision of the deity's form. You hear or perceive words where the deity — or something or someone — is indicating what is going to happen, for better or worse, or you may be instructed in how to remove impediments, bring progress to your practice, and so on.

If it is actual instruction or prophecy from a deity or a dakini, it will come true and it will actually help you; it will produce experience and realization. If it is the mischievous interference of a spirit, then even if it is a prophecy that immediately comes true, it will somehow harm or obscure your practice. In that case, even though it may be attended by some kind of positive occurrence, like acquiring wealth, if you follow the instructions it will somehow gradually lead you into unvirtuous actions.

Another thing that can happen is when mundane dakinis attempt to test the acuity of a practitioner. Normally they test those who are fairly close to realization, but Karma Chakme also presents this here for someone of intermediate faculties. These mundane dakinis may give a lot of prophecies and predictions about things that are going to happen, and they will be precise. The test lies in the attitude you take toward these prophecies or predictions. If

you become proud and arrogant about the fact that you received all of these accurate prophecies and predictions, then through your pride you separate yourself from the source of the actual prediction. From that moment onward they stop coming true. At that point, because you have assumed that these prophecies come from your yidam or dakinis, you start to doubt the yidams and dakinis, and this can produce problems with your samaya and lead you on the wrong path.

In any of these cases, if you receive instructions or predictions and the predictions come true, do not become arrogant. Do not regard it as something special about you; this will always lead to problems. Think of it as the blessing of the deity and not some particular quality or extraordinary ability that you possess. If the predictions do not come true, then do not worry about them, and do not use this as a basis for doubting the deity if you think that the predictions came from a yidam or dakini.

The best thing to do with these experiences is to rest in the expanse of the view; in other words, perceive the essentially equal nature or equal flavor of any instruction or prophecy that you receive. If you are a practitioner in Mahamudra or Dzokchen traditions, whenever you receive any kind of instruction, prophecy, or vision, if you can be free of fixation toward it whether it is an authentic experience of the deity or the interference of

a mara or spirit, then it will definitely not lead to any problem and will instead lead to benefit. Even if the experience is the interference of Mara, then simply through not being fixated on it, the experience will not interfere with your practice. If it is an actual vision or instruction from the deity and you do fixate on it and become arrogant, regardless of the fact that it originated from the deity, it will interfere with your practice. At best you should rest in the view, and at least you should rest in lovingkindness, compassion, and bodhichitta free from fixation. If you do this, then it is not so important who gave you the prophecy. It will not be an obstacle and you can bring it to the path of awakening.

Other things that can happen in the half-asleep state are that words, syllables, or letters appear before you in the sky, or you are given a book, text, piece of paper, or scroll that looks like a proclamation and contains information, predictions, prophecies, and instructions. An example of this is Karma Chakme Rinpoche's vision that provided the source of the *Instructions of the Great Compassionate One*, which was recounted in that text. Even in a case like that where you receive something in a vision that definitely benefits yourself and others, such as instructions and accurate predictions, it is extremely important not to become proud or vain about it. As was said a moment ago, if you become

proud or vain about these things, they will become a problem regardless of their origin.

Other experiences that can happen are when you seem to see through solid objects, or in some cases you feel you can pass through them. This happened during retreat at Thrangu Monastery; the session would begin, everyone would be in their rooms, no one would exit their rooms through the doors, and some people would still end up outside. Here the text is principally talking about the experience where you seem to be able to see things behind solid objects like mountains and buildings, hear things that are naturally a great distance away, or know that which is hidden, such as other people's thoughts.

In the latter case, it is very important not to regard this as authentic extrasensory perception or supercognition. This is because it is just an experience; it may or may not be accurate, and you cannot base a decision or action on this type of experience. For example, you may have the sense that you know what other people are thinking, as though they were verbally expressing all their thoughts to you and as though everything that went through their minds was actually coming out of their mouths and you literally heard it. When you have that experience, it will seem as though you know every thought those people are having, but you may or may not actually be hearing what they

are thinking. You may be imagining it all. In the case of that kind of experience, do not become arrogant and puffed up and start proclaiming that you have supercognition.

Signs for Someone of Lesser Faculties

The term *lesser faculties* should not be interpreted as being particularly pejorative. It does not mean a person who is incapable of practice; it actually means a person who is practicing well. Because this section concerns the more common ways that signs arise for most practitioners, the presentation of these signs is going to be more detailed.

For an ordinary practitioner signs are unlikely to arise in actual experience or meditation, but will instead arise in dreams. Karma Chakme Rinpoche is not the first person to make this point, and to illustrate this he says, “As was taught by Machik Lapkyi Drönma.” When you are practicing, various sorts of dreams could have particular significance. If you dream of dawn or early morning; washing or putting on clean white clothing; climbing up the face or slope of a snowy mountain; acquiring a crystal; or circumambulating a stupa, statues, or other representations of the body, speech, and mind of buddhas — all of these are signs

that you are gradually purifying your obscurations. As in the case of all the signs mentioned here, they only mean something if they occur in the context of intense practice; if someone who does not practice has these dreams, they do not mean anything.

The second type of dream you might have is that the sun and/or moon are rising; you are riding a horse; running up a slope; upholding a silken banner; blowing a conch shell; or seated on a throne in the middle of a large assembly. All of these are signs that your merit is increasing. If you dream that you are donning armor of any kind, but especially the type of armor we associate with medieval warfare; if you are holding weapons such as swords and spears; or if you are inside a very secure place like an impregnable fortress, these are signs that you have accomplished the activity of protection.

If you dream that you avert an invading army; defeat an army; reverse a hailstorm; muzzle ferocious animals; or break weapons such as phurbas that belong to your opponents or enemies, these are signs of the accomplishment of reversal, where you attempt to reverse or turn back disaster or negativity. Finally, if you dream that you command and send forth an army, or take enemies prisoner then kill them or cut them up, these are signs that from among the four activities, you have accomplished a forceful activity. All of these are signs in dreams that seem good

and in fact are good. If they occur in the context of intense practice, they are signs of success in practice.

Next we have some negative signs. If you dream that you are in an obscure and depressing darkness and lose your way; if you do not know where you are going; wear terrible, dirty, tattered clothing; walk down a slope; or walk along a very unpleasant, narrow, dirty, and confusing road or path, these are signs that your life and merit are becoming exhausted. If you dream that you are taken prisoner and held in prison; driven or chased by a landslide or hailstorm; or threatened by an army who are, for example, shooting arrows at you, these are signs that someone is cursing you.

Now we are back to good signs. If you dream that the length of your life is revealed to you; if you dream of a lot of tsa tsas (the tiny clay stupas that are put inside large stupas); or you dream of eating or drinking ambrosia, fine fruit, and so on, these are signs that your life force and longevity have increased or are increasing.

If you dream that your hair has grown longer or you have a long beard or mustache; if you dream you discover a treasure such as buried treasure under the ground, or you acquire jewels or nice green grass, these are signs of your wealth increasing. Again,

all of these dreams have to occur in the context of practice, otherwise they are meaningless.

With these dreams as examples, you can extrapolate and understand most of the positive and most of the negative signs. For example, if you have a dream in which you feel unpleasant or frightened, or if you dream you are in danger, this is likely to be a negative sign. If you dream that you are happy and things are very, very bright and sharp and you are full of joy, this is likely to be a positive sign.

There are exceptions to this. In certain contexts there are dreams that seem good but are actually bad, and those that seem really bad but are actually quite good. In the specific context of a tremendous practitioner or very high teacher, a dream that seems good but is actually bad is one in which they are surrounded by many wellornamented women who sing and dance, show great respect, and serve them. In general this is a good dream, but it is bad in this case because it is a sign that the reception committee from the dakini realm is coming to get you. If a high teacher dreams this, he may be about to die. In that case, it is important to perform the ceremony called “Turning Back the Call of the Dakinis,” which is an elaborate ceremony centered on praying for the longevity of a great teacher. If this dream occurs to anyone, even a great teacher, in the context of doing

the practice of a goddess — which in a general sense here means any female deity — it does not necessarily mean they are about to die, and it may be a legitimately good sign.

In the same way, if you are doing a practice centered around the accomplishment of attraction — the third of the four activities — and you dream of walking in fields filled with bright red flowers, or if you dream your body is adorned with many flowers, especially red ones, this is a sign that your practice is successful and you are gaining that accomplishment. If it occurs at any other time when you are not doing that specific type of practice, it is a sign that you are about to die.

In general it is good to dream that you are in a secure fortress, but if the fortress is red and very high and you dream you are on top of it, and if this fortress is surrounded by moats or pits with impregnable iron walls that do not allow anyone in and do not allow you to go out, this is a sign that you are going to die. If you dream that you are pursued by large fish or poisonous snakes that catch you and swallow you, leaving only a little bit of you such as your head or feet sticking out of their mouth, this is a very good dream if you are doing the practice of the channels and winds because it means that you are starting to bring the winds into the central channels. If you dream this at any other time it means either that you are about to die or you

are being oppressed magically, meaning that you are under a magical curse of oppression or control.

If you dream of acquiring a lot of gold, and this occurs when you are involved in intense Dharma practice in general, this means you will give rise to realization. If you dream this when you are doing a practice for increasing prosperity, it means you obtain the siddhi of increased prosperity. If you dream this when you are about to start a project of some kind, it means it will be delayed. If you dream this when you are neither involved in intense practice or about to start a project, it means you are going to die.

If you dream that you acquire a lot of silver and the dream occurs when you are doing the practices of the channels and winds, it means you have increased the drops in your body. Dreaming of anything brilliant and white also means this, so it is very good. If you dream this when you are doing the activity of pacification, the first of the four activities, or when you are doing a practice for the accomplishment of prosperity, it means that you will successfully accomplish or are successfully accomplishing those activities. If you dream it at any other time when you are not doing any of those practices, it indicates the obstacles of kings. Here kings means a certain kind of spirit that is basically the embodiment of aggression.

In the same way, if you dream that you enter a huge temple containing consecrated images of buddhas and a large number of the ordained, and while you dream this you think that it smells very good and everything is bright, clean, nice, and cheerful, this means you have purified or are purifying your obscurations. If you dream that you are entering a large temple filled with the sangha, but it is depressing, your clothing is dirty, and things feel and smell unclean, this is a sign that you are being menaced by a gyalgong, a spirit connected with aggression. Those are examples of dreams that, while they seem very positive, can actually be inauspicious.

Another way to tell if the sign in a dream is positive or negative is how you feel when you wake up from the dream. If the dream is good but as soon as you wake up you feel anxious or depressed, this means it is not good; it is inauspicious.

There are dreams that seem really bad but are actually good. It is good if you dream that your body emits pus, blood, vomit, excrement, any and all forms of filth, or if you dream that your body is burned in a fire and the ashes are cast away by the winds. Those are good dreams in the context of practice because they indicate that your obscurations are being purified.

If you are practicing and you dream that you eat your own heart, drink your own blood, take weapons and cut your body into little pieces so there is nothing left, or turn your body inside out carrying your heart and lungs on your back, these dreams indicate that good experience and realization are dawning within you.

Signs in Dreams Indicating Attainment

The following are dreams that, in the context of intense deity practice, indicate achieving the attainments of that deity's body, speech, and mind. If you are doing such a practice and you dream that you actually see the deity — whether it is a yidam, dakini, **dharmapala**, or guru — or if you dream that you meet the actual deity or see a representation of the deity as a painting, statue, self-arisen image, or accurately depicted image made of gold, this is an indication that you have accomplished the attainment of that deity's body.

The practice of any deity will be drawn from a specific tantra within one of the four classes of tantra. It is a sign of accomplishment of the speech of the deity if you dream that you see or receive books associated with the deity's practice, such as seeing or receiving the original tantra or liturgy of the practice,

especially if the text or book is clear, well-written, or nicely printed, and if it smells good like incense. If you dream that you discover a Dharma treasure such as the scrolls of a terma, this is also a sign that you have accomplished the speech of that deity. If you dream of various scepters and other implements such as damarus, bells, phurbas, khatvangas, or if you dream that you acquire a scepter or implement that is actually held by the deity, these are signs that you have accomplished the mind of the deity. In the context of intense practice, you can use these examples as a general indication, and you can extrapolate from them in order to understand the significance of dreams.

In a more general context, if a dream that seems significant is vivid, bright, and lustrous; if your own color, the color of other beings, and the colors in general in the dream are lustrous and bright; and if the feeling of the dream is clear and cheerful, then the dream is an indication of the presence of the deity. If everything is kind of pallid; if beings have ashen complexions; and if your clothing is dirty and torn, this is a sign of the intervention of a negative spirit.

Discerning Whether a Dream Has Meaning

The next topic in the context of dreams is how to tell if a dream means anything or not. It has been said that if a dream occurs in the context of intense practice, it may be significant; if it does not occur in the context of intense practice, it is probably not significant.

There are some further indications. The first is the time of night when the dream occurs. It is taught that dreams that occur in the early part of the night after you go to sleep are simply the regurgitation of your mind's habits and are not regarded as having special significance. The dreams that occur in the middle of the night are also not regarded as significant because their clarity is affected by the mischief of spirits, and are consequentially not accurate. The dreams that are accurate, the ones you should pay attention to, are those that occur in the early morning around dawn.

There is another factor, which is the physical position of your body at the time the dream occurs. For a dream to be a really reliable source of indication, it is best if you are sleeping sitting up. If that is not possible, then at least you should be sleeping in the posture of the sleeping lion; that is to say, on your right side. Sleeping on your left side disturbs your channels and

winds, which harms the reception and makes the dreams less accurate. At the same time, if you dream of something really disturbing while sleeping on your left side, you should not take it too seriously since the disturbance may simply be caused by the agitation of your channels and winds.

Another indication is to what extent the dream stays in your mind. Even if you have many dreams, if you forget them all as soon as you wake up, then regardless of their content and whether they were apparently positive or negative, they probably do not mean anything. The dreams that mean something are those that remain clearly in your mind, sometimes for years. Those are the dreams that tend to be significant.

Aside from the auspices of dreams, the content of dreams, even apparently negative ones, can be helpful. For example, becoming terrified in a dream can produce **lucid dreaming**; this terror has the special ability to transform the dream content by introducing the practice of the generation stage into the process of a lucid dream. This is called “lucidity through fear” or “lucidity through agitation.” This is when, for example, you dream that your body is about to burn up, but then you realize you are dreaming and you no longer have any fear, so you deal with it in some extraordinary way. The lucidity occurs through the condition of fear.

If in the context of lucidity through disturbance or fear, you can tame things in the dream — for instance, if you dream there are demons chasing after you and you transform yourself into a wrathful deity and subdue them — this indicates you have acquired a slight amount of power in your practice. It does not mean that you are fully accomplished; it means that there is a slight amount of power.

When lucid dreaming occurs more gently, it is called “gentle lucidity.” If it occurs repeatedly this is an indication that you will recognize the bardo, because if you are regularly able to recognize that you are dreaming while you are dreaming, then you will probably be able to recognize that you are in the bardo when you are in the bardo. Regularly here means at least several times, not once or twice or very occasionally.

If during the dream you meditate on the form of your deity and then your body actually turns into the deity — and you are not just imagining this, but the appearance of your body in the dream is fully and vividly transformed into the form of the deity — and in that context you dream that the retinue of deities and dakinis pay homage to you, it is a sign of true accomplishment. If you dream that you encounter many vidyadharas, yidams, and dakinis, all of whom are seen as inseparable from yourself; or if you dream that such figures teach the Dharma, bestow

empowerments, or teach through sign or symbol, this also is a sign of true accomplishment.

It is also a sign of accomplishment if you dream of yidams, dharmapalas, the great vidyadharas of India and Tibet, or all sorts of figures and deities whether or not they are connected to you; in other words, you may not ever have meditated on these deities, and they may not be historical figures whom you have supplicated. If you dream such things repeatedly, and if you receive definitive instructions from them, this is a sign that you have accomplished whatever deity you are practicing. Again what is being presented here are signs of true accomplishment. This is not to be confused with just one or two chance dreams; it means repeated, intense, and reliable dreams of such figures.

You might wonder why you would dream of gurus, yidams, dakinis, and dharmapalas whom you have not been meditating on. For example, you are doing Chenrezik practice and you meditate only on Chenrezik, but as a sign of accomplishment of Chenrezik you see a wrathful deity like Vajrapani. Or you might be meditating on a female deity like Tara, but as a sign of the accomplishment of Tara, you might have a vision of Chenrezik. Although the vision is an indication of the accomplishment of the deity you have been practicing, the reason why it might occur in the form of a different deity — such as a different gender,

wrathful instead of peaceful, or peaceful instead of wrathful — is simply because all buddhas are one in their wisdom. They are all embodiments of the same wisdom.

This is mentioned because you might think that if you have a vision of a deity other than the one you practice, maybe you should change your practice and start doing the practice of the deity you saw in the vision. That is not the case. You should simply go on doing the practice you have been doing. Because all deities are the same in nature, having a vision of a different deity or deities does not mean that you have to go out and start practicing those deities instead of the ones that you have been doing.

Signs Arising through Completion Stage Practice

Everything up to this point has been concerned with the indications of success in the training of the generation stage, and in the case of the last set of signs, considerable success or attainment. This section deals with signs that arise through the practice of the completion stage. Specifically this refers to the path of the method, and within that the practice of **tummo** or chandali, which is the root practice of the path of method.

Initially when you begin the training of tummo, you feel as though you have been beaten up. You feel as though you were bruised inside and out, you feel exhausted and torn apart. You feel that if your arms are straight you cannot bend them, or if they are bent you cannot straighten them, and it is the same with your legs. You just feel awful. This is the first level or stage of tummo.

At this point you may think, “What is the use of this?” You just feel worse and worse, and you are tempted to stop. At this stage of tummo practice, which is called the “stage where tummo is misery,” you have to recognize that this is normal and just force yourself to continue. It does not mean that you are doing it wrong; it means you have to give rise to fortitude and pass through this first stage.

If you continue the practice, the first thing that will eventually happen is your digestion will improve. You will find that you digest food more easily and much better. As a result you are initially hungrier; you want to eat more. You never seem to get full and you never have the feeling of being overly full. You may also feel the beginning of a slight experience of the warmth or heat of chandali. Also at this time most digestive ailments will be purified or alleviated. The improvement in digestion and the beginning of the sense of warmth is the first sign that the practice of tummo is working.

As you continue with the practice you may get to the point where even though your body, especially the outside of your body, is cold or freezing, you do not feel the cold because your mind is filled with the sensation of warmth. When you begin to experience the warmth or heat of chandali, it can start to arise in different ways and different places. Depending on your particular constitution and channels, it may arise from the outside of your body moving inward or from the inside of your body moving outward, or it may arise in some parts of your body and not in others.

At this point, when the warmth of tummo is starting to arise, it is especially important to observe the commitment of tummo practice not to wear fur, because by wearing fur you obviate your body's need to generate this warmth and therefore it will not do so. In order to generate this warmth, there has to be a need; fur insulates your body too much, so even if you do generate warmth you will not notice it.

As the warmth or heat increases through your practice, you need to gradually decrease the amount of clothing you wear. Obviously this assumes a cold climate. You do not do this all at once; at the beginning of the practice you do not just suddenly stop wearing reasonable clothes and wear very thin clothing. You gradually decrease your clothing whenever it becomes possible

for you to do so. It is very important to do this gradually. If you get to the point where for a period of three years you can live through all seasons with only one layer of cotton garments, then you are considered a practitioner of the highest rank. This presupposes some exposure to cold, so doing this in Tibet or in the northeastern United States where the winters are very cold would qualify.

At the first stage of the development of warmth, practice is important. For example, if you do not perform the visualizations, the physical exercises, and the breathing techniques, then your body will freeze just like a stone. If you do them, you warm up immediately. The exercises at this point are like blowing on a fire, causing it to blaze. This is the stage of tummo practice where practice is still very important; the actual technique must be constantly maintained.

If you continue to train, you may get to the point where the warmth does not fluctuate whether you do the visualizations or not. It does not increase when you do the visualizations; it does not decrease when you do not. At that point, you can really start to mix the practice of tummo with the recognition of your mind's nature. Simply by resting in the nature of your mind, you do not get cold. If you are in the midst of the coldest part of winter and you are wearing only one layer of cotton clothing,

you do not freeze. When you reach the point where you are warm simply by resting in the nature of your mind without doing the visualizations or exercises, this is the perfection of the heat or warmth aspect of tummo. It is called “reaching the stage of the supreme tummo.” Chakme Rinpoche says, “I think it is that. It is certain that it is that.” He says this to express modesty.

At the same time, or as a result of this, something else happens. Through the power of the warmth or heat that develops in your body, your drops increase. There are signs of this as well. First of all, as the drops increase, even though your food may be very limited and not very nutritious, you do not become weak and you do not feel particularly hungry. Through the increase of the drops, your vitality, including your complexion, health, also increases. At the same time, passion will blaze like wildfire. These are indications of the increasing of the drops through the practice of tummo.

At this point, when passion starts to increase as a result of the increase of the drops, you must mix the practice with the practice of mahamudra, with the recognition of emptiness. If you succeed in mixing the **bliss** that arises from the increase of the drops with emptiness, then you will recognize the emptiness of that bliss and start to realize bliss-emptiness. If you cannot do that — if your realization of the nature of mind, your realization of

emptiness, cannot keep up with the amount of bliss generated by the practice so that the bliss overpowers the recognition — you are going to have problems. This is the point where people break their vows and ruin their samaya. If your realization can keep up with the bliss and overpower it so you can continue to practice in this way, then you will bring all the channels, winds, and drops under your control.

As a sign of that internal control of the channels, winds, and drops, you will experience a corresponding external attraction of worldly things. You will attract gods, humans, and spirits, which in practical terms means that all of your needs will be met effortlessly. For example, a practitioner at this level who wishes to support institutions for the spread of their lineage and so on will be able to effortlessly attract the necessary resources, such as human resources, affluence, food, and other material items. At the point where you have gained mastery over the channels, winds, and drops and you experience effortless acquisition of external resources, you are very close to the attainment of supreme siddhi.

Using Breathing to Determine Auspiciousness

In order to use breathing as a way to determine the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of an event or a project, you need to be fully trained in and constantly practicing the practices of the breath. This means vase breathing, which is a way of retaining the breath. For a yogi or yogini who can constantly rest their mind one-pointedly in their breathing through the mixing of the mind and the breath, at the moment when a topic or issue arises, they can determine whether or not it will go well by examining the state of their breathing. This can be done to determine the course of something that someone else asks you about, or the course of something you are about to begin or just thinking of beginning.

The reason why breathing can be used to determine the course of events is that the internal act of breathing and external phenomena are interdependent. In the case of a practitioner who focuses on the breath in this way, it functions like the practice of *mo* or divination.

This is done in the following way. If the issue concerns somebody else, as soon as the person asks about whatever it is they are thinking of, immediately look at your breathing. If the issue concerns you, as soon as you think of whatever it is you want

to do, look at your breathing. You can tell how it is going to go based on what phase of breathing you are in and which nostril you are breathing through — if the breath is going in or out through the right nostril, that is a bad sign; if it is passing through the left nostril, that is a very good sign. If it is passing through both nostrils, it is indefinite. If you are breathing in at the moment, that is a very good sign; if you are breathing out, that is a very bad sign. If it is in between, if you are holding the breath, it is indefinite.

Putting these two sets of parameters together, if the moment you do the divination you are breathing out through the right nostril, forget about it; the thing you are concerned with is bad. Give it up. If at the moment you do the divination you are breathing in through the left nostril, it is excellent; there is no problem and no assistance required. If you are breathing through both nostrils and you are in between the in-breath and the out-breath, the outcome is uncertain. If you are breathing in through the right nostril, it is a mixture of good and bad, which is distinct from uncertain. If you are breathing out through the left nostril, it is also a mixture of good and bad.

Altogether there are four possible outcomes: certainly good, certainly bad, uncertain, and mixed. If it is mixed because there is a good nostril but a bad phase, or because there is a bad nostril

but a good phase, then either you (if it is your project) or the person who asks you (if it is their project) should engage in some form of virtuous activity in order to remove the bad part and augment the good part. You should do anything that will accumulate merit, especially actions such as releasing lives. This will make the project successful. If it is uncertain because the breath is in between the phases or passing through both nostrils, you or the other person should do something to accumulate merit in order to make it positive. If it is all bad, then whatever the project is, do not do it. There used to be a custom in central Tibet, in the area of Lhasa and Tsang, of requesting realized masters to do divination through their breathing.

Unless you are someone who is intensely involved in the practice of the winds, do not pay any attention to this. In other words, do not worry if you are breathing out or breathing in through the right nostril when you think of something. It does not mean anything. The interdependence and the meaning exist only if the person is a practitioner of the winds.

A final remark about this topic: if you are someone who does this practice and has this degree of facility in it, when you start to go somewhere and you take your first step walking in a certain direction or place, if the breathing signs are bad in connection

with that first thought, do not go. Delay the trip. If they are good, you will get there without obstacle or impediment.

Signs Arising Through Meditating on the Preliminaries

We now turn to the signs of having meditated on the completion stage, which here means the entire path of Mahamudra, starting from the common preliminaries and going through to the main practices of tranquillity and insight. We will first explain which signs should arise as a result of doing each of the preliminary practices.

First mentioned are the signs arising through proper meditation on impermanence and death. This occurs if it seems reasonable and normal to constantly think of the imminence of death and to constantly be aware of impermanence so that you have no assumption that you will live for a very long time, and you find yourself wondering, “Maybe I will die tonight, maybe I will die tomorrow.” If you think this way, then regardless of what sorts of projects you are involved with, you will always view practice as more important than your projects because you are aware of the imminence of death. This is a sign that you have successfully

meditated on death and impermanence. This is very important. This is what we could call a “real sign of practice” or “significant sign of practice.”

Normally when we talk about signs and indications, people expect to see something very pretty. They think if they practice Dharma they will see rainbows or pretty designs of multicolored light. Far more important than seeing spectacular and interesting things is whether or not your attitude changes. If you have an intense and heartfelt awareness of impermanence such that you realize your life could end at any moment without warning — for example, like the people who were in the World Trade Center — and you feel you have had enough of the world and worldly involvement and must concentrate primarily on Dharma, this is a real sign of your mind having gone to the Dharma through the contemplation of impermanence.

The second set of signs mentioned here are those connected with contemplation of the freedom and resources of the precious human existence. If you keep all of your commitments (this means the **pratimoksha** vows, the bodhisattva vow, and the samaya vows), if you are constantly involved with hearing, contemplating, meditating, and Dharma practice, and if you feel there is not really anything to do or anything worthy to involve yourself with other than Dharma, this is a sign that you

have properly meditated on the freedom and resources of the precious human existence.

The third set of signs is connected with meditation on the results of actions, or karma. For example, you are commanded to do something wrong by someone in authority but you are unwilling to do anything wrong even though you know you will die as a result. This happened a great deal in Tibet during and after the Chinese Communist invasion when people would have a knife put in their hands and be commanded to kill an animal. They would refuse and then be killed themselves, which they considered a worthwhile end to their lives. Or if you are promised tremendous profit as a result of an action such as killing an animal or something else that is wrong, then even if such circumstances arise, you do not abandon the four root commitments: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery (or if you are ordained, not to have sexual intercourse), and not to tell lies about spiritual attainment. If you will not abandon those commitments, it is a sign that you have properly meditated on the causes and results of actions.

The next set of signs concerns the meditation on and practice of going for refuge. Even when everything you do goes wrong, or even if there is no blame on your part and everything still goes wrong, you continue to devote yourself to the Dharma. Even

when you are victimized by adversity and the vicious activities of others without any reason, you do not blame or resent the Three Jewels.

What is being pointed to here is the possibility of thinking that since you have gone for refuge to the Three Jewels, you should be protected from all adversity, and therefore if adversity occurs there must be something wrong with the Three Jewels. If you do not think this, and if you actually consider the adversities to be the ripening of your previous karma through the kindness of the Three Jewels, and if you continue to entrust yourself completely without reservation to the Three Jewels with the thought, “You know what I need. Please make it possible,” this is the sign that you have properly meditated on going for refuge.

The next set of signs is concerned with having generated and meditated on bodhichitta. An example of this is when people speak harshly about you, primarily behind your back, with the result that you get a negative reputation so damaging it actually threatens your life, and you have not done the slightest thing to justify such behavior. If even under those circumstances you still wish to establish the people who are saying these things about you in a state of buddhahood and rejoice in their happiness, and you never think that you are going to pay them back either

in this life or a future life, this is a sign that you have properly meditated on bodhichitta.

The next set of signs is connected with Vajrasattva meditation and mantra recitation. If in your experience during the waking state your mind is joyful and lucid, your faculties are clear, you feel light, and you feel well physically and mentally, it is a sign of success. If in the context of Vajrasattva practice you dream of washing, possibly with ambrosia; if you dream you expel filth from your body; if you dream of drinking ambrosia or milk; or if you dream of flying, then these dreams are signs that the Vajrasattva practice has been successful. If you dream of flying when you are not practicing, this means that your resources are going to decrease and you are going to become poor.

The next set of signs is connected with the mandala offering practice. If you do not feel hungry even when you have not eaten but rather feel increased vitality and health; if your mind is joyous and you feel happy; if you dream of a good harvest of crops and fruits; if you dream that you find a treasure; or if you dream that you put on fine clothes, these are all signs that the mandala practice has been successful.

The next set of signs, which concludes the discussion of the preliminaries, is connected with guru yoga. If in actual experience

during the waking state — not as a matter of ritual or because you are doing it in a group practice — your yearning and devotion blaze uncontrollably and you spontaneously call your guru by name as though calling him from afar; if when you are praying to him you cry uncontrollably and get goose bumps, then you have received the guru's blessing. If you meet your guru in dreams and receive empowerments and transmissions from him; if you receive instructions from him on how to dispel impediments and bring progress to your practice; if you receive prophecies; or if you dream that you actually become the guru, that your mind and the guru's mind are inseparable, these are signs that you have received the guru's blessing through excellent practice of his guru yoga.

Signs Arising through Tranquillity and Insight Practice

The next set of signs may arise through doing the actual or main practice, which is the practice of tranquillity and insight. The assumption here is that you follow the traditional order for practice, which is completing the preliminaries and then beginning the actual practice of tranquillity.

The first thing that can happen when you practice meditation is that your senses (the sense consciousnesses, the mental consciousness, in short, the eight consciousnesses) become unclear, such as when you are asleep. You can remain for a long time in a state of tranquillity without clarity and without the faculty of mindfulness. When this happens it is a sign that you have achieved the state of “obscure tranquillity.” It is a state of tranquillity, but it is not the type of tranquillity we wish to achieve because it does not possess the faculty of mindfulness or alertness, and this is what enables tranquillity to serve as a basis for the development of insight. It is essentially a trance state, and this is considered a sidetrack.

The next thing that can happen when you are practicing meditation is that through cultivating the tranquillity aspect and identifying the movement of thought with bewilderment, you may be able to temporarily stop thinking. If you identify the cessation of thought as your goal, then when you stop thinking you are also stopping mindfulness, and you remain in a state of complete mental inactivity. The difference between this and the former sign is that in the former sign this just happens, whereas in this sign you intentionally cultivate the goal of achieving a state of complete absence of mental activity. This is a sign that you have generated the view of the Chinese Huashang school. Huashang means “monk” in Chinese, and this refers to the view of certain

Chinese masters who came to Tibet in the ninth century. It is not saying that all Chinese Buddhism adopts this view; it refers to certain masters who came to Tibet and said that all you needed to do was stop thinking. In this view, the goal of meditation is to force your mind to come to a state of absolute stillness. This view is also considered a sidetrack because there is no lucidity.

Another thing that can happen is that you gain some control over what goes on in your mind so that you can direct your mind intentionally to any chosen object. You direct your mind to a certain object or visualization; it stays there for a long time and will not leave until you intentionally cause it to. This is a sign that you have accomplished what is called a “common tranquillity”; in other words, the practice of tranquillity as it is understood in the common vehicle.

The next thing that can happen is similar to the state of common tranquillity except no fabrication or intentional alteration of the mind is required. When you allow your mind simply to rest freely and naturally, if you find it does not move very much or generate thoughts and can stay at rest for a long time, this is a sign that you have generated authentic tranquillity. This is the type of tranquillity we are looking for. In addition to this, when you are able to see the nature of this state of tranquillity and the nature of the mind that is at rest, and if you can remain at

rest for a long time in the recognition of the mind's emptiness and the emptiness of that tranquillity, it is a sign that you have realized the unity of tranquillity and insight.

When scrutinizing the mind, first look at where the mind comes from and where thoughts come from; when thoughts are present, look at where the mind is and where thoughts are; and when thoughts vanish, look at where the mind goes and where thoughts go. Also scrutinize the characteristics of the mind, looking for its shape, color, location, and so on. When you have scrutinized each of these topics and exhausted this scrutiny to the point where you have resolved with certainty that none of these things exist, that the mind has no origin, location, destination, shape, or color, it is a sign that you have given rise to common insight, the practice of insight as it is understood in the common vehicle.

When a thought arises in your mind, the thought is naturally recognized in its nature simply through arising. The nature of that thought, its inherent emptiness, is directly or nakedly seen, and therefore the thought is seen as nothing other than the natural shape or display of mind, like waves and water. This is the arising of insight within the occurrence of thought.

When the faculty of alertness and mindfulness in meditation is utterly free of distraction and your concentration has a very

narrow focus, like trying to thread a needle, and if as a result you are aware of whatever arises in your mind, whether the mind is still or whether thoughts are occurring, it is a sign that you have only realized stillness and occurrence.

The difference between this and the previous sign is that in this case you are simply aware of whether or not thoughts are arising; you are not seeing the nature of the thoughts. This is why the text says “only”; you have only recognized stillness and occurrence.

When the maintenance of nondistractedness does not require that kind of narrow focus or concentration, but simply through the intention of mindfulness, the intention to observe the mind, you immediately and easily arrive at a recognition of occurrence and stillness within the mind, this is the point where practice has become comfortable and easy. This is a sign that the practice is becoming facilitated by habituation.

Another sign is when as a result of practicing you find that your desire for food, clothing, and conversation has decreased; and whereas previously you were concerned with acquiring a lot of knowledge about different aspects of Dharma and related cultural and scientific topics, you now find that your desire for this knowledge has decreased. When you recognize that the essence of Dharma is simply in two things, practice and devotion,

and you realize that all mundane activities are unnecessary and meaningless, you have reached the stage called “new meditator who does not even want gold.” This is in contrast with an old meditator, and it is a sign that you have given rise to the pleasure of a beginner’s enthusiasm. It is somewhat like an intoxicated state of enthusiasm, a radical desire for renunciation. This stage is characterized as a beginner not even wanting gold because you are so enthusiastic about meditation that even if someone put gold in front of you it would not mean anything to you; it would be no different from any other stone.

Subsequent to all of that, you may get to the point where you actually start to realize — not merely understand, but realize — that all things without exception are empty, that there is not so much as an atom’s worth of true existence anywhere, and yet through the habit of reification you reify that emptiness; in other words, you make the emptiness an object of reification. As a result, you may proclaim in very elevated language what you have discovered, and because of your reification of emptiness you become careless about cause and result. You think that since actions are empty, they are empty of consequence, and as a result you believe that because you have realized the emptiness of things and are therefore a yogi or a siddha, whatever you do will not affect you and will leave no imprint. This is a sign that you have given rise to the view of emptiness as nothingness,

the view of blank emptiness. This is likely to happen when you start to gain experience of emptiness, and it is very difficult to avoid. The reification of emptiness is the worst of all obstacles for a practitioner; it is worse than the reification of phenomena, which is believing in permanence.

Another thing that can happen is the experience of cognitive lucidity, the intensification of your mind's clarity. When that happens, you will develop a great certainty about your practice of meditation. You will have no doubt. Because of your certainty, your confidence and lack of doubt, you will compare yourself to others; you will not be pleased by them, and you will put yourself above them. Because of your certainty in your own practice, you become snotty and arrogant. This is a sign that you have given rise to the experience of cognitive lucidity.

Another thing that can happen is that although you have been practicing meditation sincerely for a long time, your continuum or mind has become worse, even rougher than before. You are so prickly people cannot even talk to you or deal with you at all. You are just completely uncooperative, oversensitive, and short-tempered. All of your kleshas are elevated; you get angry for no apparent reason, and you are greedy, jealous, and competitive. At this point people will denigrate you, saying, "What kind of a practitioner are you? You are worse than anyone else." This is

the point called the “phase where old meditators collect cast-off soles.” The honeymoon phase, the initial enthusiasm phase, is the point where the practitioner is new and so delighted with Dharma that they do not even want gold. At this point the older or experienced practitioner, who is having a rough time and becoming greedier, would take even the cast-off soles of people’s rotten old shoes.

Next is a sign that you are experiencing a rough ride. You have the experience of **nonconceptuality** and lucidity, and for you this is an experience of roughness. This is not an obstacle; it does not mean that you have gone off the path. It is said to be like smoke before a fire; when you are trying to light a fire, before it bursts into flame there is a lot of smoke, which is unpleasant. When the flame comes, the smoke gets used up. This is usually a sign that the practitioner is on the brink of some kind of realization, but is not quite there yet. If you do not become overpowered by this and abandon your practice, if you instead maintain the essence of your practice, this is a sign that there will soon be great progress. Sometimes you will see old practitioners who are extremely disagreeable and short-tempered, and it is natural to think, “What is the point of practice if it just turns people into ogres?” Although there is no guarantee, it may mean they are on the brink of some kind of progress.

The next thing that will happen — probably after that, but the sequence is not absolute — is that all of your previous experiences will be discarded like a snake shedding its old skin. After discarding conventional experience, what you experience will be inexpressible; as it is said about the perfection of discernment, “inexpressible, inconceivable, and indescribable.” At that point, all of your previous conceptual certainty, which was a source of pride, and all your arrogance about being a practitioner will just dissolve like a rainbow disappearing in the sky. When that happens, when you transcend all of your arrogance, certainty, and ideas, it is a sign that you have realized your mind’s nature.

Finally it can happen that someone has no qualifiable meditation experience whatsoever — no special dreams, no visions of deities, nothing auspicious, inauspicious, or particularly worthy of description — but their devotions and their renunciation of and sadness for *samsara* steadily increases. They experience no obstacle to this increase and devote their lives to practice. This is called the “monarch of signs that is no sign.” In such a case the person has none of the signs that we normally think of as signs of practice, but they have the monarch or king of signs, which is renunciation and devotion. This is the type of sign that is valued in the Kagyu tradition above and beyond all others.

Eventually it reaches the point where someone has such confidence and such depth in the realization of their mind's nature that there is no fluctuation, and therefore they have tremendous natural compassion for all beings because they recognize that beings suffer simply because they do not realize their mind's nature. At this point the practitioner no longer has any kind of arrogance or coldness, having long ago discarded these things; compassion naturally arises as the effect of their recognition of the mind's nature.

This brings up or intensifies their recognition, as is taught in the *Aspiration of Mahamudra*, and they have not so much as a hair's tip worth of desire for food, wealth, or fame. These things just appear automatically for them, as we see with great teachers who never engage in business but still manage to support their enterprises. Such a person can teach for months or even years without having to memorize anything or consult texts because, as a result of having realized the nature of things, the essence of Dharma arises spontaneously within them, and they are free to talk about it as long as they want without having to prepare; they never run out of beneficial things to say. An example of this is Jetsun Milarepa and the other Kagyu forefathers, all of whom sang songs of realization that were spontaneous, not based on study, research, writing outlines, or any of that. When all of

these things happen, this is a sign that it is time to concentrate on benefiting others.

The section concludes, “This brief letter describing the signs of practice was written in response to the exhortation of Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso in the waxing phase of the month of the constellation Go in the Wood Snake year by the monk Raga Asya over the course of a few evenings during the break in between the third and fourth meditation sessions. It was written down as a memorandum by the one who requested it. May it benefit a few of the unintelligent.” He is saying this not to insult us, but to be modest about himself.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Theoretically speaking, if a practitioner were to perceive some of these signs, how would they proceed? Would they take note and continue to practice with diligence, or would they discuss this with a teacher?

RINPOCHE: The types of things described in this text — not just those considered for people of highest capacity, but all of them — are only going to happen if someone’s practice is extraordinary. If they do happen, and if by consulting this text

you are able to determine the significance of the sign, then you do not need to ask anyone. If you are in doubt you should ask a qualified teacher.

One precedent for this is when Lord Gampopa brought his experiences almost daily to Jetsun Milarepa. From one point of view, we could say that Gampopa did this as a demonstration of the qualities of the path, and from another point of view we could say that he was developing his realization and was seriously asking Milarepa.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, could you talk a bit about maras and especially how they have the discernment to tell if someone is close to attaining realization?

RINPOCHE: Maras are both external and internal. The real mara — the worst mara, the principal mara — is internal; it is the mental afflictions that we possess. It is called the “worst mara” because it is the cause of our experience of suffering in samsara, which is beginningless.

Mental afflictions make up one type of mara, but we cannot say that this is the only mara. There are external maras as well, and they are definitely sentient beings. Such beings become maras through two different circumstances. One condition is that the

particular being has accumulated a vast amount of merit, but they have accumulated this merit without love or compassion for others as their motivation, and they have pride in their merit and their other mental afflictions as well.

The other condition is the perverted aspiration they make in connection with their vast accumulation of merit. They make the aspiration that through the power of their merit, in future lifetimes they will be able to harm sentient beings effectively, either sentient beings in general or certain beings in particular. Because of the amount of merit they have accumulated, they have the ability to affect others, and they have the discernment to recognize those whom they wish to harm. Because of their perverted aspiration, they only have the ability and interest to harm, not help.

A very great yogi can overpower an external mara, but someone who does not possess that kind of realization cannot do so. There is one infallible way to protect yourself from all maras, both external and internal: the cultivation of love, compassion, and bodhichitta. In terms of external maras, as soon as you develop compassionate bodhichitta and direct it at that being, they become powerless to hurt you, and this is because the medium through which they hurt you involves your own aggression. In the same way, if you are dealing with an internal mara, the

generation of bodhichitta and the fostering of bodhichitta will obviously overcome that.

When we talk about becoming impregnable to the assaults of Mara, we are referring to the development of bodhichitta. Therefore if you dedicate any virtue you accumulate to the buddhahood of all beings without exception, that virtue will become a tremendous and flawless source of benefit for yourself and others, and will remain so until you attain buddhahood. On the other hand, if you dedicate virtuous actions negatively or in a perverted way, then you can actually become a mara.

STUDENT: How can a mara accumulate vast amounts of merit without any compassion or loving-kindness? I thought that was synonymous with merit. If a mara is engaging in the activity of obstructing and harming Dharma practitioners, won't that mara accumulate negative karma, which would eventually be his or her undoing?

RINPOCHE: First of all, the accumulation of merit does not necessarily require compassion. You can accumulate a great deal of merit without compassion as your motivation. Compassion is the thought, "I must benefit beings; I must help beings." It is best if you do meritorious things with that motivation. You could also do meritorious things such as making offerings with

the motivation of wanting to become powerful or wanting to become affluent. Meritorious deeds that are improperly motivated will obviously not be conducive to or lead to buddhahood; nevertheless it is possible to accumulate merit through such an inappropriate motivation.

In the case of a being that becomes a mara, not only do they have inappropriate motivation, they actually have the strongly generated, perverted aspiration to harm beings with the power they accumulate. As a result of the combination of their merit and their perverted aspiration, they temporarily become extremely powerful. During this temporary state of power when they can harm beings, the mara is using up its previous store of merit very quickly. When that merit is used up, the mara will pass from that life and be reborn in the lower states. Therefore maras are among our primary objects of compassion because from the beginning they have had an inappropriate motivation, made inappropriate aspirations, and finally are engaged in inappropriate activities that will cause them to experience tremendous suffering. With that understanding you will not respond with anger when you are attacked by a mara, but you will respond with sincere compassion for that being. This means the mara not only does not harm you, but you actually succeed in benefiting them because you inspire them with your compassion and altruism.

STUDENT: When a person has an empowerment like Kalachakra, where you are given two pieces of kusha grass — one to put under the mattress and one to put under the pillow — and you have a dream that indicates how the empowerment is going to go, for someone like me what is the point of even knowing that there are signs since they are so open to misinterpretation?

RINPOCHE: Elaborate empowerments, such as the Kalachakra, have a preliminary day called the “day of preparation or orientation.” Most of what is done on that preliminary day is designed for a situation slightly different from ours. In the earlier period of the Buddha’s teachings, during the time of fruition when the individuals involved in this tradition were still those who were ripe for awakening, the auspices attending an empowerment were, judging by the custom, of some importance. The purpose of dream analysis and giving the kusha grass were originally to determine whether or not that disciple could receive the ultimate empowerment, whether or not they could generate the actual wisdom of empowerment through receiving the empowerment ceremony, and whether or not it would be auspicious for them to practice that particular cycle or deity. Nowadays the situation is different because we are not in a time of fruition; we are in a time of cause. We are all beginners, making our first contact with the buddha’s teachings through the teaching of this buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha. Therefore at this time we are not expecting,

nor are we expected, to come to some kind of fruition like that. The empowerment master gives kusha grass and instructions to pay attention to one's dreams because they are required to by the ceremony. It is done as a ritual requirement; for example, nowadays the empowerment master does not do the part where they individually question each disciple about their dreams the next morning because, as you indicated in your question, there is not much significance in this for most people.

In the context of this being the causal time or epoch, nowadays the purpose of empowerment, and especially public empowerment, is merely to create a connection between those who receive the empowerment and the deity. There may be individuals among the participants who will actually practice on the basis of the empowerment, but the primary intention nowadays is to create a connection or plant a seed that will lead to practice and awakening in some future epoch.

STUDENT: You mentioned lucid dreaming in the context of signs, and I wanted to know about working with lucid dreaming in the more general context of one's practice. For example, in the moment in a lucid dream when one becomes aware that one is having a lucid dream, is there a way to direct that dream in terms of practice?

RINPOCHE: The actual cultivation of lucid dreaming as a yogic practice must remain a separate topic beyond the scope of these teachings because no one here is doing these practices. In general, if you wish to work with the dream state as it is taught in this text in this chapter, the primary purpose is to use dreams as a way of determining the course of your practice. As the chapter taught, you would begin by taking an appropriate sleeping position, sleeping on your right side, and then you would pay special attention to the dreams that arise in the early morning. Based on our text, it seems that this is the practice for using dreams as indications of practice. I have no experience of this myself; I am merely inferring this from the text.

The actual experience of lucid dreaming seems to arise primarily from your attitude throughout the day during the waking state. If you have the attitude that all appearances are illusory and dreamlike, then that attitude is likely to occur in the dream state, which will cause you to question the reality of what you experience, and that may enable you to recognize that you are dreaming. We can say this because, in general, whatever you think about or fixate on during the day will come up during your dreams. Further development of the practice of lucid dreaming and specific techniques for developing and working with this state are part of the training of yogis, and we are not concerned with that here.

What I can say is that the basic training in working with lucid dreaming consists of cultivating equanimity toward dream appearances. Once you recognize that you are dreaming, you have no hope or fear about what arises in the dream. For example, if you dream that you are falling off a cliff, it is not a problem because you know it is just a dream. If you dream that you acquire a lot of things that you wanted, this should not delight you because you know it is just a dream. The point seems to be that lucid dreaming becomes a basis for transcending attachment and aversion to appearances.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said that a practitioner who uses lucid dreaming can have realization in the bardo. Is this something which can be developed, and should a practitioner try to develop it?

RINPOCHE: The recognition of the dream state is conducive to recognition of the bardo in the way the text mentioned, and ideally we should practice lucid dreaming according to this tradition. Attempting to work with lucid dreaming at this point would be like throwing an arrow with your hand and expecting it to stick to the target. In order to practice this, our tradition teaches that you have to begin by doing the full practice of a yidam in retreat, and after that you practice tummo, then the **illusory body**. On the basis of those practices, you can begin

to work with the dream practice; otherwise it is like trying to shoot an arrow without having a bow.

If at this point someone does lucid dreaming, then of course that is very helpful, but the main thing is to cultivate the practice of meditation on a deity such as Chenrezik. This is the primary preparation for the bardo: you dissolve the sense of your flesh and blood, your solid body, into emptiness, and then you visualize yourself as the deity Chenrezik, who is seen as being vivid but insubstantial. If you cultivate a familiarity with this image, then when the peaceful and wrathful deities arise before you in the bardo, you will recognize them as deities and not mistake them as being substantial; you will recognize that they are made of light because you are familiar with that. You will also recognize them to be the pure appearance of your mind's pure nature. It is primarily through this recognition that you will attain liberation in the bardo.

STUDENT: Sometimes when we are practicing intensively, we might have a dream about someone we do not know very well. During the dream we may see things that happen to this person, things that later on actually happen to the person in regular waking life. Is there any reason why we have seen that during the dream?

RINPOCHE: This does not happen to everyone. According to the traditional explanation, this happens because these individuals have a certain type of constitution, certain types of channels. Their channels permit their mind's clarity to occasionally reflect future events. In itself, the reflection of future events in the person's consciousness is not considered significant. The only thing that may be significant about this is that the person's channels are probably somewhat more sensitive, and this may be useful to them in other ways.

Even for the people who experience this, it is occasional and does not happen constantly. It is unreliable because you cannot tell when a dream is an instance of this and when it is just any other dream. Furthermore you cannot do it on purpose. You cannot create an image of a future event; it just happens whenever it happens, and even then it is very occasional. Therefore in itself it is not considered either good or bad. The only good thing we can say about it is that it indicates that the person's channels are sensitive. They may therefore be more receptive to certain types of practice, but there is no guarantee of that either.

STUDENT: Usually when we are dreaming it seems so real until we wake up. Going back to my childhood, I remember waking up from dreams that seemed so real and wondering whether

the waking state was also a dream. How do we know we are not dreaming even now?

RINPOCHE: There is no problem with that. When someone is really trained in dream practice, they use the experience of recognizing the illusory nature of dreams to recognize the illusory nature of appearances during the waking state (such as impermanence). In your case, if you find yourself questioning the reality of the waking state because you have awoken from a dream, you can use this to remind yourself of the illusory nature of appearances of the waking state. This may or may not help, but it certainly will not hurt.

STUDENT: In the dream state, if one is in an extremely negative situation, such as a realm of demons, is it okay to use that understanding as a support to practice? If you dream that you are in a realm of demons and you get some kind of prophecy from the demons, can you use it as long as it does not lead you into unvirtuous situations?

RINPOCHE: A prophecy of demons is not going to lead to awakening. By definition, demons cannot lead you on the path to awakening. There cannot possibly be any ultimate use in that. The best you could get from a prophecy of demons or experience

with demons is maybe some indication of something you can do to temporarily improve your circumstances.

In general I do not think that following the advice of demons is a very good idea. The only thing about it that could be useful is if, considering the content of your dream, it reminds you of impermanence and if it teaches you some kind of lesson.

If someone dreams about a lot of demons or sees demons in dreams, most of the time they are not seeing anything external. Especially in dreams, the things that arise are just images produced by your thoughts. You should not assume that when you are dreaming of demons that you are actually contacting external beings. You might be, but the chances are against it. Even assuming that it is more than just your own thought and is in fact an external being, the way to determine whether it is a demon or a protector is by responding to it with compassion. If it is a protector and you generate compassion, the being will immediately become very friendly. If it is a demon and you generate compassion, it will probably just disappear. The most important thing to remember is that most of the things you see in your dreams are just your imagination.

STUDENT: In the bardo between waking and dreaming, is it useful to try to develop a meditative state of mind?

RINPOCHE: If you can it would be helpful, although there is no guarantee that you will be able to recognize this state. The type of practice you are describing is an aspect of the clear light or **luminosity** practice, and as I said before in answer to the question about lucid dreaming, each of these practices depends on and is founded on the practice that precedes it, and therefore they cannot be taken out of context. One has to begin with the full yidam practice, and on that basis undertake the practice of tummo, then on that basis the practice of the illusory body, then on that basis the practice of dream, and then on that basis the practice of the clear light. They cannot be taken out of context because each depends on the other.

Nowadays all this information about practice is put into books. A lot of people read the books and just try the practices off the bat. I guarantee that you will not attain supreme siddhi through playing with the things you find in books. You may attain some kind of common attainment, but most likely that common attainment will just be some kind of amusement.

STUDENT: Before actually meeting the deity or realizing confidence in mahamudra, are there any particular signs, inner or outer, that one may have broken into the storehouse consciousness? Does the blessing of the deity facilitate that in any way?

RINPOCHE: The all-basis consciousness is something neutral. It is not something good so it is not considered a breakthrough. The all-basis consciousness is simply a basis for the accumulation of virtuous and nonvirtuous impressions. There is no sign or particular experience of contacting it, breaking through to it, or anything like that.

Probably the only thing traditionally explained that connects with your question is that sometimes if you practice tranquillity meditation and your mind comes to rest without the emergence of habit, one way to express that is to say that the functions of mind have temporarily subsided within the all-basis consciousness.

STUDENT: Could that be a result of yidam practice?

RINPOCHE: It is not impossible. In general, having practiced tranquillity meditation will help the generation stage practice. Also the practice of the generation stage where you one-pointedly focus your mind on the details of the deity's appearance is a particular type of tranquillity meditation. You could say that through practicing the generation stage you develop a state of nonconceptuality, and if the nonconceptuality is complete, this is your mind coming to rest in the all-basis consciousness.

STUDENT: When I hear about guru yoga, it sounds like you are fixating on your guru. How can one have devotion to the guru without fixating on him?

RINPOCHE: You do fixate on the guru in the practice of guru yoga. In the most general use of the word fixate, we could say that the quality of fixation is the same, but the actual effect is very different. The type of fixation that is the source of all wrongdoing is self-oriented fixation. Either directly or indirectly, it is all fundamentally selfish. It is, “I want this, I need that, I should be like this,” and so on. The fixation that is devotion is more a sense of awe or wonderment directed at the figure of the guru in admiration of his qualities. You could call it fixation in the sense that the mind is directed, but it is not fixation in the sense of centralization.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you made a reference to the practice of channels and winds. Could you expand a bit on that, specifically with respect to the effects of the internal dynamics of the practice?

RINPOCHE: The practice of the channels and winds is only done by the best of yogis, the most advanced practitioners. If it is done properly, then the individual who does it will definitely attain buddhahood in one lifetime. All of those individuals of the Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya, and Geluk schools who have attained

buddhahood in one lifetime have done so through the practice of the channels, winds, and drops.

The basis of the practice is what we already possess within ourselves innately, but the actual practice involves, first of all, rigorously purifying obscurations and gathering the **accumulations**, and then the actual conduct of the practice itself, which must be done in the context of 100 percent flawless maintenance of all vows and samayas. To be honest, talking about this leading to buddhahood in one lifetime is more a matter of past history. However if you want to do these practices, you have to do a three-year retreat. While I cannot guarantee that you will achieve the result of these practices by doing a three-year retreat, at least you will be able to learn them and become used to doing them.

What one achieves through the practices depends on one's diligence. As the Lord of Refuge, Kalu Rinpoche, said when he addressed the participants of the first Western three-year retreat in France, "You will be the best of lamas and the worst of lamas. I say you will be the best of lamas because the instructions I have given you are the best, and if you practice them with the best diligence, you can attain the best result. I also say you will be the worst of lamas because if you practice them without diligence or do not practice them at all, there will be no result whatsoever. It is entirely up to you."

STUDENT: I have heard something about tummo before and I have heard something about the completion stage before, but this is the first time I had heard that there was some connection between the two. You just said in answering a previous question that you could attain full buddhahood by the practice of the channels and winds. Is that the same as tummo? Also, how does tummo connect to the completion stage?

RINPOCHE: These terms are sometimes used to mean the same thing, but the terms are distinct enough that it is better to think of them as three different things. The term channels and winds sometimes refers to practices using the *channels and winds* and sometimes to the structure of the vajra body. *Channels* refers to the wisdom and karmic channels through which the winds move. *Winds* refers to coarse and subtle winds. Coarse winds consist of the air that we breathe, and subtle winds consist of currents of subtle energy within the channels of the body. Any practice that makes use of these would be characterized as a practice of the channels and winds. Tummo is one such practice; essentially it is a technique of working with the channels and winds, and producing physical heat or warmth is one of its benefits.

The completion stage can include such practices, but the typical definition of the completion stage is that at the conclusion of a session of meditating on the deity, you dissolve the image of the

deity into a state of nonconceptuality and then you attempt to rest within that. Especially if there is recognition of the mind's nature while resting in nonconceptuality, as in the practice of mahamudra, then we would call this the authentic practice of the completion stage.

In general, in the system of the sutras, one practices mahamudra by attempting to examine or scrutinize the mind's nature, and in the system of the tantras one perceives this by dissolving the image of the visualized deity. Such practice ideally — and I say this based on what I have read, I am not claiming to have experienced this myself — will enable someone to dissolve all bewilderment and confusion and remain in a state of flawless wisdom.

STUDENT: I have a history question. When you talked about the signs of tummo, you said not to wear fur because you would not be able to tell if there were any signs or not, that tummo should be practiced in a cool place. Since tummo practice originated in India, which is a very hot place, in what form did tummo practice manifest in India? Was it a different practice than what is done in Tibet?

RINPOCHE: The practice enables you to control temperature, so if you were practicing it in a hot place you could cool yourself

down, and if you were practicing in a cool place you could warm yourself up. It enables you to equalize temperature. Otherwise, as your question indicated, if the Indian practitioners of tummo could only heat themselves up, during the hot summers on the Indian plains that would have been an awful practice.

STUDENT: I think you said that there is interdependence between breath and external phenomena. Could you explain that?

RINPOCHE: The theory behind using the breath for the purpose of divination is rather subtle and hard to understand completely. It is one of the topics presented in the book the *Profound Inner Meaning* by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa. It is the doctrine of the correspondence of outer, inner, and alternative or other. Essentially this means that the movement or cycle in the external world — the fluctuations of the elements, the apparent movements of the sun, moon, stars, and so on — correspond internally to the movements of the winds and drops within the channels of the body. Therefore if someone is sensitive to those internal movements, they can determine the auspices of external events — whether they are auspicious, inauspicious, and so forth. Because this correspondence exists, the relationship between breath and external phenomena is not regarded as coincidental. If it were coincidental, you could not use it as a basis for prediction.

STUDENT: I fell asleep during this morning's teaching when you were speaking Tibetan; when I was sleeping I could understand Tibetan. When I woke up, I could not understand any more. Was I just imagining that I was understanding it directly?

TRANSLATOR: That's how we do it!

RINPOCHE: You probably could not understand it. The feeling while you were asleep that you could understand Tibetan was the result of your intention to listen, which was the last thing you thought of before going to sleep, and therefore that is what happened while you were asleep.

This brings up a very important point about the state of sleep. Normally we think that the state of sleep is completely valueless, that it is morally neutral and offers no opportunity or danger whatsoever. In fact, that is not exactly true. The state of sleep is basically neutral, but your attitude immediately before going to sleep does give sleep moral value, for better or worse. If you go to sleep with a virtuous intention — for example, your intention to listen to the teaching — then that colors the contents of your mind throughout the state of sleep. Therefore your mind remains in a state of virtue for the duration of that period of sleep. If you go to sleep with a negative intention or a negative mindset, this will remain for the duration of that period of sleep as well.

Showing the Unmistaken Path: Cutting Through Deviation

We make a distinction between deviation from the path and a mistaken path. A mistaken path is a path that is fundamentally flawed or wrong, one that is headed in the wrong direction. A deviation from the path is what happens when you start on the right path but something goes wrong. The difference between deviation from the path and a mistaken path is that if you deviate from the path, you can always find your way back. This chapter deals with how to recognize that you have deviated from the path and how to find your way back.

Because this chapter is concerned with the development of discernment about the nature of the path, it is dedicated to the bodhisattva Manjushri; therefore it begins, NAMO GURU MANJUGOSHA. The first stanza of the chapter reads as follows, “With the supreme method of great compassion, you sharpen the sword of discernment, which is the recognition of emptiness. With that sword, the weed of deviation can be cut. Cutting through such deviation is our inheritance from our guru, Manjushri.”

The situation presented here is one where you basically have the resources you need to practice. The text says, “Having received the appropriate empowerment, transmission, and instruction...” The basic prerequisites for doing any kind of Vajrayana practice are receiving the empowerment, the reading transmission, and the instructions for whatever liturgies you are going to use. In the context of the sutras this would also include receiving whatever vows or ordinations are necessary for the practice and lifestyle you wish to pursue. Having these resources as well as understanding generation and completion are the basic prerequisites.

The dangers that arise in this practice do not happen because you do not understand Dharma — these dangers can arise even though you do. Understanding generation and completion means that you understand how to practice the generation stage, which in essence consists of visualizing a deity or deities, and how to practice the completion stage, which in essence consists of meditation on emptiness. Based on a good understanding of the practice, you might practice intensively, possibly in retreat, with great diligence and even austerity, but if you do not cut through the deviations that occur, you will not attain any great result. Normally we think that if you have basic understanding and practice hard, you will attain the results you want. The text says that this is not enough. You also need to know how to spot and avoid sidetracks; if you do not know how to spot and avoid the

deviations, you are like a business person who loses their money because they do not know how to conduct business properly.

The deviations have been enumerated in many lists, such as the “nine doors of downfalls for a practitioner of Vajrayana,” and so on. All of them, the major ones and the minor ones, are included in three types of deviation from the path. These are attachment, aversion, and apathy. All deviations come from one of these three or a combination of them. Innumerable methods and techniques for recognizing and eradicating deviation have been taught, but all of them are included in two remedies: meditation on emptiness and the cultivation of compassion. These are the three deviations and the two remedies.

Deviation through Desire

The first deviation, which is deviation through desire or ambition, occurs when you basically understand why you are practicing, but you become corrupted by a lesser motivation, such as the desire to acquire a reputation, prosperity, respect, or position in this life. Because you are still attached to these things, your motivation and your wish to maintain or accomplish these things starts to supersede the greater motivation with which you began the path. You start to dream of becoming a great scholar, siddha,

or lama, and therefore what you choose to practice becomes corrupted as well. You decide to focus one-pointedly on the practice of a deity that can give you power over everything or expand your prosperity.

When you allow your practice to be corrupted in this way, when it becomes a means not for accomplishing awakening but for accomplishing prosperity in this life, then you have done something equivalent to selling the finest sandalwood for charcoal. This refers to the story about a foolish person who acquired a great deal of the finest sandalwood, known as snake-heart. He took it to the market to sell, and although everyone saw that his incense was fine, no one felt they could afford it and no one bought any. The man noticed that the merchants who were selling charcoal had no problem because it was cheap and people needed it. Returning home from the market, he took his fine sandalwood, burned it to charcoal, and then sold it as charcoal.

This is what you do when your motivation becomes the wish to acquire some kind of privilege or prosperity in this life. Practice can work with this motivation; you practice with diligence one-pointedly, and you start to actually attain something, with signs of siddhi, prosperity, and so forth actually arising. Yet because from the beginning you have forgotten about death and are thinking only of this life, you become more and more fettered

by a craving for material prosperity and for pleasure of all kinds. As a result, the more you practice, the more your affliction of desire blazes like wildfire.

At a certain point, the indications of the successful accomplishment of your deity occur and you think, “I have accomplished this deity and no matter what happens, my prosperity is assured.” At that point, not only is your practice focused on the accomplishment of prosperity, but you actually are so arrogant you think that you can do whatever you want. You think that because you have accomplished that deity, things will continue to go well for you no matter what you do. You start to fill your belly with meat, liquor, and whatever you like, then you go around saying, “I have control over my channels, winds, and drops, and therefore you should sleep with me. Not only will this not harm me because I have such control, but it will be a cause of your liberation as well.” Saying this, you start to defrock lots of nuns. Of course, if you actually had this control over your channels, winds, and drops, no one would get pregnant, but since you do not have this power, eventually somebody does. You have to conceal the pregnancy, so the child is either aborted or killed on birth, and the body is buried to protect your precious reputation. At that point, you have really become something!

The deity you meditated on was not some kind of demon or spirit; it was a wisdom deity that was supposed to be used for the accomplishment of awakening, but your motivation became corrupted. You abandoned the motivation of bodhichitta and became entirely concerned with accomplishing prosperity and reputation in this life. You may think that you have acquired the siddhi of a wisdom deity through practicing a wisdom deity, whereas actually you have accomplished devaputra mara, the mara that is the child of the gods. Devaputra mara is the aspect of Mara that forever prevents awakening because it is attachment to samsara. It is the unwillingness to leave samsara, and this is what your practice has turned into, the accomplishment of samsara. In reference to this, the mahasiddha Khacho Wangpo said, “There are people who practice for one hundred years and still do not get the point. They hold the lineage of the little people.”

The only way to avoid this deviation is to have no craving whatsoever for any kind of benefit of practice other than the perfect awakening of yourself and all sentient beings. Not only do you not aspire for the acquisition of prosperity and renown in this life, but you do not even aspire for or care about the position of your future rebirth; you do not care a bit if you are reborn as a prosperous human or a god like Brahma or Indra as the result of your practice. This is the kind of attitude that you need to have, because as long as you care about the immediate result of

practice in terms of prosperity and so forth, this craving will corrupt practice. If your only concern or motivation in practice is to bring about the unsurpassable awakening of all sentient beings, and if you maintain this motivation from the beginning throughout the middle and end of your practice, your practice will not become corrupted.

Even if you do exactly the same practice as in the previous example, such as a deity renowned for the power of attraction or a deity renowned for the increase of wealth, it will not become corrupted because your motivation is not corrupt. Your merit and wisdom will increase and you will gain control over your own energy as well as your own mind and appearances. If your motivation for practice is bodhichitta, the other benefits of practice will arise spontaneously, and they will not corrupt you because you are unconcerned with them. For example, if your crops are good, you get many other things as well. You get weeds, you get chaff, and so on, but these things are just by-products of farming; they are not the reason why you are doing it. In the same way, even if you do not care about prosperity and respect, you will get these things automatically.

In this case, where someone does a practice motivated by bodhichitta, and in the previous case, where they do a practice motivated by desire for acquisition and respect, the practice could

be absolutely identical, with both practitioners having received the same empowerments and using the same liturgy, the same deity, and the same mantra. The only difference in the way these two people practice is that in the first case their motivation is bodhichitta, and in the second case their motivation is corrupt. The only way to avoid this first type of deviation is to make sure that bodhichitta is your sole motivation in practice.

There is a second deviation similar to the first, but much worse. In this case, not only is the person motivated by the desire for temporary benefit, prosperity, respect, position, and so on, but in order to accomplish it, they decide that rather than practice a wisdom deity, they should just go ahead and practice a mundane deity. A mundane deity is a powerful, nonhuman being, like a spirit, who is so powerful that if you gain their allegiance, you can manipulate the external world. If your basic motivation is the wish to manipulate the external world, this would be very attractive because you believe this mundane deity, with all of its mental afflictions, will be much easier to make a connection with than a wisdom deity. When people become concerned with this kind of manipulation, they start to prefer the practices of powerful mundane spirits to those of wisdom deities. They think that it is more powerful and that the results are quicker. They become quite devoted to the practice and they entrust themselves and their welfare entirely to this mundane deity.

The moment you do this you have lost the vow of refuge. If a Buddhist practitioner ever takes a mundane spirit as their principal practice and entrusts their welfare to that spirit, going for refuge and paying homage to that spirit, they have violated the first and foremost commitment of the vow of refuge, which is that having gone for refuge to the Buddha, you neither go for refuge to nor pay homage to mundane deities. The point of this commitment is not that the Buddha is some kind of jealous god. The point is that if you trust your welfare to an unenlightened being, you are not going to get anything out of it. That being cannot help you; they do not have what you need. Therefore in the original book of the **Kadam** tradition it says, “Bad deities are dirtier than demons.” A demon is obviously a demon and we know to avoid it, but a seductive mundane deity is actually more poisonous because we might find ourselves relying on it.

The problem that this statement refers to has actually occurred. Karma Chakme Rinpoche gives a specific instance of this, but he does not give any names, and this is because he does not want the story to be seen as an accusation leveled in any particular direction. He says that once upon a time there was a renowned Tibetan lama who took as his principal practice the mundane protector or spirit known as Pehar. The lama gained such attainment through this practice that he actually got a certificate from the Emperor of China acknowledging his attainment. The lama

realized that because he had the Emperor's support, he could make a lot of money if he went to China. He went there and became the Emperor's guru, and he acquired huge amounts of brocades, tea, gold, silver, and all the sorts of things that Tibetan lamas would want from China. Then he went back to Tibet and eventually passed away at his residence in a place called Marchu.

When you take a mundane deity as your principal practice, you are reborn in the retinue of the mundane deity with whom you have formed an intimate connection. He was therefore reborn as one of the lieutenants of Pehar. Since the function of Pehar is to protect monastic wealth, the lama became a protector of his own wealth, the wealth he had in his previous life as a human lama. This meant that whenever any of the monks of this now-deceased lama attempted to dispose of or liquidate any of the jewels, tea, gold, or silver that the lama brought back, terrible things happened to them because this lama had been reborn as a spirit who would not let these things be touched. Finally they put everything that had belonged to the lama in an uninhabited cave, and up to the time of the seventeenth century when this book was written, everybody knew where that cave was and what was in there. Never mind touching any of it; no one could even go near the place because as soon as you got close, bad things started to happen.

The problem here is similar to the problem in the first type of deviation. Although there is a problem with relying on a mundane deity, the principal problem is that the practitioner does not know how to relate to a mundane deity. About this Guru Rinpoche said, “Do not practice spirits until you have approached a wisdom deity” — in other words, until you have attained a stable practice of a wisdom deity, do not do the practice of a mundane protector.

You might ask, “Is it not the case that all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism practice not only wisdom deities but also mundane protectors?” It is the case, but the way that we all do it, whether you are Sakya, Geluk, Kagyu, or Nyingma, is different from this type of deviation. First of all, before you do the practice of such a protector you must have performed a yidam practice to the point where you have clear appearance or stability in both the generation and completion stages. You must have done such a practice with the result that your own being has been blessed or consecrated by the yidam. After this you may enlist the aid of a mundane deity or spirit when you need to quickly achieve an activity for the benefit of others, but you do not take refuge in this mundane deity. You do not entrust yourself to it. At best, which means if you are a realized teacher, you regard the mundane deity as an employee or servant; if you are not a realized teacher, you should think of it as an equal, like a brother or co-worker.

At least you should regard it as no more than, for example, an uncle or aunt who is doing you a favor.

Mundane deities may indeed be enlisted in order to dispel impediments to the accomplishment of awakening, and therefore you can ask them to assist you. When you perform their ceremony, such as making requests of them, presenting offerings, and so on, the attitude is not the attitude of veneration that you take toward the Three Jewels. It is like paying a salary to an employee.

If you have clear realization of both the generation and completion stages, this kind of practice will not impede your path and will not corrupt you because you are not entrusting yourself to the mundane deity. In fact, simply because you do not entrust yourself to them, ironically the mundane deity can actually bestow supreme attainment. The tantras say about this, “For a yogin or practitioner who has realized suchness, even though they practice or meditate on a spirit of the charnel grounds, they accomplish supreme attainment, but for a yogin or practitioner who has not realized suchness, even though they meditate on a buddha, they accomplish rebirth as a preta or spirit.”

If you have high or genuine realization, you recognize that even mundane deities and mundane protectors or guardians are nothing other than the display of your own awareness. For

example, when we look at the sun and its rays, we can distinguish between the two. We say that the sun is the source and the rays are what the sun produces, but they are of the same nature. In the same way, your awareness and the display or power of that awareness are of the same nature. If you have realization, you understand that whatever a deity may seem to be — a wisdom deity, an activity deity, or a mundane deity — it is nothing other than the display of your own awareness.

Those two types of deviation — misunderstanding the practice of a wisdom deity and misunderstanding the practice of a mundane deity — are both deviation through desire or ambition. If this deviation is not avoided, regardless of what form your practice may take, it is not different from the practice of a Shaivite tirthika. A Shaivite tirthika practices channels, winds, and drops. The technology or paraphernalia of their practice is not much different from Buddhist Vajrayana, but the motivation is different. The motivation is not the recognition of emptiness and the compassionate wish that all beings attain awakening. If your motivation is not bodhichitta, then the techniques of Vajrayana are nothing more than the accomplishments of mundane states.

Regardless of the deity's form, as long as you see the deity as the display of emptiness and nothing other than that, and as long as your motivation for meditating on that deity is the wish to

establish all beings without exception in the state of Vajradhara, this is the practice of Buddhist Vajrayana. If you practice any deity, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, without understanding that it is the display of emptiness and without having as your motivation the wish to establish all beings in the state of Vajradhara, then whatever your practice is called, it is not the practice of Buddhist Vajrayana. At best it is a deviation from the path.

I want to reiterate the point of all this. Whatever practice you do, whether it is meditation on a deity associated with enrichment or expansion or meditation on one associated with attraction or charm, the only selfish component of your motivation must be the desire to attain a state of Vajradhara, if you can call that selfish. Furthermore, your desire or wish to attain the state of Vajradhara is not because you think it would be fun to be Vajradhara, but because having attained the state of Vajradhara, you can thereafter bring all beings without exception to that same state. The motivation for practice, especially Vajrayana practice, must be the compassionate wish to bring all beings to the state of awakening. Possessing that motivation effectively cuts through all the deviations that otherwise arise through selfishness and desire. As long as you maintain and possess that motivation, any practice you do, whether it is expansive or minimal, is a direct cause of buddhahood.

Most deviations from the path occur through the three causes of attachment, aversion, and apathy. We have discussed two different forms of deviation caused by attachment that are based on a misunderstanding of the practice of wisdom deities and a misunderstanding of the practice of a mundane deity. The way to avoid deviation through attachment is by maintaining bodhichitta — the wish to attain supreme awakening and the wish to thereafter establish all beings in that same state — as your motivation for practice.

Deviation through Anger

The second type of deviation is deviation through aversion or anger. Just as with deviation through desire or ambition, this second deviation occurs when conditions are coupled with your wish for things to go well, and this causes your motivation for practice to be corrupted or perverted.

The conditions usually involve living in turbulent times when there are many enemies, either those who physically threaten you and your belongings, or other sorts of threats and dangers. You think, “Well, in times like these someone like myself, who is comparatively powerless, is at great risk. I have no way to

control the external environment, therefore I better cultivate the practice of a wrathful deity, such as Yamantaka. Having done that, I will be able to annihilate anyone and everyone who poses a threat to me.” You practice a wrathful deity with that type of motivation, and you get to the point where you actually have the magical ability to kill others, just like a vicious spirit or naga. Because your aspiration and motivation in practice is to be able to kill everyone who threatens you and anyone under your protection, you also have the aspiration that any contact with your belongings is poisonous and bestows disaster on contact.

If you actually acquire that ability, then instead of accomplishing benefit for yourself and others, you have accomplished disaster for yourself and others. The disaster for others is obvious; in this life you are killing other beings. The disaster for yourself is that after you die, you will experience great misfortune; you will be reborn in lower states or even be temporarily reborn as some kind of harmful spirit, because that is what you have turned your mind into. About people who tend to practice this way, Mikyo Dorje, the Eighth Gyalwang Karmapa, said, “Practitioners who accomplish magical power and practitioners who are lawless, who have no kind of rules, should be, at all costs, avoided.”

In the root tantra of Manjushri there is a story about this actually happening. A long time ago, a brahmin who was also a king’s

minister noticed that there was a great deal of disobedience and disloyalty in the kingdom. People simply did not keep the laws set by the monarch. Disappointed by this, the minister practiced the wrathful deity Yamantaka in order to be able to control the people in his kingdom. He attained the siddhi of this deity, and thereafter whenever anyone disobeyed any of the king's rules, he magically killed them. He was able to do this because of the power of his practice, and he remained in his position as prime minister for many years.

When he died he was reborn in the same area of the same country as a vicious spirit that continued to kill people. This spirit had a long life, and for many years people in that place died for no apparent reason. When the spirit died, the being was reborn in the worst of the hell realms, the hell of uninterrupted torment. He was in that hell for billions and billions of years, during which time he experienced unimaginable suffering. After he had experienced enough suffering to purify the karma he had accumulated by killing all of those people, he was reborn with a human body. The deity that he practiced, Yamantaka, is none other than the wisdom deity Manjushri in a wrathful appearance. The minister had abused the practice, but because he practiced a wisdom deity with an improper motivation, after going through aeons and aeons of hell, he was again accepted by that deity, and in that life he attained the state of a **pratyekabuddha**. The story

has a happy ending, but in between he went through aeons and aeons of misery because of his improper motivation in doing that practice.

It is not enough that the deity you use for wrathful activity is itself a wisdom deity; that is to say, you cannot think this makes whatever you do in the practice acceptable. For example, Chakme Rinpoche writes, “There are some people who think that if you kill through the application of the wisdom wrathful deity, even though you are an ordinary person and do not have power to lead the consciousness of the person you have killed to the pure realm, the wisdom deity has the power to do so. They think that if you use the magical ceremony of the wisdom wrathful deity to kill someone, that person will immediately be liberated by that deity.” This is untrue, as is clear from the preceding story. The reason why it is untrue is because the deity is not killing these people. You are killing them in the deity’s name, and you are blaming the deity. You are using the power of the deity, but the deity did not kill those people, so why should you expect the deity to be able to liberate them? It is you who have killed them, and you who remain unable to liberate them; therefore you harm them tremendously and you harm yourself even more.

You will remember that there are two instances of deviation through desire: one associated with the improper motivation

of wisdom deity practice, and one associated with improper motivation of mundane deity practice. These two corresponding types are here as well. As bad as the foregoing are, there is a deviation associated with aversion that is even worse. This is when you think that you simply have to kill these beings, humans or otherwise, so you practice a mundane deity, a powerful spirit, and through that practice you engage in all sorts of malefic magical ceremonies, such as symbolic burial, which is when you take things that represent the person you are trying to control and bury them underground. The purpose of this is to prevent them from having any freedom or success in their life. You may send hail or create a whirlwind; there are all sorts of things you could do.

If you succeed in killing someone through magical means, you have broken your pratimoksha vows and obviously your bodhisattva vow and your samaya vows. We will not even discuss the bodhisattva and samaya vows, but your pratimoksha vows, which are the easiest of the three to keep, are ruined by this. The *Vinaya* says, “If someone with the vow not to kill” — an *upasaka*, *shramanera*, or *bhikshu* — “intentionally kills with their own physical action either a human being or a human fetus, entrusts such an act of killing to someone else, or encourages someone else to kill himself either directly or indirectly by praising the state of death” — for example, when someone is suffering and

you say that the suffering will be over if you kill yourself — “if you do any of these four things, that ordained person is defeated.” In the case of a bhikshu, *defeated* means that your ordination has been broken and lost. The quotation ends, “And, therefore, they do not remain within the sangha.” Thus using magical means to kill someone is just as much an act of murder as using physical means.

You might wonder about the stories in our tradition of great teachers magically killing enemies of the teachings, and you might also wonder about the Vajrayana teaching these things. Our tradition does have these stories, and these things have been taught in the Vajrayana, but the motivation for doing these actions authentically is entirely different from what was just described.

It is permitted to kill a spirit or enemy who definitely threatens the lives and welfare of many beings, especially if the spirit interferes with the beings’ ability to accomplish awakening. Principally, though, the function of wrathful activity is not killing sentient beings but annihilating the four maras, which are in essence one’s own mental afflictions and the afflictions of other beings. In order to dispel obstacles to beings’ awakening, in order to establish oneself and other beings in a state of awakening, and in order to dispel obstacles to the survival of the teachings and

to the longevity and activity of one's root guru, it is acceptable to engage in a ritual of turning back or averting disaster, which could be based on an application of a yidam practice, dakini practice, dharmapala practice, and so forth. This is the actual way these wrathful practices are to be done and the way they have been done by the authentic scholars and siddhas of our tradition. The practice or ritual is the same, but the motivation for doing it is entirely different. What creates corruption and deviation is an improper motivation.

For example, at one time nine magicians decided they wanted to kill the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. These nine magicians got together in a cave and practiced Yamantaka. They succeeded in accomplishing the deity, and as a result the Third Karmapa became ill. He said to the people around him, "In order to alleviate my illness, you must perform a Turning Back of Disaster Ceremony." His foremost disciple, the mahasiddha Drakpa Senge, performed a ritual of the same deity, Yamantaka, not with the intention of killing anyone, but simply with the intention of turning back the negative force created by the nine bad magicians. As a result of the ceremony, the power of the nine magicians was reversed on them, and their cave fell in; all nine passed away, and the village that supported them suffered an epidemic.

There is a big difference between what those nine magicians were trying to do and what Drakpa Senge did. The nine magicians were trying to kill the Third Karmapa out of jealousy and competitiveness. Drakpa Senge prevented them from doing this, causing their own malevolence to bounce back on them. Because Drakpa Senge was the instrument or intermediary, not only were the magicians prevented from accumulating the incalculable negativity of killing His Holiness, they were also brought to a state of liberation. In doing the ceremony, Drakpa Senge benefited beings, protected the life of the Karmapa, and in the long run benefited those nine individuals.

Nowadays very few of us have that type of ability. We do not have the magical power to do what Drakpa Senge did, so the major lesson for us here is not what motivation we need when performing elaborate magical ceremonies, which are not within our scope to begin with; the lesson is that the greatest and most essential thing for us is to maintain bodhichitta. If bodhichitta remains our motivation, then our actions will bring us further along the path of awakening. As we saw before in the case of deviation through desire, we primarily prevent or avoid deviation through anger, hatred, or aversion by making sure that bodhichitta is our motivation.

Deviation through Bewilderment

A third type of deviation is bewilderment through misunderstanding how to meditate on deities. This type of deviation is when you solidify the generation and completion stage techniques due to ignorance.

Let us say, for example, your practice is to meditate on the form of a wrathful deity. If you do not know otherwise, you might solidify the wrathful deity's appearance. You might think that the deity's apparent anger is real anger, and the deity's wrathful appearance is as solid as it appears. If you meditate on yourself as a wrathful deity as solid as a statue, as if made from rock or diamond, then the consequence will not be awakening.

Instead, immediately after your death you will be reborn as a demon or spirit that looks like the wrathful deity. This will happen because you are not identifying with the deity's wisdom essence, but rather with the superficial nature of the deity's appearance, which is wrathful. You are identifying with a state of deified or sanctified aggression; therefore you will be reborn either as a yama, which is a type of violent preta, or as a rakshasa, which is a kind of spirit or being that consumes and eats human flesh.

The apparent wrath of wrathful deities has nothing to do with anger; it represents the intensity of the deity's wisdom. Therefore when you visualize the form of a wrathful deity, it needs to be vivid yet insubstantial, like the appearance of a rainbow. It must not be seen as the solid presence of actual anger. There are some deities who are not only wrathful but actually have animal heads above their main heads, such as the principal yidams Hayagriva and Vajravarahi. In the case of Hayagriva there are one or more small horse heads, and in the case of Vajravarahi there is a small sow's head. If you think these deities are beings who actually have animal heads sticking up out of their skulls and that there are animals actually present, then you are going to be reborn as a spirit with animal heads called an "alloy spirit." This kind of spirit is a mixture of human and animal characteristics, and it runs around creating, at best, mischief. These are the type of problems that can come from meditating on wrathful deities and not understanding why they look the way they do.

You might think that you will not do any wrathful deity practices; you will just meditate on peaceful deities and therefore you will be fine. Unfortunately it is not that simple. If you solidify the appearance of a peaceful deity who is beautiful, colorful, perfect in appearance, who is everything you always wanted to be, and you identify with that form as solid and real, you will be reborn

as a god of the form realm. You will have deviated entirely from the path into a state of mundane bliss.

In short, if your practice consists of a generation stage practice where the image of yourself as the wrathful or peaceful deity is solidified, then at the time of your death you will be able to die within that state of visualization, and immediately after your death when you are in the bardo, you will see what looks like the deity but it will not be the deity; it will be a spirit that resembles that deity. If it was a peaceful deity, it will be a nice-looking spirit, and if it was a wrathful deity, it will be a threatening spirit. In any case, you will be reborn in the retinue of that spirit — for example, as a vidyadhara in the retinue of Vayudeva, the god of wind. “Vidyadhara” sounds really good, but the term *vidyadhara* does not necessarily mean an enlightened being. It means a wizard, and originally it simply meant someone with magical power. We use it in the Vajrayana to mean an enlightened being with magical power, but in this case *rigdzin* or *vidyadhara* does not mean that; it means a spirit in the retinue of Vayudeva, the god of wind, who has the power to create mischief for other sentient beings.

Deviations in the Generation Stage

There are other dangers with deity meditation. The teachings discuss one hundred possible sources of deviation based on meditating on the one hundred different peaceful and wrathful deities. Normally we think it is good enough to simply think of these deities, yet each one can be a source of a particular type of deviation.

For example, many practices involve concentrating one-pointedly on the deity's seed syllable in one's heart, using a syllable such as HUM, HRI, or TAM. If you succeed in cultivating a stable samadhi in which you meditate one-pointedly on a seed syllable and you see that seed syllable as solid, you will be reborn as a snake. This happens because concentrating the mind into a very tight space creates a tense, cramped, snakelike state of mind.

Having heard that meditating on wrathful deities causes problems and meditating on peaceful deities causes other problems, you might think, "Fine, I just will not meditate on deities." This is not a solution either.

There are three ways to prevent these problems from arising: prevention through understanding, prevention through correct meditation, and prevention through view or outlook. First we

are going to look at prevention through understanding. This consists of simply understanding what the forms of the deities really mean, what they actually represent. All buddhas have achieved the same dharmakaya, and therefore all buddhas are indistinguishable in nature. No buddha has an actual, definite appearance. From their own point of view, no buddha, including any yidam, has any particular color, any particular number of faces and hands, or has any particular scepters in their hands. They are dharmakaya; they take whatever form is necessary based on the needs of the sentient beings in whose midst they are active.

For example, a piece of pure crystal, like a crystal ball, has no color. Whatever fabric or surface you rest it on, the crystal will take that color and appear to contain it, but the color is not the color of the crystal itself. The crystal simply adopts that color because of its environment. In the same way, a yidam is a buddha and a buddha is dharmakaya. A specific deity takes the particular form it takes simply based on the needs of sentient beings, not because it actually has a particular form. Therefore the details of any yidam's appearance — whether it is peaceful, wrathful, or semiwrathful; whether it has one face or many faces, two arms or many arms — can take any form at all. The yidam is not its appearance, and therefore the appearance of any yidam is unlimited. There is no limit to the number of yidams and the number of forms in which buddhas can appear, and there is

no limit to the number of faces, hands, different scepters, and colors they can exhibit.

You might then ask, “If a yidam is a buddha and a buddha is dharmakaya, which has no inherent color, shape, or form, why does this iconography exist at all?” In the pure realms of the sambhogakaya, the sambhogakaya teaches its retinue but it does not teach through words. Sambhogakaya never speaks; it teaches through symbol, and the symbol is the appearance of the sambhogakaya itself. The appearance of a sambhogakaya buddha is a medium through which the retinue, the inhabitants of that sambhogakaya realm, understand the meaning of Dharma.

For example, if we look at one common form of deities, especially wrathful deities, sometimes they will have three faces, six arms, four legs, or two wings. The three faces represent the trikaya: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya. The six arms represent the **six perfections**: generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. The four legs or feet represent the **four immeasurables**: love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. The two wings represent the unity of method and discernment; it does not mean that the deity is a bird. This particular form shows how all the details of yidams’ appearances are ways through which the sambhogakaya buddha teaches Dharma to its retinue.

This is like the language of the deaf; by using gestures, you can communicate clearly without ever saying anything verbally. In the same way, the sambhogakaya communicates through symbol, and the appearance of the sambhogakaya is the Dharma. Therefore it was said by Guru Rinpoche, “All victors, all buddhas, are one or the same in the expanse of wisdom. Dharmata itself has no appearance. Nevertheless they display their individual forms in order to benefit or train the individual being in whose midst they display them.”

Hayagriva and Vajrayogini are also examples of this. If the horse head protruding out of Hayagriva’s main head does not mean that he is half horse, what does it mean? A horse represents speed, and it represents the fact that the path of Hayagriva’s yoga is a supremely quick way through the stages to the state of buddhahood; that is why he has a horse head on top of his head. In the case of Vajravarahi, she has a sow’s head emerging out of the top of her head. The most obvious characteristic of a pig, either a male pig or sow, is that it has no concern whatsoever with what we regard as clean and dirty. In other words, pigs have no attitude about cleanliness. That absence of attitude, that absence of thought or conceptualization, is what the sow’s head represents; it represents the realization of the dharmakaya beyond any kind of thought or concept.

Unlike us, who are stuck with our appearance and our bodies, with looking nice or not looking nice, deities do not have one specific appearance with which they are stuck. The appearance of a deity is not the inherent appearance of that deity; it is the way the deity communicates with its disciples. In other words, the deity communicates through the symbolism of its appearance. The deity's appearance is therefore a method and not the actual inherent nature of the deity. Understanding the meaning of that appearance is the way to avoid deviation based on the appearance of deities.

The second way to avoid deviations is through correct meditation. Again, this is principally concerned with deviations based on the solidification of the appearance of the deity. *Correct meditation* in this case refers to the correct practice of the generation stage. The definition of the correct practice of the generation stage is that it possesses three characteristics: clear appearance, recollection of purity, and stable pride. If you possess all three of these, you will be free from any deviation in your generation stage practice.

The first characteristic is clear appearance, and this means that the appearance of the visualized deity should be as vivid as a reflection in a mirror. A reflection in a mirror is as vivid as what is being reflected, but it is nevertheless completely devoid of

substantiality. The vivid or clear appearance of the generation stage is extreme clarity without any solidity.

The second characteristic is the recollection of purity. This is the recollection that the deity's appearance is the display of the wisdom that is the deity's nature. The deity's appearance is not the independent manifestation of something solid; it is the manifestation of wisdom. It is like the appearance of a rainbow in the sky, which here means that it is vivid yet insubstantial, and it is the luminous display of wisdom.

The third characteristic is stable pride. Here *pride* means utterly relinquishing the attitude of thinking of yourself as yourself, and instead thinking of yourself as the deity. This means possessing the stable conviction that you are the deity, that your surroundings are the deity's surroundings, and that all phenomena are of the nature of the deity. *Stable pride* means that you know this is actually your essential nature; you do not think you are merely imagining it. You know that your nature is the nature of the deity; you have no doubt about this, and you relinquish all fixations on the supposed ordinary or impure nature of appearances. If you possess these three points — clear appearance, recollection of purity, and stable pride — then your practice of the generation stage is authentic.

Finally, the third remedy for this type of deviation is avoiding deviation through the view. In your generation stage practice, avoidance or prevention through the view means never practicing without the view of emptiness, the recognition that emptiness is the single nature of all phenomena, which therefore includes the visualized presence or form of the deity.

This can be done in two ways. The best way is not to see the image of the deity as different from the emptiness it embodies; in other words, to see the appearance and its emptiness as the same thing. This is the way we see the unity of the vividness and insubstantiality of a rainbow; they are not two different things. The rainbow only appears because of what it is — it only appears because it is insubstantial. If you can practice in that way, then you can practice in the generation and completion stages simultaneously. If you cannot, then until you have attained the stability in practice that allows you to do that, you can use the second way, which is to ensure the maintenance of the view of emptiness by practicing the generation and completion stages in alternation. This means that during your practice of the generation stage you visualize the deity as vividly as possible, and at the conclusion of the session you utterly dissolve that image into emptiness. This is how, even at the beginning, you can maintain the view of emptiness in the practice of the generation stage.

Minor Deviations of the Generation Stage

We have looked at deviation through desire, deviation through anger, deviation through bewilderment, and how to practice the generation stage. Now we continue with the presentation of deviation connected with practice of the generation stage, and what follows next are called “minor deviations.”

The first deviation concerns your attitude toward and your practice of making external offerings. If you can afford to set up offerings and you do not, or you have set up offerings that are just a token, merely enough so you can say you did it, this is a deviation. This refers to a situation where you have the means to set up fine offerings without excessive difficulty. For example, you live in a place where water is readily available, yet you choose the smallest possible offering bowls and offer only a few drops of water in each; or you have plenty of incense at hand yet you break the sticks into smaller pieces and only offer a half or a third of a stick at a time.

There are two reasons why you might do this. One is laziness: you do not want to deal with filling the bowls. The other is stinginess: you cannot bear to give anything away for free. In any case, if you practice offering as a mere token and not a wholehearted gesture, this is deviation into the preta world,

and you are accumulating the cause of being reborn as a preta in your next life.

It is fine not to make offerings if you do not have the means to do so. If you are a yogin or yogini practicing in utter isolation and if you have nothing for offerings, or no more than a certain amount, then it is fine if you do not make offerings. There is nothing wrong with that, but if you can easily make offerings and you do not, that is not good.

The second thing about offerings concerns your attitude toward the offerings themselves. In this case, the attitude needs to be specific to the level of practice in which you are engaged. If you are practicing the **kriya tantra** or **charya tantra** — kriya tantra refers to a practice like nyungne and charya tantra is like the practice of Zap Tik Drolma or Green Tara — you must not eat the disposed-of offerings, meaning the offerings thrown out or exchanged. In the case of the two lower tantras, you do not take the rice from the offering bowls, cook it up, and serve it for supper. You are supposed to throw it outside, in a clean place where it is available to birds, deer, and other wild animals. You do not throw it in the garbage.

In the case of the third level of tantra, the **yoga tantra**, the requirement is slightly different. Karma Chakme says that you

are not supposed to step on the offerings. People have sometimes misinterpreted this as merely meaning “do not step on them,” but it actually means more than that. The words *step on* here actually mean “sample.” You are not supposed to sample the offerings before you offer them. This goes for the preceding tantras as well. This means, for example, that if you are lighting a stick of incense to be placed on the shrine, you do not smell it first to see how good it smells. You do not waft it in front of your nose, because then you are getting it before the deities do, and you are giving them the leftovers. You do not blow on the incense to blow out the fire, just as you would not blow on someone’s plate of food before serving it to them. Up to the level of yoga tantra, the most important point about offerings is not to pollute them by sampling them. Obviously this includes not nibbling at tormas before you put them out, but it also means not smelling the incense.

At the highest level of tantra, the anuttara yoga tantra, the attitude toward offerings is slightly different. You are still not supposed to sample them, but what is more important is not to throw out the offerings when you dispose of them; instead they are consumed by the practitioner. The offerings are seen as having absorbed the siddhi or attainment of the practice, and therefore the practitioner should eat them. Thus in the anuttara yoga we find the practice of feasts or tsok, which is not present

in the lower tantras. You can offer all sorts of food — such as meat, butter, curds, yogurt, things you would normally eat — as a feast offering. A certain part of the offering is eaten by the practitioners themselves at the appropriate point in the ceremony. You are not eating the offering for the sake of the food; you are doing it in order to gather the accumulation of merit. By offering these foods as a feast to the deity and then partaking of them, you actually gather a tremendous accumulation of merit.

This brings up the specific issue surrounding offerings of meat and liquor, which are unique to the higher tantras. There are two deviations you can fall into here; the deviations come from the same basic problem, but they manifest as two different behaviors. Meat and liquor offerings that must be used in feast practice, and may be used in other contexts as well, are called the “offering of samaya substances.” These are called “samaya substances” because as a practitioner of anuttara yoga, you are bound by samaya and vow to offer these substances and to partake of them.

This is where the problem comes in, because you may be bound by pratimoksha vows not to consume liquor, and in addition you may be vegetarian by choice. As long as you perceive meat, liquor, or any other substances in the feast offering as ordinary food and drink, you are going to fall into one of two deviations. The only way to avoid these two deviations is to utterly trans-

form your perception of these substances as ordinary into the perception of them as wisdom ambrosia. If you do not succeed in doing so, no matter how you relate to them, you are going to fall into a trap.

The first trap is when you have offered these feast substances, but you still perceive them as ordinary, as fine meat, fine food, and delicious liquor. Because you would not normally have them at all or certainly not in great amounts, you literally feast on them; you eat a lot of meat and you drink a lot of liquor. Your motivation for doing so is liking the taste of the foods or perhaps the feeling of intoxication. If you partake of meat and liquor as a practitioner of the higher tantras, and you still perceive these substances as meat and liquor, you will be reborn as a preta, a hungry ghost of the type called the “bound snout,” which is one of the many nasty types of pretas you might be reborn as.

You might think that in order to avoid this downfall, you should avoid these substances altogether. You still perceive them as meat and liquor, and your pratimoksha vows do not allow you to partake of liquor under any circumstances, and if you are monastic, you have vowed not to eat in the evening. When the feast substances are brought around you do not touch them or go near them. This behavior is the complete opposite of the previous deviation; instead of gorging yourself on the offerings,

you avoid them entirely. This behavior fundamentally comes from the same problem, which is that you have failed to alter your perception of these substances. If you abstain from feast substances with the motivation of keeping your pratimoksha vow, you will be reborn in the cold hell called Blister.

When you avoid these offerings you are not violating your pratimoksha vow, but you are violating your samaya vow because partaking of these substances is required by samaya. The reason for this is that the rule with the three vows — the pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and samaya vows — is that the higher vow takes precedence over the lower vow, but in a way that does not contradict the essence of the lower vow. In the context of a feast, the Vajrayana samaya vow, which requires you to take at least token amounts of these substances but expressly forbids intoxication, takes precedence over the pratimoksha vow, which forbids not only intoxication but the consumption of even a drop of alcohol and the consumption of solid food after noon. Therefore the correct way to avoid the two extremes is, first, to transform your perception of these substances into wisdom ambrosia, and second, to partake of token amounts that do not enter the realm of intoxication, and to do so with the motivation of gathering the accumulations.

What is meant by deviation here is a temporary departure from the path. It is not a fundamental misunderstanding of the path; it is a sidetrack that slows down your path. Nevertheless slowing down your path can be a serious matter. For example, it can mean being reborn once in hell or as a preta, which will seriously slow you down. Eventually you will return to the path, but it is best to avoid these deviations.

Deviations in the Completion Stage

The next level of the path of the higher tantras is the completion stage with signs, which is meditation on the channels, winds, and drops. Some particular deviations can occur here. When you meditate on the channels, winds, and drops, normally the first sign of training is the ability to control your physical temperature to some degree. You gain the ability to be warm when it is cold, and cool when it is hot. This becomes obvious to others because you only wear one layer of cotton even in the coldest weather. People will find this very impressive, even beautiful.

The danger at this point is that because people are so impressed with you, you can get away with a certain amount of misbehavior. Because you have achieved some success in meditation on the

channels, winds, and drops, you start to be careless. Particularly you might engage in promiscuous sexual behavior, simply because you can. No one is going to stop you because they think you are some kind of siddha. This is the first deviation when you practice channels, winds, and drops; because people are impressed with you, you start to misbehave and you get away with it.

Even if you avoid that, there is still a more subtle problem. When you practice the channels, winds, and drops, you not only experience warmth but you also experience physical pleasure or bliss. The pleasure, which is orgasmic in nature, naturally produces desire. If the desire for the experience of pleasure starts to supersede your fundamental motivation (which is the wish to attain the state of Vajradhara in order to bring all beings to that same state) and if instead you are unconsciously practicing in order to experience pleasure, then you have degraded or corrupted the path into a form of sexual gratification. All of the mechanisms and techniques of the path, the meditation on the channels and winds and the physical exercises that accompany these, have become no different from the practice of a non-Buddhist yogin or yogini who cultivates a state of desire that they have deified and determined as the appropriate result for the spiritual path.

As soon as your practice of the channels and winds becomes a form of gratification, it is no longer a genuine Buddhist path. You have deviated from it. Because of this danger many scholars have said, “The lustful practice of channels and winds just causes more trouble or more kleshas.”

Remember that the practice of the channels, winds, and drops is not done for the sake of pleasure. It will bring pleasure; you cannot avoid this, but that is not its purpose and must never become its motivation. You are doing it for one reason and one reason alone: it is the quickest possible way to attain the state of Vajradhara in this life and thereby be able to liberate other beings. You do not do it because it feels good, but because you have the compassionate wish to liberate other beings and therefore you wish to achieve that ability as quickly as possible. And it is quick: someone with a strong karmic propensity for such a path can attain the state of Vajradhara in three months, someone with an intermediate karmic propensity in six months, and someone with even lesser karmic propensity in three years and three months. Do not assume any kind of guarantee here. It should be obvious by now that many individuals can do these practices far longer than three years and three months and not attain the state of Vajradhara. The deviation from the path of the channels, winds, and drops is avoided through maintaining the correct motivation.

The third and final level of practice in the highest tantra is the completion stage without signs. This is the ultimate completion stage practice where the practice consists of looking at the nature of your own mind. This also has its own deviations, which all fundamentally consist of fixating on what you experience as supreme and making a goal out of it, thinking that some experience you had is special, that it makes you special, and that the experience itself needs to be repeated or cultivated in some way. Any kind of fixation or goal-directed meditation of this sort is a deviation from the genuine path.

Generally speaking, there are three different types of experiences that people tend to attach to. There is no guarantee, however, that everyone who meditates on the mind's nature is going to have all three of these experiences; or if they do have all three, there is no guarantee that they will experience them in a certain order; or if they do have all three in a certain order, there is no guarantee that they will experience them in the forms that are traditionally described. Nevertheless all three possible deviations will now be explained.

One type of experience that arises principally when you are engaged in the practice of tranquility meditation (*shinay* or *shamatha*), which is the first half of this practice, is an experience of overpowering well-being. Because of the pacification of

thought and the resultant pacification of anxiety and manifest suffering, you experience an unprecedented state of well-being, initially mentally and subsequently physically. It may be so intense that you actually feel as if your body and mind are about to melt with bliss. There is nothing wrong with this; it is good in itself, and it is nothing to be afraid of.

If you fixate on this and decide that this state of well-being is the goal or purpose of your meditation, this is a deviation because your motivation for practice is not the achievement of awakening, but the achievement of the experience of well-being. By identifying this as a goal and being attached to it, you have deviated into the desire realm, which means that your practice will not lead to awakening, but to rebirth as a god in the desire realm. Any of the six classes of gods in the desire realm definitely have more fun than human beings, but it is a useless rebirth because it is not a rebirth in which you can practice Dharma; therefore it is a deviation from the path.

Another type of experience is overpowering or unprecedented cognitive lucidity. Your mind becomes so clear, so crisp and lucid, that you experience the naked emptiness of all things. It is not the perception of emptiness that overwhelms you; it is the clarity or crispness of that perception that causes your mind and what is experienced by your mind to seem like a lucid, clear

blue sky. You may actually believe you can read others' thoughts. Probably you cannot, but even if you can it is no big deal. There is nothing wrong with this experience, but if you become attached to it, if you think that you have actually attained something, especially if you think that this is the goal or result, then you have deviated into the form realm. You will be reborn as a god of the form realm, which is a state superior to the human realm as far as feeling good is concerned, but it is vastly inferior for the practice of Dharma and is therefore a deviation.

The third type of experience is an experience of emptiness. This is not like the previous experience, where your clarity of perception or cognition of emptiness overwhelms you. This is the utter, absolute nothingness of emptiness, a complete and all-encompassing nothingness or blankness that overwhelms you. In its most intense forms, you may think that your own physical body has disappeared. Of course, your physical body has not disappeared or you would be dead, but you may think it has. There is nothing wrong with the experience, but if you are attached to it, this is deviation into the formless realm, a profound and utterly useless state.

In all three cases, attachment means identifying your experience as special and supreme, and thinking that there is nothing beyond this, nothing better to attain or acquire. It is trusting in the

experience and having an utter certainty about the validity of your experience. When you develop this kind of utter certainty about your meditation experience, it is without doubt a deviation. The solution to this is simply to be utterly impartial about whatever happens in your meditation practice. Whatever arises in your mind, whatever you experience mentally and physically, simply look at the nature of it without fixating on its characteristics. If you have no craving for any particular experience and if you have no attachment based on the identification of one or more types of experience as supreme, then regardless of whatever experience arises, you are still on the path to awakening.

In connection with practice in general, there are further points to be clarified. When you are an ordained monastic, either shramanera, bhikshu, or bhikshuni, normally there are many strictures on your behavior, down to the actual dimensions and measurements of the robes you wear, what they are composed of, how they are sewn, and so forth. If you are a monastic in isolated retreat and keeping your vows purely, you do not necessarily have to possess the strict, perfect forms of the robes prescribed by the vinaya. Essentially there are three robes: the two upper robes (the chögö or inner robe, the lagö or outer robe), and the lower robe. Even if you do not possess these in their perfect form, if you are in retreat you are not violating the vinaya, because it is taught in the vinaya that even if your skirt or shamthap is

only one cubit in width, which is far shorter than you would normally want, it is acceptable if you are in retreat.

In the *Vinaya*, every section begins with a story that presents the development of a particular vow. In these stories it is clear that if a monk or nun is in retreat, they do not have to cut their hair. Having long hair, a long mustache, or a beard while in retreat does not violate the vinaya.

With regard to food, all monastics, both novices and fully ordained monastics, take a vow for life not to eat after the midday meal. In retreat, if you view your food as an inner fire offering or a feast, there is no violation. With regard to liquor, you should partake only minimally, just a drop placed on the tongue so that the samaya of relying on it is not contravened or broken. If you drink liquor to the point of intoxication, then not only have you contravened your monastic ordination, you have also contravened the bodhisattva vow and the samaya vow, which you may be claiming to keep.

While it is acceptable for a monastic in retreat to eat in the evening if they have the appropriate perception of the food, there is nothing wrong with not doing so. It is an excellent practice for monastics in all situations to avoid the evening meal and eat only once a day, keeping the rule of one seat, simply because

you are always safe if you do that. If you stick to that discipline, then you do not have to worry about whether or not you are contravening the vinaya.

In short, the principal thing that determines whether or not you are deviating from the path is your motivation; therefore the one thing that can prevent deviations from the path in all circumstances is maintaining the motivation of bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is like the alchemical elixir that transforms any base metal into gold. Whatever metal this elixir comes in contact with, and no matter how much of that metal there is, when this elixir touches metal, it immediately transforms into gold. In the same way, whatever practice you are doing and however much virtue you accumulate, if your motivation of bodhichitta is stable then all of your practice will become virtue conducive to awakening. This is not only true for virtuous actions; most unvirtuous actions, if motivated by bodhichitta, become not merely virtue but virtue conducive to awakening.

The *Jataka Tales* provide clear examples of this in stories from the Buddha's previous lifetimes where he takes life in order to benefit beings. Because of the greater motivation involved, not only were these actions not unvirtuous, but they accumulated tremendous merit. By maintaining bodhichitta as your motivation, all your practice and all your virtuous actions are not

merely virtue conducive to higher states within samsara, but will become virtue conducive to awakening itself. Therefore keep bodhichitta in the midst of your heart because it is the single all-sufficient way to avoid any and all deviations.

The practice of discernment, especially the recognition of mind's nature, is a very effective way to avoid deviations. For example, there is a legendary blazing sword that cuts anything you can think of into little pieces; nothing can resist it. In the same way, the sword of discernment that comes from recognizing emptiness can cut through reification of experience and the perceived characteristics of phenomena. If it is done properly, the practice of looking at the nature of your mind directly, which is the source of this discernment, will cut through any reification of experience. If these two — the altruistic motivation of bodhichitta and the aspect of discernment that is the recognition of mind's nature — are unified, then regardless of however many possible deviations can be enumerated, you do not need to worry about any of them.

“This was written in the year of Amrita Kundali, the Wood Snake Year, on the evening of the sixth day and that of the next day, in the month of the constellation Go, in the break before the evening session, by Raga Asya, and it was spoken by him spontaneously as he thought of it. It was copied down by Lama

Tsondru who took it as dictation, “riding on the horse of a whirlwind,” which means he was able to copy it down really fast. Through the virtue of this, may the unintelligent who wish to practice in retreat bring about benefit for beings like an ocean.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: I am afraid that I am not quite up to deviations yet. I am actually dealing with impediments to practice. One of the first impediments is my lack of discipline. It seems to be a very deep one.

RINPOCHE: You should not think that the deviations are always as dramatic as they might seem in this presentation, or something that only advanced practitioners need be concerned with, because deviations start small and they start soon. They start with a slight corruption of motivation. One needs to focus strongly on the correction of one's motivation from the beginning of one's practice.

STUDENT: I think one of the biggest impediments I have is faith. I know that this has a great deal to do with all the other impediments. It is almost like I have a misunderstanding of what enlightenment is: I think I'm waiting for an acid trip or a

dramatic experience to come and take me away. There is a need to be special, to have it come easy.

RINPOCHE: You are not alone. The three impediments that you have identified are, in fact, the three principal reasons why we are still in cyclic existence. The only thing that makes you different from anyone else is that you have correctly identified these as impediments.

The first problem we face is that we doubt whether or not buddhahood is possible. We want to believe that it is, but we are not completely convinced there really is a way out of cyclic existence. This is a big problem. On the one hand, this doubt appears to us as a lack of faith, and on the other hand, it seems to be a lack of discipline or diligence, but it is really the same fundamental problem. We do not have faith because we do not know if there is anything to have faith in. We lack discipline or diligence because we do not know if there will be any benefit through being diligent. This principally comes from an unfamiliarity with Dharma; we are still so unfamiliar with it that we are not really sure if it makes sense. Because of that unfamiliarity, we are plagued by a recurrent fear that maybe it is all made up, maybe it is just cultural, and maybe it does not really work.

Lack of discipline is partly due to this, but it especially comes from forgetting our own mortality. We are unable to be disciplined or diligent at any specific time because we forget that we will lose everything when we die. We will lose everything we have acquired, we will lose every moment of pleasure we ever had, and we will lose the very bodies we used to acquire things and have fun. A recollection of death and the imminence of death is probably the single most helpful thing in bringing about discipline.

The hankering for special experience is related to the first problem. Because we are unfamiliar with Dharma, we are not really sure what buddhahood is. We imagine it as something similar to, but hopefully better than, what we have already experienced — as you said, imagining it like the world's greatest acid trip or seeing lots of rainbows and flashes of light. This hankering for experience is really just another form of attachment to some kind of temporary pleasure.

These three things — lack of faith, lack of discipline, and hankering for some kind of experience — are the things that keep us in *samsaric* existence. It is not that they are particular obstacles; they are the main problems you deal with on the path.

It helps to recollect that right now you have the opportunity to transcend these problems. In fact you have what may be your only opportunity to transcend these things and attain liberation. Should you be reborn as an animal, you will have no opportunity whatsoever to practice or even hear about Dharma. Your suffering will be far, far greater than what it is now.

The major technique that is taught for dealing with all these problems is contemplation: contemplating the impermanence of things; contemplating karma or the results of actions; contemplating the defects of samsara, and so on. Our doubt or lack of faith interferes with all these contemplations. Because we doubt, we think these things are not really true; we think they are exaggerations and basically just stories made up to convert us. This thought itself is Mara. It is not that Mara produces this thought; the thought is Mara. These things are true and they are presented straightforwardly; this is the truth that we have the right and the need to know.

Finally, the best thing we can do is to cultivate a stronger conviction about the results of actions, a more consistent and more intense recollection of death, and a greater conviction about the existence of buddha nature. These three things will deal with the three problems. Through the recollection of death you will become disciplined; through belief in cause and result you will

find greater faith and confidence; and through conviction of the existence of buddha nature you will understand what buddhahood is, and therefore you will not hanker after any kind of temporary experience.

STUDENT: Concerning the deviations through aversion or anger, you said that there are a lot of dangers nowadays and people often want to control their environment, which some people do in a negative way by poisoning, killing, or praying that their enemies be poisoned or killed. Is it okay just to aspire that all beings be guarded and protected and receive appropriate guidance, or is that also a deviation?

RINPOCHE: That is fine. It is best if you phrase your aspiration not only as “May beings immediately receive what they need,” but “May they also be guided to the state of ultimate liberation and awakening.”

STUDENT: What qualities of a deity or a deity’s mandala will necessitate a tsok feast?

RINPOCHE: For those deities that are hungry, you have to provide a feast, but in the case of well-fed deities, it is not necessary to offer them anything — that may be the difference! I am only joking.

At the three outer levels of kriya tantra, charya tantra, and yoga tantra, generally the offerings consist only of tormas, and so a ganachakra is not performed. The ganachakra feast is found at the highest level of secret mantra — anuttara yoga tantra, within which there are three further divisions: father tantra, mother tantra, and nondual tantra. You offer a feast according to which of these three tantras your practice belongs to, and this in turn brings about the fruition of qualities.

STUDENT: Regarding retreat, we have discussed the hazards and pitfalls that can arise. Should a relative beginner in the practice be leery of attempting a short retreat if he has no access to a teacher for instruction?

RINPOCHE: There is no danger whatsoever with a new practitioner doing a personal retreat, provided your motivation for doing it is clear. As the text explained, the single sufficient way to prevent the arising of deviations and obstacles is to maintain the motivation of bodhichitta, the desire to attain supreme awakening in order to establish all beings in that same state. As long as that is your reason for doing the practice, no deviation can occur.

Deviations all come from some kind of corrupt motivation. You might go into retreat with the thought, “If I do this retreat,

when I come out I will be a big deal. Maybe I will really attain something, and by attaining it I will become everybody's boss and I will be able to tell people what to do and people will serve me and respect me." If that is your motivation, then you are going to have a lot of problems and there is no way to prevent them unless your motivation changes.

On the other hand, if you go into retreat, whether it is a short one or long one, with the motivation, "I am doing this in order to bring all beings to a state of buddhahood," as long as you maintain that motivation throughout the duration of the practice, and seal that motivation by dedicating the retreat and all other virtue accumulated to your achievement of the state of Vajradhara in order to liberate all beings, there will not be any problem. No deviation can occur.

Most of what is taught on deviations is to remind individual practitioners of the need for correct motivation.

STUDENT: There seems to be very little text on Mahakala, his origin and meaning. Is there any way to explain how this wrathful deity came to exist?

RINPOCHE: The origin of Mahakala is the Buddha, the awakened being. Because the Buddha can emanate in many different

forms in order to benefit, liberate, and fulfill the wishes of every sentient being, his emanations sometimes appear in the form of a teacher or guru, at other times in the form of an ordinary monk or nun, at other times in the form of a beggar, and so on. When he emanates in the form of the wrathful deity Mahakala, the source of emanation is still none other than the Buddha himself.

People may wonder why the Buddha emanates in a wrathful aspect. The reason is that in order to benefit different kinds of beings, it is necessary for the Buddha to emanate in many different forms. One form of emanation will not fulfill the needs of every sentient being. There are situations in which it is easier to benefit beings in the form of a simple, ordinary beggar.

To give you an analogy so you can understand why there are so many varieties of emanations, you can say that emanations are like medicine. All medicine heals, but some medicines are bitter, some sour, and some sweet. Regardless of the sour, sweet, or bitter taste, the function of the medicine is to heal the person who takes it. In the same way, regardless of whether the emanated form of the Buddha appears as a wrathful or peaceful deity, a guru, a monastic, or something else, the purpose of all such emanations is to benefit sentient beings.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, earlier you were discussing mundane deities and wisdom deities. I would like to know how to view Mahakala; I would not want to view him as an employee because I would probably get in big trouble.

RINPOCHE: Mahakala is a wisdom deity. As far as his actual nature is concerned, he is the embodiment of the **dharmadhatu**, the nature of all things, and especially the wisdom of all buddhas. His form and features actually represent the quality of the dharmadhatu itself. Mahakala appears in a wrathful form in order to appeal to, and therefore guide to liberation, beings who are aggressive and who can therefore only be communicated with in a wrathful form. In terms of his nature, he is in essence no different from His Holiness the Karmapa, and therefore it is said that any of the Karmapas and Mahakala should be viewed as identical.

STUDENT: I think it was the word protector that threw me off and made me think that he might be mundane.

RINPOCHE: It is worthwhile that you asked this question, because many people were probably wondering exactly the same thing for the same reason. It is also important to remember that ultimately, from the point of view of an accomplished

yogin or yogini, all the various deities — the **dakas**, dakinis, and dharmapalas — are the display of one wisdom.

STUDENT: Protector and yidam: what is the difference?

RINPOCHE: The difference between a yidam and a protector is like the difference between the boss and an employee.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I have some questions along the same lines. What is a yidam? How is a yidam different from a daka and dakini? Is yidam practice typically given after ngondro, and if so, why is that?

RINPOCHE: The term *yidam* means “bond of mind.” This term is applied to a certain type of deity called “wisdom deities,” which are used as a primary object of meditation in Vajrayana practice. The reason why these deities are referred to as a yidam or “bond of mind” is that the practice of that deity becomes the primary focus of that person’s practice, and they commit themselves to the practice of that deity either until that deity has been fully realized or for the duration of their life. The deity is referred to in terms of the commitment made to it by the practitioner.

As far as the nature of the deities that we refer to as “yidam,” they are wisdom deities. *Wisdom deities* means that they are not

samsaric gods and goddesses. They are beings that have utterly purified all obscurations and as a result they manifestly embody and demonstrate unchanging, constant wisdom, which they do continuously for the benefit of all beings. This is the answer to your first question, “What are yidams?”

Your second question was about the difference between yidams and dakas and dakinis. In a general sense, dakas and dakinis can simply be understood to mean, respectively, male and female yidams; in other words, a male yidam is a daka and a female yidam is a dakini. Sometimes the terms *daka* and *dakini* are used for male and female deities in the retinue of a principal deity; for example, dakas and dakinis surround Vajradhara as the sangha of the Vajrayana.

Your third question was about why yidam practice is traditionally begun after completing the preliminaries. After you complete the preliminaries, you start the full-fledged practice of the yidam in which you commit yourself to that practice as your primary emphasis. The reason why this is postponed until you have completed the preliminaries is because the preliminary practices — the purification of obscurations, the gathering of accumulations, and so forth — establish the necessary conditions or prerequisites for successful yidam practice. If you attempt to do a yidam practice before you have completed the preliminaries,

the conditions that make you receptive to that practice and able to do it will simply not be present. While it is not traditionally the case that you begin the actual practice of a yidam before the preliminaries are completed, this does not mean that you cannot supplicate these deities. Even from the very beginning of your path, you are always free to supplicate these deities in accordance with your natural faith and devotion — even, if you wish, to the point of entrusting yourself entirely to one or more of these deities.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I heard that if we supplicated Guru Rinpoche enough he would appear to us in person. If you could meet him in person, doesn't that contradict the sense of the deity being emptiness or the deity being a personification of the dharmakaya principle?

RINPOCHE: There is no contradiction. First of all, the text says that through reciting the Seven-line Supplication, Guru Rinpoche will actually be present — that is his vow — but it does not say he will appear. It does not say that through reciting the Seven-line Supplication he will be forced to get on an airplane to come here. If you take the view that Guru Rinpoche abides in a specific place, in the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, and that when you recite the Seven-line Supplication you are requesting him to leave there and come here, it is okay to think

that he will appear in a form body because he does exhibit a form body in the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. Nevertheless if you recognize that all buddhas are one in the expanse of wisdom, and therefore he is ubiquitous, then he is already here.

STUDENT: If at least some of the motivation of practice is the alleviation of personal, physical, or emotional suffering, is that considered a deviation?

RINPOCHE: It is not a deviation in the sense that you need to be concerned with renouncing the physical and mental well-being resulting from practice, but it is important not to allow it to become limiting. When you experience the well-being that practice produces, it is important to take an attitude of dedicating it to all beings.

STUDENT: What is enlightenment? Does achieving enlightenment equate with attaining a state of buddhahood?

RINPOCHE: Awakening is two things. From one point of view, it is the purification or removal of all imperfections from within a person's mind. From another point of view, it is the full perfection or maturation of all the qualities that are innate and latent within that person's mind. The term *bodhi* or "awakening" is synonymous with the term *buddha* or "awakened."

STUDENT: Is the Buddha an individual like the sun, or is the Buddha whole like the universe?

RINPOCHE: Generally speaking, the person we call “Buddha” was initially an ordinary human being like ourselves. Through practicing Dharma as the path, he purified innumerable faults and fully perfected all qualities without exception. If we think of him in terms of his knowledge, compassion, and power, then Buddha universally pervades all sentient beings. “Buddha,” or *sangye* in Tibetan, describes the point at which the ultimate fruition has become fully manifest. *Sang* means that although prior to awakening the Buddha had numerous defects in his continuum, he then purified every one of those defects without exception. *Gye* describes the change in which the innate presence of sugatagarbha is fully revealed.

STUDENT: Is there a higher level than Buddha?

RINPOCHE: There is no higher or better state than that of a buddha. At that point, for a buddha, there is no difference in terms of levels or stages.

STUDENT: Is there a reason why the Buddha did not write down any of his own teachings or sayings himself?

RINPOCHE: The time of the Buddha was what is known as a “pure age,” which means that at the time there was a prevalence of disciples with completely pure minds. This means not only that their minds were completely pure, but their devotion was also completely pure. Due to this purity of mind and devotion, together with the presence of the authentic teacher, whatever was said or taught by the Buddha was not forgotten. Those disciples had what you would call an indelible memory. These are all indications of good karma.

The “age of positive or pure karma” also refers to the extraordinary condition of the Buddha’s teachings during the time when they were given. When the Buddha gave teachings, thousands of disciples gathered from different places. These disciples were all interested in different aspects of the teachings, and when the Buddha taught, each and every disciple of the many thousands in attendance could hear it in their own respective language. Not only could they literally hear the teachings in their own language, but they could hear just those teachings they wanted to receive according to their needs — nothing more, nothing less. In that way, the wishes of every person who attended were fulfilled accordingly.

STUDENT: What is the traditional significance of the Monlam, and is there any specific aspirations that you want us to make for this particular Monlam?

RINPOCHE: Traditionally the Aspiration or Monlam Festival is held in the first two weeks of the first month of the Tibetan calendar. The first two weeks of the first month are the time in which the Buddha demonstrated for a period of two weeks one miracle after another; I believe this happened in the seventh year after his awakening. Therefore that first month is called the “miracle month.”

This occurred when the Buddha was challenged by many non-Buddhist teachers and their followers, who said, “How do we know you are awakened, and what makes your teachings superior to that of others?” After the Buddha answered their questions with reasoned argument and statements, they challenged him to a contest of miracles, which he easily won. He continued to display miracles for a period of two weeks. Because this marks an occasion in the Buddha’s ministry when many people entered the sangha at one time, it is traditionally considered a crucial time in the yearly Buddhist calendar. It is held that during this month everything you do, for better or worse, is one hundred thousand times more powerful than at other times. Therefore it is also called the “month of one hundred thousand.”

Each monastery in Tibet had its own particular way of celebrating these first two weeks of the year. For example, at Palpung, which was the major seat of the Karma Kagyu tradition in eastern Tibet, the principal observance was to repeatedly recite the *Aspiration to the Conduct of Excellence* or *Zangchö Monlam*, and also what we call in our tradition the *Five Great Aspirations*, which I will describe below. These were recited for the whole month by the entire monastery. At Thrangu Monastery the custom was that for the week before the full moon on the fifteenth day, half of the monks would practice the Achala Chandali system, a system of chandali or tummo connected with the deity Achala or Miyowa that can be accomplished in one week. At the end of the week you were supposed to be able to take off all your clothes in the cold and not get cold. At the end of that week there would be a *rebu* or “removal of the cotton clothes,” dipping them in the water and so on. Then everyone would do a nyungne. This is the way it was celebrated at Thrangu Monastery.

Each of the monasteries of each of the four schools and their subdivisions had their own particular way of commemorating this occasion. Most famous among these was the Monlam Festival in Lhasa, which was celebrated primarily by the monks of the three great seats of the Geluk tradition: Sera, Ganden, and Drepung. The monks would congregate in Lhasa for those two weeks and recite all of these various aspiration prayers. In almost all the

monasteries that observed the Monlam Festival, the practice was centered on the repeated recitation of aspiration liturgies that were first spoken by the Buddha himself and are found in the sutras and, in some cases, in the tantras. These could include reciting, for example, the tantra called the *Proclamation of the Names of Manjushri*, but typically it was the recitation of aspiration liturgies taught by the Buddha, such as the *Confession of Downfalls* (which many people call the *Thirty-Five Buddhas*), the *Aspiration to the Conduct of Excellence*, the *Aspiration of Maitreya*, and others.

Each school has its own list of what it considers to be the most important aspirations: sometimes they say the five great aspirations and sometimes they say the eight great aspirations. In the Karma Kagyu tradition, we speak of five great aspirations, but there are actually eight. This is confusing, but nevertheless we say five although we actually recite eight.

The five great aspirations are: the *Aspiration to the Conduct of Excellence*; the “Aspiration Chapter” from the *Bodhicharyavatara*; the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati*; the *Aspiration of Maitreya*; and the *Aspiration of Mahamudra* by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa. Those are the ones we count as five, but when we say we are chanting the five great aspirations, we always chant those together with the *Confession of Downfalls* (*Thirty-Five Buddhas*), the *Aspiration for Rebirth in the Realm of Akshobhya*, and the *Aspiration*

of *Uddiyana*, which is the aspiration liturgy spoken or composed by Guru Rinpoche.

Of course, most of these customs we have been speaking of were done before the Chinese Communist invasion. Nowadays most of the lineages attempt to convene an assembly of aspiration practice at Vajrasana (Bodhgaya, India), which is where the Buddha attained awakening, and therefore we have to take turns. Practically speaking, we no longer do all of the aspiration festivals in the first two weeks of the “miracle month.”

A Shower of Ambrosia: The Dispelling of Impediments or Obstructions

Since this chapter is dedicated to Vajrapani, it begins, NAMO VAJRAPANI YE: “You hold aloft the indestructible vajra of emptiness. You point at beings the threatening gesture of immeasurable compassion. You wear the blue clothing of the pure three vows. May I be continually protected by the guru, the Lord of Secrets.”

Before we begin this part of the text, there is something I want to say. Some of you are probably thinking that practice is very difficult; somehow it just does not seem to work out right. The difficulty of practice comes because you are naive and simpleminded about what is required for practice. Think of the simplest thing that you do, such as making a cup of tea. You know that in order to do something as easy and simple as making a cup of tea, you must acquire all the necessary conditions and ingredients. You need a source of heat and you need a source of water. You need a container in which to boil the water, you need tea leaves, and you need a cup to drink the tea in. If you do not have those things, you cannot make tea. When it comes to making tea, we take all of these things for granted. We think

of it as a very simple process. Yet somehow when it comes to the practice of Dharma, we are unwilling to go through the process of accumulating what is necessary.

Furthermore when you make tea you have to know what you are doing. You have to know how to use the stove. If you do not know what you are doing, you are going to burn your house down. When it comes to practicing Dharma, you think that you do not need to know what you are doing; you do not need to know anything, and you do not need to study. This is incorrect.

You may think, “Why is he teaching all of this? Why do we need to hear so many different chapters? Surely the contents of any one of these chapters would be enough. Surely even just hearing one or two lines of this text would be enough.” It is not enough. Thinking that it is enough is naive because hearing part of the text is not enough for real practice to occur. All of the things presented in this text are necessary; they are here for a reason. You need to know these things in order to be able to deal with the problems that arise in practice. Therefore these practices and these chapters are not redundant, they are not irrelevant, they are not outmoded. They are here for a reason.

This chapter deals with the problems that can impede practice and stop it from working. In general there is something in

common between a deviation and an obstacle or obstruction, but you will see there is also a difference. If someone who wants to practice seriously does not have profound instruction for dispelling impediments, there is a great danger that the frost and hail of impediments will destroy the result of their practice.

The various methods for removing impediments can be summarized in three techniques: dispelling impediments before practice, dispelling impediments during practice, and dispelling impediments at the conclusion of practice.

Dispelling Impediments Before Practice

The principal impediment you need to deal with before you practice is ensuring that you have received the full blessing of the lineage for whatever practice you are doing. If for any reason you have not received it completely — and the reasons why you might not have will be discussed here — then the practice will not work. You will do it and nothing will happen.

Before you enter retreat, you must first receive the empowerments, the reading transmissions, and the practical instructions for whatever practices you plan on doing. Even if you have received these, several problems can occur. We talk a great deal

about the length or proximity of a lineage. Sometimes we extol a long lineage that we say goes back to the Buddha; sometimes we are afraid that a lineage has become corrupted along the way. It is true that if a lineage is too long, if it has passed through too many generations, there is liable to have been some damage or impairment along the way.

To be honest, it is rare to find a lineage that really goes back to the historical Buddha. Even if there is one, quite possibly there has been disharmony or disagreement within that lineage — for instance, if one teacher has not completely agreed on various things with the next member of the lineage. Even if that does not occur, even if the lineage of words is unbroken and the empowerments and reading transmissions have been bestowed from one generation to the next, is the lineage of the actual practical experience of the practice broken or not? Even if the words have been carried on and the books are there, has every generation of your lineage done this specific practice and realized it? Even if they have practiced it, has this practice been central to the realization of each generation because the ultimate lineage of realization has been transmitted through this practice? Even if the realization has been transmitted in and through this practice, are the ritual details correct or not? You can have a very realized master who doesn't know how to perform an empowerment; he makes all kinds of mistakes, and

as a result the blessings get lost. If any of these problems have occurred, then the blessings are very distant; this means that even if you practice for the required amount of time, nothing may happen, and you will not generate the signs of success that are supposed to occur with the practice.

There is another problem. Even if there is no problem with the lineage, and even if up to the time you received the empowerment and transmission from your master the lineage was complete, realized, and with unimpaired blessings, there is another possible problem: if in between the day you received the empowerment and the day you entered retreat, if you ever for a moment doubted the master from whom you received that empowerment, if you ever felt slightly displeased with him, maybe even criticized him somewhat or felt uncomfortable with him, then that is enough to prevent the blessing from coming through. This is the “removal of samaya.” It obstructs the samaya that is the medium for blessing. Even if there is no problem with the lineage, if you have felt any doubt in between the day of empowerment and the day of practice, there will be obstacles and you will not succeed in the practice.

If the text were to stop here, it would be a very sad thing indeed. We would have identified all of the impediments but not given you any remedies for them. Fortunately the text continues.

Not only do you need to know these problems and admit the possibility of their existence, you also need to know what to do about them, and so we are now going to discuss their remedies.

Dispelling Impediments During Practice

Before you begin the session of retreat practice, choose an auspicious day, such as the tenth day of the waxing or waning moon according to the Vajrayana, or one of the four great occasions according to Buddhism in general. Or within any given month, begin on the eighth day, the fifteenth day, or the new moon day. On this particular good day, set up the complete mandala of the practice required for the empowerment and also an extensive ganachakra — a nice feast offering, not a miserly or token one.

Perform the complete practice, the self-visualization, the front visualization, and a vase visualization if there is one; in short, do everything you need to do to perform the empowerment. What you do next depends on the practice. If it is a practice of the **New Translation School**, at this point there is always a self-empowerment, or entering yourself into the mandala, so you should do that. When you receive the self-entering or self-empowerment, identify the guru from whom you received the empowerment with the principal figure of the front visualization

mandala. The key point of this whole technique is regarding the guru as inseparable from the deity.

If it is a practice of the Old Translation tradition, then it may or may not have a full self-empowerment. Sometimes it merely has an abbreviated ritual called “casting the flower of awareness.” If the practice has a self-empowerment, then do it. If it does not, then receive the empowerment through “casting the flower of awareness” or through the meditation of the four empowerments through rays of light. In short, do the meditation very carefully. Do not just skip the whole idea of self-empowerment.

Then perform the feast practice. Offer the select portion of the feast, and when you get to the fulfillment ritual, which always occurs in the middle of any feast practice, recite the short fulfillment. If it is a long practice, there will be both long and short fulfillment liturgies. Recite the long one, by all means, but recite the short one at least one hundred times.

While you are doing that, do the following visualization. During this visualization, the most essential point is to consider the guru from whom you received the empowerment as completely identical to the yidam of the mandala. If you cannot do that, this whole practice is not going to work. If you think the guru is a human being and the yidam is a god, if you believe the yidam

is superior and the guru is inferior, it is not going to work. The basic point here is not to have that attitude.

In the body of the guru inseparable from the yidam — who is in essence your guru and in form your yidam — visualize inside his head a white OM, in his throat a red AH, and in his heart a blue HUM. Surrounding each of these, visualize the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. Think that from these hundred-syllable mantras in the body of the guru, identical hundred-syllable mantras are emanating. These enter your body from the guru's forehead, throat, and heart, and come to rest surrounding the OM, AH, and HUM in your forehead, throat, and heart.

Then think that ambrosia descends from these hundred-syllable mantras that have entered your body from the body of the guru. This ambrosia is composed of the corresponding colors: white, red, and blue. Think that these three ambrosias fill your entire body and purify all your samaya violations. All the samayas of the body and all the violations of samaya committed through body are purified by the white ambrosia; all the samayas of speech and all the violations through speech are purified by the red ambrosia; and all the samayas of mind and all the violations through mind are purified by the blue ambrosia. Think that all these violations are purified at this instant, and your body becomes as pure and clear as a piece of crystal.

At the end of reciting the fulfillment liturgy one hundred times, visualize this and recite the following mantra: OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUM SAMAYA GURU (name of guru) GANACHAKRA SATTVA SAMAYA. From there onwards the rest is the same as the Vajrasattva mantra. At the beginning of the Vajrasattva mantra you should insert OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUM SAMAYA GURU (name of guru) GANACHAKRA SATTVA SAMAYA.

As for the name, it can be either the name of the yidam or the name of the guru; in either case, view them as inseparable. For example, let us say you were practicing the Vajrayogini sadhana. You would say, OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUM SAMAYA GURU VAJRAVARAHI GANACHAKRA SATTVA SAMAYA, and so on. Assuming your root guru is His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa, you could say OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUM SAMAYA GURU ORGYEN TRINLEY GANACHAKRA SATTVA SAMAYA. It is up to you. It is not so important which name you pick; what is more important is picking the name of the guru you think of as inseparable from the yidam, and picking the name of the yidam you think of as inseparable from the guru.

At this point in the middle of the feast, after the fulfillment liturgy is completed, during this visualization you should recite

the hundred-syllable mantra at least seven times, and if possible twenty-one or one hundred times. The more recitations you do, the better. Do not be afraid that you will recite the mantra too many times; you could not possibly recite it too many times. From this moment onward, you must maintain the certainty that the guru from whom you received the empowerment and the yidam are in all ways inseparable.

In order to make this easier for you, a quotation is provided from the Eighth Gyalwang Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje, who explains why it is reasonable to consider the guru and the yidam as identical. “When even an ordinary lama, that is to say a guru who is not an awakened being but who is an ordinary person who has received the lineage and is qualified to bestow an empowerment, bestows empowerment or instruction, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions enter that guru’s body so that he can benefit those beings who are his disciples. Therefore during the empowerment or during the session of instruction, that guru actually contains within him all of those buddhas and bodhisattvas.”

In other words, when you receive an empowerment or instruction, regardless how ordinary the guru may be, you are receiving empowerment and blessing from all of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is because when a guru bestows an empowerment,

the buddhas and bodhisattvas enter the guru's body to benefit beings. They always do this; this is what happens.

Mikyo Dorje continues, "When the lama has finished the empowerment or finished the session of instruction, the buddhas and bodhisattvas do not stay there. They leave. It is like the medium of a deity like Tsimarwa."

You have probably all heard of the national medium of Tibet, the Nechung Oracle. When the Nechung enters the Oracle, he is in that person's body; after the Nechung leaves the Oracle, he is not. An empowerment is actually the same thing. When someone bestows an empowerment, buddhas and bodhisattvas actually enter into the person and bless you. After the empowerment is finished, the buddhas and bodhisattvas leave because they no longer need to be there.

If you understand this point, then regardless of what you may think about the guru as an individual, when you received the empowerment from your guru, the yidam was a buddha and was actually there. You really received the empowerment from that yidam in person. Therefore if you have stable confidence that when you received the empowerment from the guru there was no difference between the guru and the yidam, then you received the empowerment from the deity himself. Therefore you

do not have to worry about whether it is a long or short lineage, whether there was corruption or disagreement, and whether there was full realization or not in earlier stages of the lineage.

Therefore the mahasiddha Lingje Repa wrote, “While the guru is the buddha, I see him as a human being. I, therefore, count up the lineage to see whether it is long or short. I confess it.” He is saying that when we start to worry about whether the lineage is long or short, whether it has been corrupted or not, it means that we are failing to get the basic point, which is that when we received empowerment from the guru, the guru was the yidam on that day and at that time. Regardless of how long it has been since the lineage began, you have received the lineage from the very beginning.

Dispelling Impediments at the Conclusion of Practice

Then you complete the practice. Finish the feast offering and so on, and at the end think that the front visualized deity and the mandala in front, which are inseparable from the guru, dissolve into you. Then meditate on mixing your mind and the mind of your guru. Although the mixing of your mind and the

mind of the guru is something we imagine, it is not something imaginary because ultimately the nature of the guru's mind, the nature of the yidam's mind, and the nature of your mind are absolutely identical. They are identical in nature because they are all emptiness. There are no distinctions to be made within emptiness; the emptiness of one thing and the emptiness of another thing are absolutely identical. The nature of your mind, the nature of your guru's mind, and the nature of your yidam's mind are the same: they are all emptiness.

They are the same in characteristic as well. The characteristic of your mind — that which qualifies it as being mind in contrast to all other things that are empty — is that it is cognitive lucidity. It is cognitive lucidity that is empty. This is exactly the same as the characteristic of the guru's mind and the characteristic of the yidam's mind. Therefore the mind of the guru, the mind of the yidam, and your own mind are identical, not only in nature but even in characteristic.

The responsiveness, the expression or manifestation of the mind is unlimited, and this is true in the case of your own mind. Your mind can take any form, perceive anything, and think anything. This is true of the guru's mind and this is true of the yidam's mind. Your mind is nothing other than this nature, this characteristic, and this potential or responsiveness of manifestation. This is all

that the guru's mind is and this is all that the yidam's mind is. When you realize this, which is called the "mixing of the guru's mind and your own mind," it is also called the "devotion of seeing the guru as the dharmakaya" or "devotion to the guru as the dharmakaya." Even if you do not realize this, you will come to understand something about it when you do the practice and dissolve the front visualization deity, which is inseparable from the guru, into yourself, and imagine mixing the guru and yourself. This is an especially profound way to dispel the impediment before you begin practice. It is called the "impediment of lost samaya" — when there has been a diminution of blessings through impaired samaya either in the lineage or in yourself.

Before we begin any significant undertaking, such as any mundane enterprise, we always try to become aware of and prepare for any obstacles that are likely to arise. By doing so, we assure that whatever we are trying to do will succeed. In the same way, we need to prepare ourselves before we begin Dharma practice. This preparation consists partly of learning what impediments or obstacles can arise during the practice, and partly learning how to remove them.

In the same way, in order for our practice to produce the result or fruit we wish for and not something gross and poisonous, we need to prepare ourselves properly beforehand. This preparation

consists of, first, learning what the impediments to practice are and how to deal with them as they arise, and second, learning how to bring progress or enhancement to the qualities we derive from our practice. This section of the text is concerned with the first of these, the removal of impediments.

Impediments Caused by Obstructors During Particular Practices

Impediments caused by obstructors arise in connection with the intensive practice of yidam deities and the repetition of mantras. There are two sorts of these impediments: impediments caused by obstructors particular to certain practices, and impediments caused by obstructors during intensive practice in general.

Some deity practices do not carry a following obstructor with them. A following obstructor is a mundane spirit that is something like a camp follower of the deity, and they may bring impediments once you have begun to do that deity's practice. If you are someone with realization they will bring additional attainment, but if not there might be a negative result.

It is suggested here that if you are going to do a series of yidam practices, start by doing one that does not have a following

obstructor. Deities that do not have this kind of following obstructor include Chenrezik, Hayagriva, any form of Tara, and the peaceful form of Guru Rinpoche. However even in the case of those deities, if you are doing a drupchen — an especially elaborate form of group practice with certain ritual requirements — you still need to do what is called the “pressing down or vanquishing of antisamaya spirits.” You must do this whenever you do a drupchen, even if it is one of those deities without its own following obstructor. But whether the form of practice is drupchen or not, certain deities do have intense following obstructors. For example, any form of Yamantaka, Palden Lhamo, Vaishravana, the protectors Shing Chong and Dorje Lekpa all have particularly agitating following obstructors.

There are other deities that have following obstructors, but the obstructors are not that bad. For example, Four-Armed Mahakala, the Maning Mahakala, and Red Jambhala have following obstructors, but they are not so dangerous or agitating as the others. If you are going to do a practice that has a following obstructor, first do a practice that does not have one, such as Chenrezik, Hayagriva, Tara, or Guru Rinpoche. When you begin the practice that has the following obstructor, you have to vanquish it, and the practice will contain a method for doing so.

Right now you do not really need to worry about much of the information presented in this chapter. We are just going through these things because they are discussed at this point in the text. Nevertheless even though you do not need to know about them for your own practice, it is still good for you to know these things. Do not feel they do not apply to you at all.

Impediments Caused by Obstructors During Intensive Practice

If you are doing a drupchen, which is an intense twenty-four-hour-a-day practice done by a group, there is the additional problem of what are called the “wanderers.” The wanderers, or nyullema, are spirits who come several times during such a practice to try and prevent the offerings from being made, the samadhi from being clear, and so on. Any drupchen liturgical text will contain the ritual to be performed at various times of the day or night in order to dispel those particular wanderers.

Even though you may not be doing a drupchen, if you find that when you are doing intensive practice your dreams become agitated, that you have nightmares or other unpleasant dreams, you should periodically perform the Exhortation to Kuntup Gyalmo, which means the “Queen Who Can Beat Anyone.” This

is a practice that can enable you to deal with such problems, and if the circumstances were appropriate it would be explained accordingly.

This latter section about the wanderers and so forth is basically how these things are explained in the Nyingma or old tantras. In the Sarma or new tantras, there are equivalent methods, but the problems and solutions are not called by the same name; you do not find the term *wanderers*. The *Tantra of Supreme Awareness* teaches that there are potentially harmful obstructors who will attempt to interfere with any form of intensive practice, and therefore we need to pay attention to this. As the *Tantra of Supreme Awareness* says, “Where there are gods, there will be demons. Where there is Dharma, there will be impediments.”

Many different methods are taught on how to deal with these obstructors, but if they are summarized and made easy to apply, they are as follows. When you begin a session of intense practice — not necessarily every day, but at the beginning of the day, at the time when the sun is just showing over the top of the highest mountain in the region — you should face east, join your palms in an attitude of prayer, and make the following announcement: “I am going to practice or accomplish the awareness mantra of (state the name of the deity practice that you are doing). Obstructors, take joy in this.” By saying that, you

invite all the potential obstructors. Recollect Amrita Kundali, which means visualizing yourself as the deity Amrita Kundali, and recite his short mantra OM AMRITA HUM PHAT seven times. Then take a wrathful attitude and stance, even stamping on the ground, and say, “If you are going to stay, stay — but do not move!” This means, “Those of you who cannot stand to remain here without interfering with my practice, please leave now. Any of you that wish to remain may do so, but if you do remain, do not interfere with what I am doing.” Then fill your palms with clean water and recite the same mantra seven times (we are going to be using the same mantra for several different things here) and blow on the water. Then throw that water to the east (remember that you are facing east).

Do that from time to time; you do not have to do it every day. Do it at the beginning of a session of practice and do it if you have bad dreams or other agitation. By doing that, you bind all the obstructors for the duration of your practice, and therefore when you finish the retreat or the intensive session of practice, you have to mentally release them. You cannot leave them bound. There is no liturgy given here for releasing them, but you have to mentally let them go.

Among the various offerings we make — flowers, incense, lamps or butter lamps — each carries its own obstructor. If the obstructors

are not dealt with, they will possess the offering, and although you may wish to deliver the offerings to the deities, the deities cannot properly receive them because the obstructors have possessed them. Thus when you place the flower offering on the shrine, you should continually recite the Amrita Kundali mantra that was just taught. This will remove impediments and obstructors from the flowers.

Incense is a little more complicated. Whatever kind of container you are going to burn incense in, which could be a clay vessel or even a fragment of one, put a fire in it, perhaps some kind of little charcoal fire. With your left hand, put butter on the fire while reciting this same mantra. Then hold the incense above the fire so the smoke coming off the burning butter hits the incense. This will protect the incense from being possessed by obstructors.

With regard to lamps, you need to prepare a large butter lamp and a small butter lamp. Light the large one, and with your left hand hold the small one over it so you can transfer the flame from the larger one to the smaller one. The small butter lamp does not completely face the large one, but is held more or less downward. While you are doing that, recite the mantra and with the mustard seeds you previously consecrated with the same mantra, use your right hand to strike the smaller lamp with

mustard seeds, which then bounce back and go into the larger lamp as well. This will dispel the impediment to the offering of butter lamps.

You do not need to do these practices all the time, every day. You need to do these things just once at the beginning of a session of intense practice. Every day for the duration of the practice, you will offer a select portion of your food, which may be a select portion of a feast offering or just a select portion of your regular food. You should also reserve a select portion for the deity Amrita Kundali, whose power or blessing you are using to dispel all of these obstacles.

When doing intensive practice you need to have a little kila, a little stake or phurba. Ideally it should be made out of sandalwood, but if it is not, it should be made from another wood associated with the action of violence or force. It should be four fingerwidths in height, and it should have mustard seeds in a little bag tied around its neck. In some kind of vessel, mix earth or preferably sand with more mustard seeds, and keep the phurba and that mixture together as you consecrate them with the same mantra. You are still using the Amrita Kundali mantra.

If at some point you experience inauspicious signs — for example, at night either in actual experience or in dreams, such as spirits

displaying unpleasant forms, bad smells, or unpleasant sounds — gesture with the point of the phurba in whatever direction these things come from and, while saying the mantra, throw in the same direction a little bit of the sand-and-mustard-seed mixture that has already been consecrated with mantra. This will dispel the impediment.

There is a specific obstructor called Topknot of the Earth who misleads practitioners. If someone does a meditation session in which they recite mantra, when they get up from their seat and start to walk around, Topknot of the Earth arises from the earth and touches the person. By doing so, he steals or destroys all the merit, virtue, and benefit of reciting the mantra that the practitioner has accumulated throughout a kalpa. The way to avoid this is to prepare white gugul and the fat of a marmot, mix them together with butter, consecrate them with the same mantra, burn them, then fumigate your body and clothing with the smoke. That will protect you from that particular deceiver or lokdren. The mantra for all of these things is the same: OM AMRITA HUM PHAT.

Removing Impediments to Strict Retreat

No matter what practice you are doing, the following instructions are used when you are practicing in a retreat with strict rules not to meet others. In such a retreat, if you see the face of anyone outside the retreat or if they see you, an obscuration occurs. The way to alleviate this is to recite the mantra of Mewatsek, who is a wrathful deity. Reciting Mewatsek's dharani, use it to consecrate the vase water, then wash your face with the water. This will remove the slight impediment that comes from seeing or being seen while in retreat, which is called the "contamination through being seen."

The next possible type of contamination is the "contamination through being touched." This applies in the case of someone who is in lifelong retreat. Because they do so much practice and recite so many mantras and so forth, a person in lifelong retreat will sometimes be requested to bless others at the window or door of the retreat; they bless others with their hands and have minimal contact with them. When that happens, because you are touching other people, you get a kind of contamination that affects your practice. The way to deal with that is to consecrate gugul or other incense with the mantra of Mewatsek, then use the smoke from the incense to fumigate yourself, your mala, and the things you used that made contact with the other person.

Prepare the things you need for the fumigation beforehand with the mantra, and while you are fumigating yourself, continue to use the mantra. This will dispel the contamination through contact.

The next type of contamination is the “contamination of food.” This happens when you are in retreat and receive food from outside, especially food that has been offered by wrongdoers. If you become extremely depressed, sleepy, or your mind becomes very unclear, this is a sign that such a contamination has happened. The best way to get rid of this contamination is to visualize Vajrasattva inside a vase, consecrate the water in the vase with his mantra, perform an ablution of the five limbs with the water, and finally drink it.

Dispelling Impediments to the Practice of the Path of Method

Here the path of method refers to the practices of the channels, winds, and drops. When you are practicing the path of method, it may happen that you are either eating too little or eating food that does not have enough nutritive value. You are also doing the physical exercises intensely, so you may become exhausted. If that happens and you are very weak, place your left hand on top of your head and visualize on top of your head a moon disk, like

the disk of the full moon. In the center is a white BAM syllable upside down. Think that ambrosia-like milk descends from this syllable and enters the aperture at the top of your head, filling your entire body. Visualizing this as clearly as possible, you also hold a vase breath. By doing this from time to time, you will increase your physical vitality and strength.

The key point here is the visualization. Do not think that you are going to accomplish anything by simply putting your left hand on top of your head and being distracted and thinking whatever you want. This is why there are ten different results when ten different practitioners do the same practice: the result depends on your degree of undistracted meditation. If this is done properly, it is not only a way of alleviating weakness, it is also the best form of longevity practice and a way to dispel sickness.

Then there is the opposite problem with intensive practice, which especially affects those who are young. Because you are physically healthy and vigorous, it may happen that your drops are increased to a point where you have too many of them, and then you might lose them without freedom or control. If that happens, think that all of the drops shoot up from the tip of the secret place into the HAM syllable visualized at the top of your head. Visualize this while making the sound of a long HUM and bringing your breath upward. Press your stomach to the spine

and join your tongue to the upper palate, turn your eyes upward into space, and recite long HRIs. Also think that the aperture of the secret place is blocked by seven red HUMs.

The above description is not instruction. You are not to do this practice based on these words; it is only for those who are already familiar with these sorts of practice. Most of the practices in this section are also like this.

Another problem that can occur while practicing the path of method is generating warmth. This is supposed to happen, but because you are generating warmth, the bliss expands and your desire increases, blazing like fire. At this point you need to look at the nature of the desire, and by seeing it as emptiness, it will arise as bliss-emptiness or mahamudra.

The next type of impediment is very common now. It is a misplacement of the winds that is sometimes called “life wind.” This does not mean that having life wind is bad; it means that life wind is stuck in the wrong channel. This happens when people practice holding the breath, such as vase breathing, and do it wrong. They are too ambitious; they try to hold too much breath at one time, so they hold it too high. As a result they get air or wind trapped in the upper abdomen instead of the lower abdomen, and this approaches the heart. The mental symptom

of this is that you become paranoid and depressed, and your behavior starts to change.

One of the signs indicative of this problem, which is also called “hard wind,” is that you will sigh a lot and also inhale sharply because you feel there is something you are trying to move upward and get rid of. The appropriate method to dispel this problem is to visualize a moon disk in the sky in front of you, with a green HA syllable in capital script on top. Think that green HAs shoot out of your body and dissolve into that green HA in the sky, and at the same time forcefully recite HA twenty-one or a hundred times. This will dispel the impediment of having winds trapped in the chest or upper abdomen. Again, this depends on the clarity of the visualization; simply shouting HA is not enough.

Another problem that can occur when you are working with the winds is that you become restless. You just cannot stay put; you want to wander around or even leave retreat. When that happens, visualize a black drop or a drop of light the size of a pea in your heart, and think that it is pulled down as though by a tethered cord, down your body, out of the anus, and very, very far down to the bottom of the nine levels of the ground. Also, although you visualize the drop as being very small, think that it is very heavy and weighs a lot. Direct your awareness to its descent, and then at the same time perform the greater or

lesser falls, if you know what that is. This will dispel not only the problem of restlessness, but illnesses of the lower body.

Discerning and Preventing Obstacles by Observing the Breath

Perform the following observation of the breath during the period of the day when the sky lightens until the sun actually rises. You need to be aware of the length of that period, which varies depending on the time of year.

Between the first light of the sun and the actual sunrise, observe which nostril the breath naturally goes in and out of. On the first, second, and third days of the lunar month, it should be traveling in and out of the left nostril; on the fourth, fifth, and sixth days, it should be the right nostril. This cycle should continue to alternate every three days. If your breath does this, it indicates that no obstacles are heading your way. If it gets mixed up for a few days, this means there is going to be some kind of public opposition to you, such as people saying terrible things about you. If it is mixed up, going in and out of the wrong nostril for eight or nine days, it means that someone close to you is going to die, and if it does this for ten days or longer, it means that you are going to die.

Now that you know this, there is something you can do. Whenever the breath is going out of the wrong nostril — for example, on a day when it should be going out of the right but is instead going out of the left — take the opposite hand and press it firmly into that armpit. Thus if the breath is supposed to be going out of the right nostril but is going out of the left, take your right hand and press it into your left armpit. Then with the ring finger of your left hand, block the left nostril, and with the thumb of the left hand, press on the carotid artery. Be careful, because if you press too much you might have a problem.

Having done this, lie down on the side that the breath is moving through. Thus if the breath should be in the right nostril but is instead moving on the left, put your right hand in the left armpit, block the nostril, press the carotid artery, then lie with that side down. Stay lying on that side until the breath moves to the other side — and if you do this, it will move. By removing the impediment internally in your breathing, the obstacle will automatically be prevented. Regardless of whatever bad thing is supposed to happen, it will not happen now because you changed the wind.

Remember that this examination can only be made in the morning between the first light of the sun and the actual sunrise. You cannot make this examination at other times. Having said this,

if you find that more often than not your breath moves through the right nostril, this means you have a lot of obstacles. If it moves through the left nostril a lot, this means that happiness is coming your way. If it moves through both nostrils a lot, this means that you are going to give rise to realization.

Since your five poisons are active during the time when the breath is moving through your right nostril, do not hold your breath inward. Concentrate on expelling your breath and getting the stale air out. When your breath is moving through the left nostril or through both nostrils, there will naturally be a state of virtue. Also, in general when you find that your mind is virtuous, when you are feeling faith, pure perception, and so forth, do not concentrate on dispelling the stale air; concentrate instead on holding the breath inward. By doing these things, you will dispel obstacles and attain siddhi.

An important instruction regarding inhalation while doing the vase breath is to breathe in slowly and gently. If you breathe in a hurry as if you are in a rush and then hold your breath, you will hyperventilate. If you get in the habit of doing it wrong and breathing in too quickly, if you are really diligent in that practice you will disturb your channels and your winds, and maybe cause your own death. When you are doing the wind practice, make

sure you breathe out all the air when you exhale. Do not leave any in because the stale air will breed sickness.

Strictly speaking, a vase breath actually fills the whole chest cavity with air, from the lower abdomen up to your throat. Because of the problem of the life wind or hard wind that was explained earlier, this is very dangerous and so it is not done. If you hold the breath only in the lower part of the abdomen (from the lower abdomen up to where the ribs start), then even though that is called a “lesser vase breath,” it is not dangerous and it will not bring problems. Also the “intermediate breath” — the type of breathing where you breathe in deeply and do not hold the breath but instead slightly expand the lower abdomen — poses no danger and creates no obstacle.

When you are worried about some kind of danger, whether it is enemies, robbers, people saying terrible things about you, or other kinds of impediments, the channel in your thumb is where this feeling of worry and misery is active, so if you press on the thumb, you will alleviate this misery. In order to do this, visualize the four fingers of your left hand as the four dakinis and the four fingers of the right hand as the four dakas, and press all of them on the thumb. Visualize the thumb as whatever you are afraid of, and think that the dakas and dakinis press down on or vanquish the danger. A separate point is that by holding

the breath for a long time, you will also dispel the problem of people saying bad things about you; however you must do this carefully because if you let the breath get into the upper cavity, you will become paranoid.

If you have a problem with unwanted emission of the drops, either because of what is known as an “illness of cold,” or just because you have too many drops, take a medicinal plant called dumbu bakha. Harvest the roots and leaves in autumn, dry them in the shade, grind them finely, and boil them in milk. By drinking this again and again, you will take care of the problem. There is nothing more profound to be done for that problem than this.

If you find that the drops do not go down when you want them to, you should perform the meditation and mantra recitation of Vajrasattva and as many feast offerings as you can. This problem usually comes from impaired samaya, which will definitely be alleviated by these procedures. If you find that you are able to bring the drops down but you cannot reverse them, then stop them and send them back up. You should then bind your ring fingers with the dried muscle of a weasel or do a physical exercise called “recumbent crocodile.” This primarily involves tightening the lower door. This was not mentioned earlier, but it is very important whenever you hold the breath to tighten the lower door, namely the sphincter muscle.

In order to hold the breath properly, tighten the lower door and then breathe in gently and slowly from the top, filling your lower belly. In order to appraise whether or not you have gained sufficient facility with breathing to continue with the various applications of breathing, apply the following test. You can make this test yourself or someone else can sit right in front of you and do it, but they have to be healthy. Inhale and hold the breath in the proper manner based on the instructions, then as quickly as you can, either you or the other person touches their hand to their right knee, left knee, and forehead, then snaps their fingers. That counts as one, and this is how you determine the length of time. Each time they snap their fingers, they use their left hand to count one bead on the mala.

If you or the other person gets all the way through a mala while you hold your breath — touching the right knee, left knee, forehead, and snapping one hundred and eight times — this is the authentic vase breath. According to the *Chakrasamvara Tantra* (here called the *Samvarodaya Tantra*), this is the actual duration you are supposed to be capable of before you use the vase breath in the meditation. This is the basic amount. When you first start, you will probably be able to hold the breath for longer than twenty-one cycles of finger snaps. As you practice, the duration will gradually get longer. The tantras teach that by

holding the vase breath, you can very effectively dispel epidemic, heat illnesses, and illness through poison.

Dispelling the Obstruction of Sickness

The following methods to dispel the obstruction of sickness can be used when you are in retreat or at any time, and they can be used on yourself or anyone else. The first group of methods do not require doing anything with your breathing, but they do require the ability to visualize clearly. They sound very easy, but they are not going to work unless you are trained in visualization practice.

The first method is for headaches and dizziness. If you suffer from a headache or dizziness, visualize that your entire head flattens out from the front and back. It becomes like a flat image, then it dissolves and disappears like a rainbow dissolving into the sky. Finally visualize that you do not exist above the neck.

If you suffer from vision problems, unclear vision, eye irritation, or other illnesses of the eye, visualize that you do not have any eyes, that nothing is there in the front of your head, but instead you have two apertures in the back of your head that correspond

roughly to the position of your eyes in the front. These two apertures are wide open, and you direct your attention to them.

For toothache or other problems of the teeth, visualize a BAM syllable in the afflicted tooth and also in the one above or below it, with your attention directed especially to the painful tooth. Alternatively, inside the tooth visualize your guru in the form of Medicine Buddha or, in the context of guru yoga practice, visualize your guru in his or her ordinary form, and that will also dispel toothache.

If your tongue hurts, take the cup you use to drink tea, pour pure water in it, and then immerse your tongue. As you do so, think that whatever is wrong with your tongue comes out as black, scummy stuff and dissolves into the water.

If you have back pain, especially spinal pain, visualize a hole in the shape of a jewel in the afflicted area of your spine or back. Think that all the sickness or pain leaves, coming out in the form of smoke. In much the same way, if you have joint pain, at the site of the pain or inflammation visualize a hole such as you find in a sieve or metal screen. Think that all of the sickness and pain comes out of the site of the pain in the form of steam or smoke.

If you have a wound, such as a fresh wound that hurts, visualize at the site of the injury white and red drops smacking into one another again and again and again, like billiard balls. This visualization attracts all of the things in your body that promote healing to the afflicted site.

If you suffer from uncontrollable diarrhea, then visualize your anus blocked by a golden vajra and also bound from the outside by a tight band around the aperture.

If you suffer from heat sickness, in the midst of your heart visualize a white syllable BAM, thinking that it is extremely cold like ice and emits a stream of water as cooling as camphor. This cold fills your entire body, alleviating the sickness. Think that the illness is purified.

If you have a cold ailment — not what we think of as a cold, but what in Tibetan medicine is known as an ailment of cold, such as any kind of swelling or dropsy, a gathering of lymph that causes swelling or gathering of water — then just a little bit below the navel, at the juncture of the three channels, visualize a red syllable RAM and think that a flame blazes from it and fills your entire body.

If you have an ailment of wind (this does not mean an imbalance of the winds, but an ailment in the category of wind from among the three humors of wind, phlegm, and bile), visualize in front of you a huge skull cup filled with the butter of a dri, which is a female yak. Dri butter is much richer than cow butter, and this is why you are supposed to visualize it. Think that this butter is bright yellow and rich and fills the kapala. Think that your two big toes become like hollow tubes that suck in all of this butter, filling your entire body such that the excess butter actually starts to come out of your pores.

If you suffer from an illness of phlegm, visualize your entire body filled with many white AH syllables.

For these practices you do not need to hold the breath or anything like that. The source of these instructions is the tradition of Pacification, the lineage of Padampa Sangye, and also the *Heart Sadhanas of the Guru* from the Nyingma tradition. Chakme Rinpoche also says at this point that these methods are taught in all those texts, and he has also established their effectiveness to some extent in his own experience. This means that he is not guaranteeing that he has done all of these, but he has tried some of them and they worked.

If you have the aforementioned problem of mental discomfort, paranoia, and depression associated with the gathering of the winds in the region of the heart, or if you have angina or heart pain, visualize a white BAM syllable in the midst of your heart, and think that ambrosia descends from it and fills your heart.

If you have indigestion or an inability to digest food — not due to heat or to poison in the food, just indigestion or stomach pain — then lie on your back, visualize a white AH syllable on each of your palms, and rub your stomach. This is taught in the *Kalachakra Tantra* and in tantras of the Nyingma tradition.

This next remedy is gender specific. If you lose your drops because of sexual dreams, then before you go to sleep, visualize your secret vajra as a phurba or stake that is like red-hot iron, and visualize this phurba shooting out sparks. This will dispel the obstacle produced by succubi.

If signs of imminent death arise while practicing the path of method, the following practice is particularly recommended. This is also a very good practice for lengthening life in general. In the early morning, at the time when you can just see the little hairs on your skin, go to a place where you can see a lot of sky. Take the proper physical posture, open your mouth a little bit, and think that the entire sky melts into ambrosia, white or blue, and this

ambrosia dissolves into your mouth and fills your body. While visualizing that, breathe in and hold the breath as well as you can. By doing that a few times, you can reverse imminent death. Also, after doing this visualization and practice, press on the carotid artery three times with your thumb and forefinger. If you do this regularly, this is the best form of longevity practice. This is taught in the Chenrezik practice *Thukje Chenpo Sangwa Dupa*, the Path and Result (Lamdre) teachings of the New Translation tradition, as well as in many other tantras.

In general, if you suffer from a cold ailment, the best remedies are the practice of the winds and the practice of tummo or chandali. In particular, an inability to digest food is dispelled by the physical exercise called “belly circles.”

If you find that you suffer from a contagious ailment or from heat sickness, then visualize that you are in an extremely cold place in the midst of a lot of ice and snow. Breathe through your mouth between almost-closed teeth, causing a sensation of cold, then make a small whooshing sound. This is one of the few times you breathe using your mouth. Breathe in like this and then hold the breath. Breathing in this way is called “holding the water wind,” and it is considered the best remedy for heat ailments.

For any kind of sickness and especially for sicknesses produced by combinations of the humors, whether it is your own sickness or someone else's, visualize the guru in the form of Medicine Buddha above the head of the afflicted person. Think that the begging bowl held in the left hand of the Medicine Buddha is filled with five-colored ambrosia. Visualize this ambrosia flowing out of the begging bowl and entering the aperture at the top of the afflicted person's head, filling their whole body and purifying the sickness.

Dispelling the Impediment of Obstructive Spirits

The dispelling of the impediment of obstructive spirits or dōns is connected with dispelling the obstruction of sickness, in the sense that you have to intentionally dispel obstructive spirits. If you do not, they will create obstacles for you and impede your pursuit of the path, and these spirits will thereby accumulate negative karma. By taking the proper measures to dispel or avert their harm, you not only help yourself but you also help them. Because of the methods explained here, you cause them to generate love and compassion, and this also benefits them as well as yourself. This section consists of three methods: something to be done in the morning, something to be done in the evening at sunset, and something to be done when nothing else works.

Something to Be Done in the Morning

Something to be done in the morning is a meditation on Chenrezik. Visualizing yourself as Four-Armed Chenrezik, think that your body in the form of Chenrezik is huge, filling the area in which you live. In between the palms of your first two hands, which are facing one another in front of your heart, think that all those beings who attempt to cause harm, including humans, nonhumans, spirits, and other obstructors, are present. You are not squashing them; you are holding them. The attitude with which you perform this meditation is one of intense love and compassion for all of these obstructors, like the love of a mother for her only child. In addition, visualize all those you wish to protect inside your body as Chenrezik, which is visualized as huge. If you cannot specifically visualize those you wish to protect, simply think that all beings are inside your body, which is in the form of Chenrezik.

Having generated this visualization, perform the practice of tong len, or taking and sending, in the following way. When you breathe out, think that all of the virtue you have ever accumulated and all of the happiness and well-being that has resulted or will result from this virtue is given to and dissolves into all beings in general, especially those obstructors attempting to harm you. Think that all of those beings, especially the obstructors, receive

and enjoy consummate happiness and well-being. When you breathe in, think that all the suffering and wrongdoing of all beings in general, and especially all obstructors, dissolves into you. Through its dissolving into you, the form of yourself as the deity becomes even more radiant and brilliant than it was before. The effect of the wrongdoing of others dissolving into you is like a wind hitting a fire: it blazes more brightly.

This is taught in many sources from both the old and new traditions, such as the *Heart Sadhanas of the Guru*. It is called the “armor of love and the breastplate of compassion.” It means that through generating an attitude of love for and compassion toward potential obstructors and all beings in general, you not only protect yourself from their harm, but you benefit them directly.

You benefit them because you prevent them from harming you, and also because your attitude of love and compassion is somehow communicated to them. This is also called the “excellent circle of protection, the armor of bodhichitta.” It is the best way to protect yourself and others from harm, and it is truly invincible armor because it is based on the altruistic attitude of bodhichitta. Whether the danger comes from a previous wrongdoing or adventitious circumstances, it can be prevented because the practice of tong len also purifies your negative karma. It is

the essence of the method of protection taught in the Dharma teaching *gong chik* or “single thought.”

Something to Be Done in the Evening at Sunset

In the evening at sunset, again visualize yourself as Chenrezik, but this time imagine him in his wrathful form, known as Hayagriva. Visualize yourself as Hayagriva complete in the instant of recollection. Hayagriva is very wrathful; he is red, and he has a green horse head emerging out of the top of his principal head. In his right hand he holds a cudgel, and in his left hand he does not hold anything but his hand makes a threatening gesture. He is big, so visualize yourself as also having a large form. He is adorned with the costume of a wrathful deity, which includes such things as bone ornaments, a tiger-skin skirt, an elephant-skin shawl, blazing fire, and so forth. Visualize yourself in this fearsome and awe-inspiring form.

Having visualized yourself as the deity, think that this horse head neighs three times. The first time it neighs, think that this sound summons all obstructors and all those who wish to harm you and others; they are gathered in front of you beyond any control on their part, like chaff blown about by the wind. Then the horse head neighs a second time. This time think that this sound places all of those obstructors under samaya, and they

take such a full and unreserved vow of samaya that they offer their life essence to you as Hayagriva, which means they put their life entirely in your care, like pawns in your hands. Then the horse head neighs a third time. This time the sound blows all of these obstructors that have just taken samaya to the very edges of the ocean that surrounds the inhabited world. They are blown away, just like feathers blown away in a strong wind.

Next think that shooting out from your body as Hayagriva are masses of flame, interspersed with all sorts of sharp weapons. These shoot out in all directions, and when they start to come back in, they knit together to form a circle of protection. This circle of protection has six levels or walls. The first circle of protection, which is the one closest to your body visualized as Hayagriva, is composed of a base, a ground, a fence, a tent, and a canopy, all made up of vajras. Outside that is a circle of wheels, outside that a circle of swords, outside that a circle of double vajras, outside that a circle of phurbas, and the final circle is composed of mountains of flame. These circles of protection do not have any kind of aperture or fissure. They are as solid as the surface of an eggshell, much harder than that but without any fissure or opening.

In the spaces between each of these six concentric circles of protection, various wrathful deities hold different weapons. They

are rushing around all over the place as though blown about by the wind. Think that in the middle of this circle of protection all of the beings you wish to protect are included with you. This is to be done in the evening and is a forceful type of protection.

Something to Be Done when Nothing Else Works

Sometimes you try everything you can think of — such as going for refuge, meditating on a circle of protection, doing various procedures for averting disaster — but no matter what you do things keep getting worse and the disturbances become more alarming. It seems as though every time you do something to reverse the harm, you only strengthen it, and the harm comes back at you even stronger.

When this happens, you should engage in the conduct of a mad person. This does not mean that you should act like a mad person. It means the following: in the evening, after you have finished your evening practice and you are about to go to sleep, perform the manner of gathering the accumulations of a kusali, which is a yogin living a life of utmost simplicity. This is especially to be done either when you have been doing practices involving mundane protectors or guardians and you are not strong enough to control them, or if somebody is cursing you and they have more magical power than you do, and as a result you cannot reverse their actions.

When you do this practice, visualize in the sky in front of you all the gurus of the lineage. Below them visualize your principal deity surrounded by all other yidams, below them the dakinis, and below them the dharmapalas. Surrounding the wisdom dharmapalas are the mundane protectors, those bound to the wisdom dharmapalas by samaya. Visualize clearly all of these figures in the sky in front of you gathered like masses of clouds and filling the whole sky.

Visualizing yourself in your ordinary form at this point, think that a small sphere of white light is in the center of your heart. Think that this sphere of white light embodies all of your mind and wind, your basic energy, your spirit, your vitality, your life force, all of your power and ability, all of the blessings that you have received through doing practices such as meditation on deities, and also the pure aspect of your aggregates, elements, and senses, which you have visualized as deities, either peaceful or wrathful depending on the practice. Do not identify all of this with your ordinary body, but with this tiny drop or sphere of light in the center of your heart. Think that this white radiant drop embodies all of the pure aspects of your being.

Then exclaim, “PHAT!” Think that this exclamation shoots up your central channel and out the top of your head all at once. As soon as it leaves your body, the drop changes into Dorje Phakmo

or Vajravarahi. This part of the meditation is very important: you must think that all the deities you visualized yourself as are present in the drop and not present in the rest of your body. You must do this because there is a contradiction between doing this practice of severance and visualizing yourself as the deity; you are going to be cutting up and offering your body, so in this practice do not identify your coarse physical body with the deities you have visualized yourself as. Identify all these deities only with the subtle drop, which is ejected.

After the drop has left the top of your head, your physical body, which is now uninhabited and regarded as a corpse, falls down. You thereafter identify yourself with Vajravarahi, into whom the drop has been transformed. Your former body is now seen as extremely large; it is lustrous and shiny, and it expands to the size of the whole world. Even if you are somewhat emaciated or skinny, visualize your body as really nice and plump because you are going to be using it as food.

The next thing is that you, as Vajravarahi, hold a hooked knife in your right hand. Gesture at the body with the knife; do not visualize yourself actually cutting anything, simply gesture toward the head of the body. This causes the skull, the top of the head from the eyebrows upward, to fly off, turn over in the air, and fall back down, at which point it has become a huge and very

uniform skull cup. *Huge* means the size of a billion worlds. Then with the curved tip of your hooked knife, pick up the rest of the body and flip it into the skull cup. Then gesture once more with the hooked knife. Again, this means just gesture; do not think that you chop up the body the way you chop vegetables. You gesture again, and the body falls apart into tiny pieces. At this point the skull cup is completely filled with your former body in the form of fragments of your flesh and blood.

Then say OM AH HUM three times, and while doing so visualize the syllables OM, AH, and HUM above the skull cup. Think that from the three syllables emerge streams of ambrosia that are white, red, and blue respectively, embodying the body, speech, and mind of all buddhas. These dissolve into the contents of the skull cup, transforming it into an ocean of ambrosia that is white with a red gleam, with the best possible taste, the best possible nutritive value, and the best possible smell. It has become the ultimate food.

Then emanate from your heart innumerable replicas of yourself — that is to say, other Vajravarahis. These millions of replicas hold ladles in their right hands; the bowl part of these ladles is shaped like a skull and made of precious metal. These replicas fly toward this huge skull cup, scooping up the ambrosia and offering it to the deities. First it is offered to all of the gurus,

then to the yidams, then to the dakinis, then to the dharmapalas. Through making this offering to all of them, you please and satisfy all the yidams and dakinis. After your offering to the wisdom dharmapalas, especially offer to the mundane beings who are in their retinues, and especially those that are angry at you. Offer to these beings again and again, and think that they are completely satisfied and delighted.

Then make offerings to the protectors of the world, to all the various spirits and obstructors, to all forms of devas and spirits, to all local deities, and to all sentient beings of the six realms. In the case of all those mentioned after the wisdom and mundane protectors, such as the deities of localities, sentient beings of the six realms, and so forth, do not think they are summoned into the sky in front of you. They do not even have to make the effort to come because they are served at home.

Think that the Vajravarahis with their ladles full of ambrosia go to wherever these beings are. Think that all of these beings receive all of the ambrosia in whatever form is most pleasing to them; think that the ambrosia becomes whatever they most want and wish for. You can do this when you are so sick that you cannot even chant your usual practice. In that case, lying there practically immobilized by illness, you can just quietly say,

“PHAT” periodically while doing the visualization. Do not do the visualization just once, but do it a hundred times.

Here Chakme Rinpoche writes, “The fact that this will immediately dispel sickness and disturbance by spirits is something that I have established again and again through experience.” He means that he not only does this for his own benefit but also for the benefit of others, and the practice worked every time. Therefore this method is considered the single most effective way to dispel both sickness and the disturbances caused by spirits.

There are three ways this practice can be done for others. The first way is to be done only by those with great realization, the second by those with intermediate realization, and the third by everyone else. The first way: from the beginning of the practice mix your body and the body of the person you are trying to help, mix your speech and their speech, and mix your mind and their mind. This means that when you do the ejection of consciousness, you identify your body with theirs, and so you do just one ejection of consciousness. You identify your mind with theirs, so you visualize just one Vajravarahi. You just do the practice in the usual way, except here you have mixed your body and mind with that of the other person. This is of great benefit to the other person, but it is very, very dangerous. Unless you are a highly realized individual, there is a danger that you

will be contaminated by the sickness or disturbance caused by the spirits that are affecting the other person. Do not do the practice this way unless you have the great confidence of profound realization.

The way a practitioner with intermediate realization does this practice is by visualizing the bodies as separate. You do two simultaneous ejections of consciousness, one for yourself and one for the person whom you are trying to help. After ejecting the consciousnesses, mix the two consciousnesses together.

Thus you have one Vajravarahi who is the mixture of your consciousness and the consciousness of the other person, but the bodies are separate, and so each body is offered as a complete set of offerings to the field of accumulation and the other beings.

Everyone else, those with lesser realization, should visualize the bodies of themselves and the person they are trying to help as separate, and even after ejecting the consciousness, continue to visualize the minds as separate, each in the form of Vajravarahi. In that case, do the whole practice with you as one Vajravarahi and the ill person as another Vajravarahi, making identical offerings at the same time to the field of accumulation and the other beings. This is appropriate because there is no danger you

will harm yourself or be contaminated, and it is still beneficial to the other person.

Applications of This Visualization to Specific Types of Sicknesses or Disturbances

In all these cases, you need to understand that the part of the body being referred to concerns the body after the ejection of consciousness. I will repeat this: the part of the body being referred to concerns the part of the body after the ejection of consciousness.

First, wherever the person is ill, whether it is yourself or someone else, dissolve all the sickness and malevolent spirits afflicting all beings and all the wrongdoing and obscurations of all beings into the place of illness on the body, meaning the body after consciousness has been ejected. Think that this part of the body starts to rot and swell, then it bursts open and a river of blood flows out of it. This river is drunk by all of the harmers or obstructors; they are delighted by this blood and they consume it all.

More particularly, if you are doing the practice to alleviate an illness of any of the four limbs, either the arms or legs, then in the center of that limb, in the palm of the hand or in the sole of the foot, visualize a red RAM syllable. This syllable bursts into

flame, burning up that limb entirely just like a stick of incense. Imagine that it burns the limb all the way up to the trunk, stopping so the trunk of the body is not burned, but the affected limb is burned up and no longer there. Those two methods, the visualization of the stream of blood and the visualization of burning up the affected area, are called the “chö or severance practice for the sick.” According to Padampa Sangye, this corresponds to bleeding and moxibustion.

If someone is suffering from a stomach illness that prevents them from properly digesting food — not to the point where they cannot have any food at all, but rather something like chronic indigestion — visualize one or more holes in their belly. Think that all of the undigested food along with a lot of blood, pus, sickness, and so forth spews out of these holes and is greedily consumed by those causing the sickness.

If you are doing this practice for someone who is so ill they cannot eat at all, then in the stomach of the body visualize masses of iron bees, or other stinging or biting flying insects made of iron. They pierce the belly and eat the insides of the belly entirely.

If the afflicted person has an illness that prevents them from swallowing, visualize a black being, with a snake’s head, holding a big red-hot hammer. This black being shoves the hammer into

the mouth of the body, forcing the body to swallow it. As the hammer goes down the gullet and into the stomach, it burns away all the innards, causing the whole body to become hollow. Finally the redhot hammer is excreted out of the bottom.

If the person suffers from a headache or other illness of the head, think that the head of the body bursts open like a thousand-petaled lotus flower. The brains burst out and expand, covering everything, then many garudas show up and eat all the brains.

I will reiterate that these visualizations occur after the ejection of consciousness, and they all concern the body.

If the person — either you or someone else — is suffering from an illness in the eye, such as irritation or a more serious illness, think that a black being holding a sharp iron spoon pops the eyes out and tosses them upward. The eyes miraculously multiply until they are everywhere, then lots of black birds show up and eat all the eyes.

For a toothache, visualize a short black being holding a pair of pliers. He pulls out all the teeth then grinds them up between stones. Alternatively for toothache, visualize a black being with many heads riding on a lion. He pulls out all the teeth, makes a necklace out of them, puts the necklace on, then rides the lion

and circumambulates the four continents of the world. For sickness of the tongue, visualize a black being with ten tiger heads carving the tongue into ten strips. Each of the ten heads sucks on one of the strips.

If there is an illness in any of the four limbs, the two arms or the two legs, visualize two black snakes, each about fifty-four feet in length. These two snakes wrap themselves around the afflicted limb. A black being holding a very large axe comes along and slices up the snake and the limb together, the way you would cut up sausage. I am referring to the way we make sausage in Kham, where you cut it up into little short segments. Then think that the bits of snake-and-limb sausage are eagerly eaten by all the various devas and spirits.

If there is an illness of the lungs, visualize a red being with a sharp tube of either copper or iron. He uses the tube to puncture the body right in the middle of the lung, then puts his mouth on the tube and sucks out all of the pus, blood, and sickness in the lung.

If there is an illness of the gallbladder, think that one hundred thousand black dogs show up, tear open the body, and eat all the gall from the corpse, leaving no remainder.

If there is an illness of the intestines, think that all of the intestines of the corpse are removed and spread out amongst trees in a forest, the way we string Christmas lights on trees.

In general, whatever area of the person, yourself or another, is ill — whether it is external, such as a problem with the skin, or internal, such as the internal organs — think that the afflicted part of the body is scattered all over the ground and covers it. Then this afflicted part is consumed by all the gods and spirits. All of these applications are called the “severance of sickness at the place of sickness” because they are all visualizations centered around the afflicted part of the body.

Also, before you engage in any of these practices, immediately before doing the visualization you need to generate compassion — compassion for the afflicted person and also for the beings that are bringing about the affliction. After doing the visualization, you must rest evenly in emptiness.

The visualizations we have just gone through work because the root cause of sickness and the root cause of interference by spirits is our beginningless fixation on the self and the reality of appearances. By thinking that you give away, and allow to be consumed and destroyed, the part of the body that is ill, you reverse the tendency to fixate on the self and the reality of

appearances. This is why these visualizations work; otherwise they would simply be like a child playing and imagining things with no meaning. They work because they reverse the cause of sickness and interference by spirits.

Removal of Impediments to Meditation and to View

This chapter concludes with a final section on the removal of impediments to meditation and a brief mention of removal of impediments to view. Although there are many impediments to meditation and therefore many methods used to dispel these impediments, essentially all problems with meditation can be summarized as two: torpor and agitation.

When you suffer from torpor — when your mind is depressed or dull, unclear, vague, and unable to retain the object of meditation — go to a place such as the top of a mountain, a wide open place with a great deal of light and a breeze where you can see a great deal of sky. Take the meditation posture, the seven dharmas of Vairochana, in a very strict way. Put a great deal of attention, and even some tension, into the adoption of the posture. Direct your gaze to the peak of a distant mountain,

or if that is unavailable, to the distant reaches of the sky. With your mind, look directly at your mind itself. Briefly put, that is the remedy for torpor.

If you find that you suffer from agitation or wildness, where thoughts flow unceasingly beyond your control and you are distracted by them, adopt the meditation posture in a relaxed way and allow your body to be like a bundle of grass that just had its binding strings cut so that the grass falls freely. Allow your body to rest freely and in a relaxed way within the meditation posture. Direct your gaze downward to your mat just in front of your legs. Do not be too tight in attempting to stop the thoughts; if you attempt to summon the thoughts back or hold them in and prevent them from arising, you actually feed them. Allow the thoughts to just arise, but watch the mind as though watching it from a distance.

Finally, in terms of impediments to view, sometimes when you generate an awareness or understanding of emptiness, you generate the misunderstanding that, since everything is empty in nature, there is no such thing as cause and result. This problem occurs when you do not have a correct understanding of emptiness; your understanding of emptiness does not include the simultaneous understanding of interdependence. Through having some experience of emptiness, you think that actions do

not cause results, and therefore you think that virtue is of no benefit and wrongdoing does no harm.

When that kind of thought arises the solution is simple — take a thorn or a needle and stick yourself with it, or take a spark and touch it to your skin. See how much good this thought of emptiness does you then. In this way, you will be able to cultivate certainty that the interdependence of appearances does not contradict the emptiness of their nature.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to understand that it is not the case that you need to practice all of the various methods explained here, but you need to know about them because at some point a situation might arise in your practice where you will need a particular method. Therefore you need to learn it now. In sum, these methods are of great benefit, although they are not all needed by any one individual.

“This was composed in the Wood Snake Year, the year of Amrita Kundali, from the eighth day until the tenth day of the Ox month, with one session of dictation on each of those evenings. It was composed by Chakme Rinpoche, Raga Asya, in accordance with his experience.” This means his instructions are based on his actual experience that these methods work. “He taught this openly, without reservation, to Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, who

wrote it down as it was taught for his own use as a memorandum. Because there are not many quotations in this chapter from tantras and texts that explain the meaning of the tantras, the intelligent may not be pleased by this. Those with discernment may doubt the validity of it because not many of the sources are mentioned, there are not many quotations and so on. You might think, ‘Is this not just the invention of a fool?’ If you wonder about that, then look at the ocean of tantras and texts explaining the meaning of the tantras of the Old and New Translation traditions and it will be clear to you that these methods are not the invention of a fool.”

This means that if you see the text and think, “Is this just something that someone made up and wrote down?” then you should know that these are the actual instructions that Chakme Rinpoche received from his teachers, and which he has also experienced himself, used himself, and experienced the effectiveness of. If you wonder if these instructions really are profound methods coming from a tradition and based on experience, if you practice them respectively you will find out that they are profound methods because they will work for you.

Finally he concludes the chapter with the aspiration that this be of great benefit to many individuals who, like him, are unintelligent but wish to practice.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: You were talking about starting your practice on an auspicious day. Does this refer to when you are just starting to do prostrations or Vajrasattva? Are these instructions for the beginning of a practice that you are newly learning?

RINPOCHE: Actually it was picking a day to do the ceremony of selfempowerment in order to remove obstacles to your subsequent practice. In general, it is true that engaging in more practice or more virtuous endeavors on these days is always recommended, since on these days such things are even more effective than usual.

STUDENT: You spoke about perceiving the deity and the guru as identical when you are receiving an empowerment in order for the empowerment to take effect properly. I am not sure I have done this in the past. If I am not sure, is there any remedy?

RINPOCHE: It is not too late. The reason this is mentioned in the text is that even if you do not understand that your guru was filled with yidams until long after receiving the empowerment, it is enough to know this now because it will give you faith in the empowerment process. Many elaborate empowerments actually remind you of this. They contain instructions such as, “Do not regard the guru as being separate from the yidam.” But even if

we did not know this when we received the empowerment, it is not too late.

Do not be too hard on yourself for failing to see the guru and the yidam as inseparable; some of the greatest individuals in Buddhist history have also made this mistake. One day Lord Marpa the Translator was in the presence of his guru Naropa, and he had a vision of his yidam. Aware of the vision that Marpa was having, Naropa asked him, “To whom do you prostrate first, the yidam or the guru?” Marpa thought, “I always see the guru, but I do not always see the yidam, so I will prostrate to the yidam first.” Of course that was the wrong answer. As a result Marpa’s family lineage ended, but his Dharma lineage will last for as long as Buddhadharma exists.

STUDENT: I had a situation where I received an empowerment from a particular teacher, but then later it seemed to me that this same teacher was wrong about something they did. Are you ever allowed to say to the teacher, “I think you have made a mistake here and this is something you should not do,” or should you just stay quiet and let them work it out?

RINPOCHE: Before you receive either empowerment or instruction from a teacher, it is highly recommended to examine the teacher very carefully, to look at what they say and how they behave.

This examination will lead to two benefits. One benefit is that by examining a teacher and discovering that their conduct, their behavior, and their teachings are pure and trustworthy, your respect for them and therefore your respect for the teachings will increase because their validity will be evident to you, and you will be more inspired and get more out of the relationship. The other benefit is that if you discover serious defects in their behavior or in something else about them, because you have not yet made a dharmic connection with them, you can simply decide not to form one.

According to Vajrayana, once a connection has been formed, especially through empowerment but even through instruction, you must see every apparent defect of that teacher as your own projection. If you do not, if you actually come to believe that your teacher has a defect of any kind to any degree, you are breaking samaya and you will definitely be reborn in lower states. The reason is because you naturally identify with the wisdom of empowerment, which is at the essence of Vajrayana. When you turn away from or reject the teacher, you also reject the wisdom of empowerment at the same time. By rejecting that, you are also turning away from samaya.

At best you should consider that whatever you perceive as inappropriate on the part of the teacher is merely your own

projection, the result of your own previous negative actions. If for whatever reason you are unable to do so, you must not say one word of criticism about them, either to them or someone else. Just leave the situation completely alone.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you just revealed another wrong view that I had. I am wondering what to do about it because I may be on the way to the hell realms. Previous to coming to KTD, I got bits and scraps of Dharma teachings here and there, but I never had the complete picture until I got here. I said critical things about teachings that I had received before, about how inadequate or incomplete they were. The implication was that the teacher just did not have it all or was inadequate. I think I also said that to people.

RINPOCHE: If you think about it carefully, you will see that although you may find that the teachings you received prior to your involvement here were not that helpful to you, and although you may feel that they were in some way incomplete or incorrect, it is not necessarily the case that they were not helpful or that they were incorrect. Buddhadharma is not homogenous. It incorporates and embodies not only a tremendous variety of teaching styles, but also a wide variety of actual content and explanation of how things are and how to deal with them. The reason for this variety is that in the Buddha's teachings he had to

accommodate the needs of an almost infinite variety of people. What benefits one person is not necessarily going to be appropriate for another. If you take that view and then consider what you heard before you came here, you will see that even though it may not have been directly beneficial to you, it was indirectly beneficial because it somehow got you here. Even though it may not have been primarily directed at you, it may be exactly what someone else needed to hear. Forget about any kind of attempt to reassess what you heard before and scrutinize it or compare it to what you are hearing now. Practice what you practice and forget about the rest.

This advice is not limited to the particular situation you have described above. We constantly have to deal with the appearance of contradictions within Buddhadharma. Let's say you take literally the Buddha's teachings in the vinaya, the Buddha's teachings in the Mahayana sutras, and the Buddha's teachings in the Vajrayana tantras: if you then decide that one of these must be correct, then the other two will seem wrong because they overtly contradict one another constantly. In fact there is no true contradiction, but in order to see this you have to take a step back and gain an environmental view, or a wider view, of the whole thing. As long as you do not see the whole picture, there seem to be lots of contradictions all over the place, and that is what you are experiencing right now.

For example, if you consider the growth of a flower, the flower is what you are interested in. From the very beginning, you think that you are dealing with the creation of a flower, yet if you take the whole process and divide it up into its various stages, you would say that the seed has nothing to do with the flower because it is not a flower, the sprout has nothing to do with the flower, and the stalk has nothing to do with the flower. However there is no contradiction because without the seed you cannot have the sprout, and without the sprout you cannot have the stalk, and without the stalk you cannot have the flower. In the same way, by taking a wider or more open view of your whole situation, let go of any criticism of what you heard previously.

STUDENT: Why do some deities have hinderers and others do not? Is it that the ones who remove the hinderers from their camp are more compassionate? Or do the other deities sic all these hinderers on the people who try to do their practice? What is the difference?

RINPOCHE: Generally speaking, peaceful deities do not have hinderers, although the word *hinderers* is not really right. *Gap dre* means a “hidden spirit,” and peaceful deities do not have those. The reason why most wrathful deities have them is that wrathful deities have retinues. The retinue or inner circle of a wrathful deity will all be wisdom deities, like the deity itself. Outside that

inner circle, however, there will also be some mundane deities that consider themselves part of the retinue of the wrathful deity. These are not demons; they are not hinderers. What happens is that if you do the wrathful deity practice and thereafter you do something that contravenes Dharma, the wisdom deities do not get mad, but the mundane deities do. Being mundane and being in the retinue of wrathful deities, they are kind of grouchy; they can punish you, but you have to make a mistake first. This is the reason why it happens.

STUDENT: Because I just started ngondro, I wanted to know if Vajrasattva has any of those kinds of spirits.

RINPOCHE: Do not worry.

STUDENT: About the man with the topknot who jumps out of the ground and steals merit, since I cannot get marmot fat or gugul, would it be sufficient if I just dedicated the merit before I got up?

RINPOCHE: If you dedicate the merit with genuine compassion, then you are invincible against Topknot of the Earth. If you have compassion, no one can take your merit away from you.

STUDENT: I realize that Buddhism is becoming fear based for me. For example, I am thinking about Topknot of the Earth taking all of a person's merit. I am concerned about it and concerned that my practice is becoming overly motivated by fear.

RINPOCHE: Fear is a natural product of our instinct for self-preservation. All fear comes from the wish to protect our mind and our body, but if you look at the instinct of self-preservation, you will see that it comes from the basic fixation on the self, the misapprehension of the true existence of the personal self. From that point of view, we would say that fear is a symptom of bewilderment and cyclic existence.

On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with taking care of your own body and mind. You need to do that. But remember that fear ultimately comes from fixation on the self, so the more altruistic you become and the more you focus on the needs and benefit of others, the less fear you will feel about what happens to you because you will be more concerned about others. If you look to see where the fears you experience come from, you will see that some of them come from dealing with the unknown, from dealing with something in which the outcome is uncertain. Some fears come from being reminded of a previous experience that scared you before. Some of it arises for no good reason whatsoever.

At this point, having the opportunity you have — being born human, having access to Dharma, and being able to practice Chenrezik — there really is not much to be afraid of. There is no better practice than Chenrezik, which is a practice without any danger from harmful spirits and so forth. If you can, do the entire Chenrezik practice as it is recited nightly here at KTD; if not, just recite the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM as you walk around, as you sit, as you do your daily activities, as you eat, before you go to sleep and so on, with the motivation that you are doing it for the benefit of others and with the attitude of compassion for others. If you do this then your fear will naturally decrease.

STUDENT: I am sure that is true and I have been advised by others that Chenrezik is the practice I should be doing daily without fail. I have tried to keep to that as steadily as possible. Perhaps I do not need to know everything. To use a knitting analogy, maybe I just need to stick to my knitting and not try to purl yet. Why try to do a big mosaic? If you can sew on a button, that may be enough.

RINPOCHE: As you said, a practice need not be thought of as ineffective because it is simple. A practice as simple as Chenrezik can still be very effective. In fact, it is the most effective of all the practices because it is the simple and direct implementation

of compassion, which Chenrezik embodies. As you said, that is enough.

For any individual's practice, a lot of different things are not really necessary. Each of us really needs very little to practice. The only situation in which you need to know a lot about different aspects of Dharma is if you are going to teach. This is simply because each person you teach will have slightly different needs.

To change your analogy a bit, as long as you can make clothes that fit you, which is not difficult, that is enough. You also have to remember that the clothes that fit you will not fit everyone. If you are trying to clothe other people, you need to be able to make a lot of different sorts of garments.

STUDENT: I guess that comparing myself with others and other levels of practice is just foolishness, since what fits me will not fit another and what fits another will not fit me. I do understand, and that is good enough because I tend to compare myself with others and feel that the others know more and have done more than I have. I guess your analogy is pretty much the same.

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: I would like to express some sympathy with everybody who has had some obstacles or problems in their practice. At times I have felt the presence of negative influences. Maybe they were these problem beings and maybe they were not; maybe it was just my imagination. Whenever I felt that kind of thing, I have always done tong len for whatever negative beings there might be. Is that something that would be an even simpler and easier kind of antidote than the Chenrezik practice with the folded hands, which is so beautiful?

RINPOCHE: Definitely the practice of tong len is the best remedy for all of these sorts of things. Nothing else is necessary and nothing else is more effective.

About obstructors existing or not, you cannot say that they do not exist since there is some indication of their activity. On the other hand, you cannot say that they do exist because in the experience of a yogin who has realized emptiness, they do not.

STUDENT: I would like you to clarify something in the part of the teaching about stopping obscurations related to sickness. It started with how to deal with headaches. Is that something for the general community to do?

TRANSLATOR: Do you mean because of what Rinpoche said about some part of the teaching being mostly a reading transmission and a don't-do-this-at-home kind of thing?

STUDENT: Well, he said that one needed to be able to do visualizations to do these practices, but I did not know how to consider that whole section.

RINPOCHE: Those you can do. You need to have good meditation, but you can do those.

STUDENT: You are saying they could be done generally by the population in our sangha?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: I have a question regarding the two methods that use the seed syllable AH. There was one for the stomach where you imagine the AH syllable in the palm of the hand and then you rub the stomach, and there was another that had to do with balancing the phlegm, where you visualize many AH syllables throughout the body. I remember hearing that AH is the one-syllable sutra in the Prajnaparamita, so I am wondering if that is the meaning of this AH?

RINPOCHE: It is the pacification of the sickness through the meaning of the syllable.

STUDENT: Related to the Prajnaparamita and that meaning?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: If that is the case, I am wondering if that type of visualization with the hands could be used in another place in the body or if filling the body with AH syllables could work for many issues.

RINPOCHE: Not necessarily. You will remember that at the end of the chapter Chakme Rinpoche said that these were not things he just found in some book; these visualizations were all methods or instructions he received from his masters, methods he practiced and validated through experience. Therefore he wrote them down. Basically he was saying, “I can guarantee that if you do these properly, as I am explaining them, they will work.” We should not try to figure things out and make up things on our own because we will be going outside of Chakme Rinpoche’s experience, and there is no guarantee that what we make up ourselves will work.

STUDENT: That is why I am asking. I am thinking that filling one's body with AH syllables might be similar to the Medicine Buddha practice that was given in the end of the chapter as being generally holistically good. Would that be an inappropriate way to think of it?

RINPOCHE: I cannot say yes or no. However you do not need to make anything up because there are already a lot of methods provided here. For example, he does not say that to get rid of headaches one should visualize an AH in your head. He gives a different method, and you should apply the method that is given.

STUDENT: With regard to the other methods, there was one that was called “belly circles.” Could you explain what that is or demonstrate?

RINPOCHE: The belly circles are part of the physical exercises taught only in the three-year retreat. It is not something taught casually or something you should be in a hurry about. You learn that when you do the complete practices of our lineage in retreat.

STUDENT: Would that be excluded from the general practice for most of us?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: My last question has to do with the method for removing headaches and dizziness. One was supposed to flatten one's head. Is it like a pancake?

RINPOCHE: Like a flat piece of paper that disappears upward into space.

STUDENT: Like a rainbow?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: Earlier you taught some techniques having to do with checking your breathing, checking which nostril was predominant in your breathing and then trying to rectify that because if the breathing was off from the lunar cycle, it perhaps indicated future obstacles. How does the connection work between the breath and something that I perceive as an external obstacle?

RINPOCHE: The reason for the connection is that the more your breath flows through the right nostril, the more diminished or repressed your wisdom winds are becoming, and therefore the more obstacles will arise in your life. The more your breath flows through or moves through the left nostril, the more expressed or the more expanded your wisdom winds will be, and therefore you will be more prosperous, you will live longer, and everything will be better.

STUDENT: To me that implies that there is a major component of the physical body that is obviously important to spiritual practice and enlightenment. Is that true only of beings in the human realm? Is that another reason why a human birth is so important or so valuable?

RINPOCHE: All sentient beings have this wisdom component in their body.

STUDENT: When you say, “PHAT” and eject all of the deities out of your body because you are going to try to heal the sicknesses in your body, and the body falls down to the floor and you blow the top of the skull off and make a skull cup, I think what was left out is how to put it all back together. How do you put the deities back in and then resolve everything? What is the completion stage of that?

RINPOCHE: You actually do not resolve everything. When you eject that drop or sphere of white light, it is your mind, including all the blessings of deities and everything else. You identify with it once it transforms into Vajrayogini, and then you offer the body. You give it away. In your visualization you do not attempt to re-enter the body or put the body back together again. At the conclusion of the practice, simply rest without any kind of concept. That is the equivalent of the completion stage. You do

not have to be afraid because when you have finished the session, you will notice that you still have a body.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I need to know how to explain or describe the wrathful representations in Buddhism to my relatives, all of whom are Christian. To them the wrathful representations look devilish, which to them denotes evil.

RINPOCHE: The first thing you need to make clear is that the deities that are depicted as wrathful are, in and of themselves, entirely peaceful; their minds are in a state of peace or tranquillity. They manifest a wrathful appearance in order to tame beings who are especially vicious or involved in great wrongdoing; such beings are not receptive to and cannot be tamed by a peaceful appearance.

Each aspect or component of the appearance of a wrathful deity has a distinct meaning that represents the force of the wisdom they embody. For example, possessing three eyes means that with their wisdom, they clearly see all that has occurred in the past, is occurring in the present, and will occur in the future. The fact that they emit flames from their bodies and are surrounded by masses of flame means that the intensity of their wisdom and discernment is such that it burns up all mental afflictions without exception.

In general, the strength, force, and apparent violence of their appearance represents their ability to conquer the obstacles to awakening that are the most difficult to defeat, such as the four maras and so forth.

STUDENT: Is the regular method used to practice tong len just as effective as the method that you taught in this section?

RINPOCHE: No, the one I just taught is more effective because you are combining the meditation of tong len with the blessing of Chenrezik, who is also the embodiment of compassion.

STUDENT: When you are doing tong len for all sentient beings, while you are imagining all sentient beings do you still imagine the obstructors in your palm and also those protected in your body?

RINPOCHE: You continue to visualize the obstructors in between your hands, and those you visualize in your body are supposed to be the ones under your protection, specific beings that you know personally who are in great difficulty. When you perform the taking-and-sending visualizations, it includes all of these beings, who are still visualized in your hands and within you, but it also extends to all beings without exception; all of these beings are included equally.

STUDENT: You explained the Chenrezik mantra and how each syllable vibrated to clear a particular klesha. I want to be reminded of that. I also want to better understand generation and completion cycles, maybe using Chenrezik as an example.

RINPOCHE: OM is the remedy for the affliction of pride, MA for the affliction of jealousy, NI for the affliction of desire, PAD for the affliction of bewilderment, ME for the affliction of greed, and HUM for the affliction of anger. To apply the generation and completion stages to the Chenrezik practice: At the beginning of the practice, as the liturgy indicates, visualize above the head of yourself and each and every sentient being a lotus flower and moon-disk seat. Above that is a white HRI syllable, which is transformed into Chenrezik. Visualizing Chenrezik above your head and above the head of each and every being is the generation stage. Then you recite the mantra. At the conclusion of the mantra, reflect on the empty nature of the bodhisattva Chenrezik and all things. Here the meditation on emptiness is the completion stage. When you arise from the practice in postmeditation, regard all visual appearances, including that of your own body, as the presence of the body of Chenrezik; regard all sound as his speech or mantra; and regard all thoughts, good or bad, as his wisdom. That is the postmeditation practice, which is the threefold bearing incorporating the recognition of

mind's nature and the recognition of the illusory nature of all phenomena.

STUDENT: Since you taught three methods, if you just do the one in the morning, do you also have to do the sunset one or else none of the methods will work? Or do you try one method first and if there are still more obstacles, you do the morning and sunset methods?

RINPOCHE: It really depends on what an individual wants, but basically the morning one alone is sufficient. It's fine if you just want to practice that.

STUDENT: Basically you do this for any type of obstacle?

RINPOCHE: Yes.

STUDENT: I am new to this. Can you give me some information about the Buddha? For example, I heard his aura is very big.

RINPOCHE: The Buddha had a very bright aura so there was no difference being around him in the day and being around him at night. You could see everything around the Buddha regardless of what time it was.

STUDENT: Was it a clear white color?

RINPOCHE: I do not know that much about it. It sounds as though it was basically white but would occasionally be refracted into different colors of the spectrum, like a rainbow, in order to correspond to different forms of activity.

STUDENT: Would it change during breaths? For example, when the Buddha breathed, would the color change with every breath?

RINPOCHE: I do not know. To answer such a question, I would have to see a clear story relating to this in one of the traditional texts and I have not seen anything like that. What is recorded is that all of those who were struck by the light of the Buddha's halo or aura naturally had few mental afflictions, great faith, diligence, virtue, and an experience of great joy.

STUDENT: Bardor Tulku Rinpoche talked about the level of bodhisattvas and about how it takes aeons and aeons to reach each level. I have been thinking about this for several weeks. What does it really mean? Do you start off each birth where you left off in the previous birth? On what bodhisattva level do you no longer have the possibility of slipping down?

RINPOCHE: To answer your first question, what happens is that someone starts the path by generating bodhichitta and by practicing the six perfections in accordance with their capacity in that life. Then eventually they die. They are reborn and, because of the merit they accumulated and the habits they acquired through their previous practice and previous generation of bodhichitta, mostly they carry on from where they left off. They encounter a teacher, then they very quickly achieve the state they achieved in the previous life and, hopefully, pass beyond that.

Your second question about which stage on the bodhisattva path is the stage of irreversibility needs clarification because the term *irreversibility* is used in two ways. If you mean the state at which there is no danger of abandoning the path or of degrading, going downward, it is generally considered to be the first bodhisattva level. At that point you have directly seen or realized dharmata, the nature of things, so there is no longer a possibility of, for example, being born unintentionally. You have control over that, so there should be no degradation of the path.

The other use of the term *irreversibility* means the point where you will never again take birth. In that case, there are two types of irreversibility. There is the irreversibility for one's own benefit and there is the irreversibility for the benefit of others. Irreversibility for one's own benefit is what is attained by an *arhat*, either

a *shravaka* or pratyekabuddha arhat who previously generated the intention to never again be born in samsara. Because they have purified the obscuration of the mental afflictions, which is the cause of rebirth in cyclic existence, they will never be reborn. They will have to produce emanations to complete the rest of the path in order to attain buddhahood, but they themselves will not be reborn in cyclic existence.

The other type of irreversibility is irreversibility for the benefit of others. When someone attains perfect and full awakening, or buddhahood, they attain the state where they will no longer undergo birth themselves, but for as long as samsara has not been emptied, they will produce emanations that will continue to benefit others.

In general, in the second use, which refers to arhats and buddhas, the term *irreversibility* refers to the eradication of the mental afflictions or kleshas, which are the cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. An arhat eradicates these when they attain arhatship because that is their intention. A bodhisattva does not eradicate all of the mental afflictions until they reach buddhahood. They retain some in order to be able to accept rebirth, but the rebirth of a bodhisattva is intentional and therefore should not be regarded as equivalent to the rebirth of a sentient being.

STUDENT: In one of the songs when Naropa and Marpa were parting, Naropa said, “You will always have desire.” What did he mean by that? He said it several times in one of the songs, and he talked about the fact that his biological sons would not carry on the line.

RINPOCHE: What Naropa meant was that Marpa would practice and also demonstrate the superior manner of Secret Mantra. The superiority of Secret Mantra is that afflictions such as desire are not suppressed, but instead are transformed. In exhibition of this, Marpa had nine consorts and seven sons, which obviously necessitates the presence of desire.

STUDENT: Relative to your recent answer relating to the arhats and their emanations, since they will not be reborn, I do not understand the connection between the original and the emanation. Is it like an exact clone?

RINPOCHE: The relationship between the arhats, who are the source of the emanation, and the emanation itself is like the relationship between a person and their reflection in a mirror.

STUDENT: Are their minds the same mind?

RINPOCHE: I cannot say if they are or not. One cannot answer that question because if you say that their minds are one, this means they are the same and then it is not an emanation; it is the person. On the other hand, if you say that their minds are different, then it is not an emanation.

STUDENT: If there is a buddha or bodhisattva with emanations, are they all the same? In other words, if there are three emanations, would they all have the same karma and the same mental abilities?

TRANSLATOR: Do you mean are they of the same rank or do they have the same activity?

STUDENT: I can understand that their activity might be different. Would they have a mind-to-mind connection? Would they know what each other was doing? Are they like the same person except just acting differently?

RINPOCHE: I really do not know. I suspect they would know what the other one was doing, but they certainly might appear different from one another.

STUDENT: For example, one could be a woman, one could be a man, another one could be in a different culture and that type of thing?

RINPOCHE: Of course. The whole point of an emanation is they take a particular form and appear in a particular place where they can be of the most benefit. An emanation does not have to limit its style and manner by conforming to the appearance of the source of emanation. They can appear anywhere and look like anything.

STUDENT: Do emanations ever have karma related to their activity?

RINPOCHE: A buddha, and the emanations of a buddha, are beyond the accumulation and experience of karma. On the other hand, the emanations of a bodhisattva have a karmic role in a sense because through producing emanations and thereby benefiting beings and the teachings, a bodhisattva further expedites their own path.

STUDENT: For some reason I am getting this image — and I mean it with all respect — of an octopus with many arms. Is the relationship of the original to its emanations like the relationship of an octopus to its connected arms?

RINPOCHE: No, because an octopus is one body. You need not imagine an octopus; you can say “human being” because we have twenty fingers and toes. That is all one physical body, whereas emanations have different bodies.

STUDENT: You are saying they are not connected in mind in the sense that they have one mind and different bodies?

RINPOCHE: You cannot really say that they have one mind or different minds. If we are talking about the emanations of a single source, and if the intention for all of their emanations is the same, then in a sense you could say that they are pervaded by the same intention or purpose. On the other hand, it is by no means certain that an emanation will possess all aspects of the mind of its source.

Emanations need not be sentient at all. For the benefit of beings, when it is most necessary, buddhas and bodhisattvas can emanate as medicine, food, wealth, or other necessities, and these things do not have mind.

STUDENT: I got quite excited when I heard that one can practice and, through practice, remove obscurations and sickness from another person. Then I found out you have to be a realized being first. Is this a correct understanding?

RINPOCHE: If you are talking about the visualization of chö, or severance, the only thing you cannot do unless you have high realization is mix your aggregates and the aggregates of the other person. If you do not have high realization and you are doing it for somebody else, you eject the consciousnesses separately. In other words, visualize yourself and the other person both doing the ejection, both becoming Vajrayogini, and so on. You do not have to have high realization to do this for the benefit of someone else. That is perfectly fine. If you mix your aggregates and the other person's aggregates, you need to have high realization or you will cause danger to yourself. As long as you keep them separate, that is fine.

STUDENT: How do you do that? Are you just aware of the separation?

RINPOCHE: You duplicate the visualization. You visualize yourself and you visualize the person for whom you are doing it somewhere else, say to your left or to your right. Then you do the ejection of consciousness simultaneously, but you keep the bodies separate and the minds separate. You have two drops coming out that turn into two Vajrayoginis, one as you and one as the other person. Then you make all the offerings in duplicate simultaneously.

STUDENT: I am interested in the Karmapa. Is he considered a bodhisattva or a buddha? Where does he figure into this?

RINPOCHE: He is considered a bodhisattva in terms of his role or function, but a buddha in terms of his state. He is considered someone who has previously attained buddhahood, but continues to function or act as a bodhisattva.

STUDENT: Why is he so special? There are many other great figures, yet he occupies this very special role.

RINPOCHE: What makes His Holiness distinct is that he is someone who already attained buddhahood in the distant past and brought to liberation all of those who were his disciples at that time, and now he acts as a bodhisattva although of course he remains in the state of a buddha from his own point of view. Then in the future he will exhibit buddhahood again. In that sense, he is called “someone who exhibits buddhahood throughout the three times: the past, the present, and the future.” This makes him very special. This is not to say, however, that other teachers have not attained the same state. We cannot know what the wisdom of other teachers is.

STUDENT: Is buddhahood one common state, or are some buddhas more realized than others?

RINPOCHE: There are said to be no distinctions among buddhas with regard to their state. The definition of *buddhahood* is that it is the perfect relinquishment of all that is to be transcended, and the perfect attainment or realization of all that is to be realized. That being the case, one perfect state and another perfect state cannot be graded because there is no gradation.

Distinctions are possible in the activity of different buddhas. A certain buddha may have more disciples and more beings that they bring to liberation than another buddha. A certain buddha's teachings, or Dharma, may last longer than that of another buddha. This is not because the first buddha is more enlightened than the second: it is because the disciples in the first example have more merit.

STUDENT: What is meant by “emptying samsara”?

RINPOCHE: Emptying samsara, or emptying samsara from the depths, means getting each and every being out of cyclic existence, so that they are all in a pure realm such as Sukhavati or in the actual state of the inseparable kayas and wisdom.

STUDENT: This is expected to occur?

RINPOCHE: It is hard to answer that. On the one hand, it is the aspiration of all buddhas and bodhisattvas that at some point samsara will be completely and forever emptied. On the other hand, it is also said that what makes this aspiration infinite is the fact that samsara is infinite in extent.

What is certain is that from the point of view of an individual, samsara can be emptied; this is to say, an individual can escape from samsara and be reborn in the pure realms, never to return.

The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel That Brings Progress: Instructions on Improvement

The word *progress* in the chapter's title refers to improvement of one's practice, using whatever methods are necessary to cause one's practice to develop over time. Initially the process of improvement or progress is explained using the analogy of a **wish-fulfilling jewel**, which represents the mind. The text says, "That great, blue, precious vaidurya, the mind, which comes from the vast ocean of the dharmadhatu." Here the nature of mind, or the expanse that is the mind's nature, is referred to as an ocean because it has the characteristics of being boundless, unfathomable, and inexhaustible. The awareness or wisdom that is inseparable from the nature of mind is compared to a wish-fulfilling jewel of vaidurya, a brilliant blue jewel. This is the same nature of mind pointed out in the Mahamudra and Dzokchen teachings.

In order to gain access to and make the most of that jewel-like mind, one needs to go through a process of refinement and improvement. First of all, once the jewel has been brought out of the ocean or discovered there, it must be anointed by the stream of blessings coming from the ripening empowerments and the

liberating instructions. Thus the first stage in the refinement of the jewel of mind, which corresponds to the removal of the coarsest level of sediment or other debris covering the jewel, is to receive the necessary empowerments, instructions, and transmissions for practice.

The three obscurations — the mental afflictions, the cognitive obscurations, and the habitual obscurations — are removed through the preliminary practices. This is like the process of gradually refining the jewel by removing the sediment or ore that surrounds it.

For the wish-fulfilling jewel to actually fulfill its function, it must be placed atop a victory banner. The text says, “And then it is placed atop the victory banner of piled experience and realization.” The height of the victory banner represents the achievement of all the levels of experience and realization, which enables the wish-fulfilling jewel-like mind to produce or grant one’s wishes.

Finally the text says, “And when this jewel is placed aloft such a victory banner, it rains down as streams of the two siddhis.” Just as a wish-fulfilling jewel placed atop a victory banner can grant one’s wishes simply by being asked, when one’s mind — the jewel-like mind — is placed atop the victory banner of experience

and realization, one achieves the two siddhis, which are granted by one's mind on the basis of experience and realization.

If an individual practicing dharma does not know the way to bring progress, enhancement, or improvement to their practice, they will not improve. They will get stuck at some point. Similarly, if you wish to grow crops, there will be no progress if you do not know how much to water, how to apply manure, and so on.

The root of all progress and improvement is diligence. Diligence is the source of improving one's practice in the same way that walking is the source of arriving at a destination. If you do not walk on the road to a destination, you will not get there. In the same way, if you are not diligent, no methods of improvement will produce progress.

In order to have diligence, it is essential to contemplate impermanence and the fact that you have no idea when you are going to die. This also entails realizing that if you should die without practicing, you will have wasted this opportunity. It will not reoccur. Forget about liberation or omniscience — you will never again hear the word *dharma* for aeons and aeons.

Remembering the imminence of death and the possibility of immediate death, you should consciously think of impermanence

three times every day. When you first wake up in the morning, think of impermanence and generate the resolution, “Today I will not waste a moment. All mundane activities and responsibilities lack any meaning or point whatsoever, therefore I will exert myself only in the practice of the holy dharma.” In the middle of the day, remind yourself of this in case your virtuous momentum starts to slow down. In the evening before you go to sleep, assess your activities during that day, rejoice in those that were virtuous, castigate yourself for those that were not, and resolve to do better the next day because you remember impermanence. This will bring progress and enhancement to all your virtuous activities without exception.

Bringing Enhancement to the Generation Stage

In general, all Vajrayana practice is included in the two stages of generation and completion. We will look first at how to bring enhancement to the practice of the generation stage.

The first issue with generation stage practice is generating a clear image of the deity. Sometimes this is difficult, because although we may have familiarized ourselves with the deity’s appearance, knowing what to visualize and generating a clear image are often two different things. The text suggests that if you have difficulty

generating a clear image, place a properly painted **thangka** of the deity in front of you, whether it is Vajrayogini, Chenrezik, or any other deity. *Properly painted* means that the proportions are correct — the deity does not have an inappropriately large head and small body, the trunk of the deity is not too long, and so forth. Place this thangka in front of you and at sunrise direct your attention to it in the following way. Gazing at the painting, start from the top of the deity's head and slowly look at each part of the deity's body until you get down to the bottom, to the deity's feet or pedestal. Then from the bottom, slowly go back up and look at each part of the deity's body as you go. Do this in both directions again and again.

After that, without focusing on any particular part of the deity's body, look at the entire image for a long time. Do that for a few days, then go to a very dark place where you can create total darkness; you can also do this at night, or just close your eyes. In any case, go to a dark place and as clearly as possible bring up a mental image of the thangka. Because you gazed at the thangka for a few days previously, you will be able to recall the deity's image to mind very, very clearly, as clearly as if you were physically looking at it.

Then simply apply that clear image to the practice. If you are visualizing yourself as that deity, apply the image to your own

body. If you are visualizing the deity in front, visualize that same image in front of you, and so forth. That is how to bring enhancement to the clarity of the visualized image in the generation stage. For this reason various tantras say, “A beginning practitioner of mantra, a beginning practitioner of the Vajrayana, should resort to images and so forth. They will be accomplished through a painting.” In other words, they will accomplish a clear image of the deity by relying on a painted one.

There is another technique you can use to further enhance your visualization. Through doing the previous technique, at this point you will have developed clarity of image. The next step is to develop an awareness that the image is the unity of clarity and emptiness. One way to do that is to obtain a painting of the deity that is reversed. In other words, what the deity is holding in her right hand you see in her left, the position of her legs is reversed, and so forth. It is a complete mirror image. Set that image up, again at sunrise, so that the reversed image is reflected in a mirror. The text says a mirror that is at least the width of one fist in circumference. In any case, it means a mirror large enough to reflect the entire image of the painting at once. Obviously you use a reversed painting in this case so the mirror image is not reversed.

Look at the clear reflection of the painting in the mirror. Do more than simply try to record the details; actually scrutinize the reflection to see where the deity's appearance, color, shape, and so on, reside. Do they reside external to the mirror, inside the mirror, somewhere in between, or somewhere else altogether? By scrutinizing this you will determine that although the reflection in the mirror is just as vivid as the painting it reflects, this reflection has no reality; it has no existence independent of being a reflection. In that way, you cultivate the meditative state of recognizing the clarity of the deity's form without independent or true existence.

Another way to enhance this is to look at a rainbow appearing in the sky. This refers to a true meteorological rainbow; we will discuss other rainbows later on. When a rainbow happens to occur, you can scrutinize the status or nature of the rainbow and observe that, while it is a vividly clear appearance, it lacks any independent or true existence. Thus a rainbow can serve as an example of the unity of appearance or clarity and emptiness.

The next aspect of enhancing generation stage practice is to bring enhancement to the formal sadhana practice. This is where you practice the approach and accomplishment stages involving not only visualization but ritual recitation of mantra and so forth. Enhancement means an intensification of the practice — in-

tensifying your faith, your devotion to the deity or deities, and bringing about the actual achievement of the deity's blessing.

The primary method for bringing about this enhancement is the timely observance of special or sacred days. Sacred days are those days or times when it is most powerful to perform certain practices or make certain offerings. In the context of Vajrayana practice, these would primarily be the tenth and twenty-fifth days of the lunar month; in a more general context, these would be the eighth, fifteenth, and thirtieth days of the month. In the particular context of protector or Mahakala practice, it would be the twenty-ninth day of the lunar month. In any case, on the days connected with whatever practice you are doing, offer feast and tormas, perform the fulfillment ritual through which you repair impairments of your samaya, perform fire offerings, recite more and longer praises than usual, and so on. Also include the exhortation to the deity that culminates the feast practice. In short, for whatever practice you are doing, do the things that occur in that practice and do them on the day or days appropriate to that specific practice.

Bringing Enhancement to the Completion Stage

The completion stage has two parts: the path of method and the path of liberation. We first turn to the *path of method*, which refers to the completion stage of mahamudra. Since the path of method depends on having a lot of drops, you can bring enhancement by relying on food and nutrition that increase the drops. Especially, relying on the consumption of the samaya substances of meat and liquor, properly consecrated during feast practice, will bring about the enhancement or increase of the drops. When you do this, your motivation must be to bring enhancement to your practice. You should not eat meat because as an eastern Tibetan you like meat, or drink liquor because as a central Tibetan you like to drink.

Second, we have a particular method for restoring problems with the channels in connection with the path of method. In the early morning, before you do much of anything else and before you have gone to the bathroom, visualize your body as a golden vase. In the center of this, visualize your mind in the form of the deity Vajravidharana. In the heart of Vajravidharana, visualize a HUM surrounded by his dharani, both of them on top of a sun disk. Mentally invite the wisdom deities, all buddhas and bodhisattvas, in the form of Vajravidharana, and dissolve them into the deity inside your body. Then as you recite the mantra

or dharani of the deity, think that a stream of ambrosia flows from the deity's body and fills your own body, which is visualized as a golden vase.

Then you urinate. The first flow of urine should be discarded because you do not want the first bit. You do not want the last part of that particular urination either. Keep the middle part of the urine flow in a container. You do this because urine is in nature the Buddha Akshobhya, and it is also the best way of purifying sickness, demons, contamination, and other problems.

With the perception that your urine is wisdom ambrosia, you take the middle part of that session of urination from its vessel. First, with the tip of your finger, offer the select portion to your guru and the yidams. Then drink three swallows, thinking of it as ambrosia. Then wash the outside of your body with it. This is very important because by doing this you can repair any damage to the wisdom channels. The wisdom channels can be broken or blocked, or they can dry up and become what are called "lame channels," which occurs when they dry up because they are used so little. You can repair this very, very well by following this instruction.

Another thing for bringing enhancement to the path of method involves an herb called "black shudak." This herb has two forms:

white and black. It is very hard to tell them apart. One of them grows here in the northeastern U.S.; I have seen it at our three-year retreat center, Karme Ling, but I am not sure if it is the right one for this method. Grind or chop the shudak very finely, mix it with old butter, and rub it on your body. This will make warmth come very quickly. If warmth develops, then bliss develops, which is important for the path of method.

The second aspect of the completion stage is the *path of liberation*, which consists of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection. The supreme way to bring enhancement to this practice is to visualize your root guru above your head as the embodiment of, or as being inseparable from, all buddhas in the form of Vajradhara. Generate as much intense devotion as possible, so much that you cry uncontrollably. Supplicate the guru in the manner of a child calling her mother from afar with words such as “Lama Khyenno,” or whatever supplications and mantras you wish — the words are not important. After doing that a few times, simply think that the guru dissolves into you, and rest your mind without contrivance. This will definitely bring enhancement or progress to your realization of mahamudra.

When you first start to practice the meditation of mahamudra, you must develop some degree of mental stability before you can go any further. The mind has to come to rest; you have to

experience a state of tranquillity. If as a beginner you find that you cannot generate an experience of stillness or tranquillity no matter what you do, then do one hundred prostrations in a row without resting. Do them as quickly as you can; immediately after you have finished the prostrations, take the meditation posture, the seven dharmas of Vairochana. By engaging in the physical activity of prostration and then immediately stopping and meditating, your winds will enter the **avadhuti**, which will automatically bring an experience of stillness.

On the other hand, if you cannot break through an experience of mental dullness, depression, or torpor no matter what you do and no matter how much you meditate, then in the first part of the morning or the latter part of the afternoon, when the heat of the sun is not too hot, go to a place where you can see lots of sky, on a day when the sky is clear and there are no clouds. Facing away from the sun, take the proper meditation posture and direct your gaze into the midst of the blue sky. Focus your mind in the sky so there is no distinction between the mind that is looking and the sky that is being looked at. Just remain like that for a long time. This experience of direct lucidity-emptiness will bring enhancement.

If you find that you have achieved a state in meditation where there is stillness and occurrence, and although you can tell which

one is present you cannot break through that mere experience of stillness and occurrence, then for a day or so do very exertive practice with body and speech, such as prostrations and *circumambulations*, busily and quickly. Do not let your body rest at all. While doing that, look at the nature of your mind in the midst of all of this busyness. At the same time, keep your speech busy: recite a lot of liturgy, prayers, mantra, and so on. Do all of those things as actively as possible and look at your mind's nature while you are doing it. Do that for a day.

The next day take it completely easy. Do nothing with your body and nothing with your speech; just remain in a meditation posture, immovable as a statue. Do not even recite mantras. Sometimes lie down in a state of complete rest, like a corpse, but look at your mind's nature. Then sometimes sit up in meditation posture without moving, like a golden statue. By alternating these states or practices, you will generate some improvement in your meditation practice.

Enhancement that Comes from Illness

This section is not so much about how to get rid of illness but rather how to make use of it, because the intensity of illness makes it an opportunity to progress in meditation practice.

The cause of sickness is previous wrongdoing and the obscurations you have accumulated. From this point of view, because illness is caused by wrongdoing and obscuration, the best way to deal with it is by meditating on emptiness. This is simply because meditation on emptiness is the best way to purify wrongdoing and obscuration. There is no other method of purification as powerful as meditation on emptiness because the essence or nature of wrongdoing is obscurity or darkness, and meditation on emptiness is like lighting a torch in that darkness. If you want to get rid of darkness, you need to produce light. That gets rid of it; nothing else needs to be done to dispel darkness except introduce light, and nothing else will dispel darkness except introducing light. Thus from the point of view of the cause of sickness, the best way to respond to sickness is by meditating on emptiness.

The proximate condition that produces an occurrence of illness is demons, obstructors, and elementals. You may think the best way to get rid of demons, obstructors, and elementals is to do all sorts of fancy visualizations. The problem with this is that gods and demons also know how to do visualizations.

There are many stories about this. For example, in order to overpower a demon, someone might visualize themselves as a huge form of Guru Rinpoche. The demon will simply visualize

himself or herself as an even bigger form of Guru Rinpoche; it is no problem for them to do that. However gods, demons, and spirits do not know how to meditate on emptiness; they do not understand emptiness. If you feel that you need to tame spirits or elementals, the best way to do so is by meditating on emptiness; this is because in the nature of emptiness none of them can find any opportunity to cause harm. When you recognize that the nature of your mind is empty and therefore beyond any kind of substantiality, you are beyond harm since only that which is substantial can be destroyed or harmed.

The resulting and final stage of sickness, what we mean when we think of the pain of sickness, is the thought of sickness, the thought that “I am ill.” If you look directly at that thought — which here means looking at the thought in a way that sets up no boundary between the looker and the object that is looked at — you will see that there is no difference between the thought of sickness and the thought of not being sick. It is not the case that the nature of the thought, “I am ill” and the nature of the thought, “I am well” are different. One thought is no more real, no more intense, no more coarse than any other thought. Rest evenly and look directly at the thought, “I am ill,” and look at that which thinks, “I am ill.” Do this without attempting to alter these things and without attempting to get rid of them. If you do this, although the pain and discomfort of illness will not immediately

disappear, the suffering of illness will arise as mahamudra. The point of this method is that, although conventionally we think of mahamudra as being bliss-emptiness or clarity-emptiness, it can just as well arise as suffering-emptiness.

Whenever you recognize the nature of any experience as emptiness, it is the same fundamental thing. Therefore many different methods can be used to point out mahamudra. For this reason teachers sometimes abused and beat their students until they wept, and then the teacher would point out the nature of mind. Others have punched their students in the belly so they farted loudly and were horribly embarrassed, and then the students were able to recognize the nature of their mind. Still others have made their students sleep with the teacher's consorts and then, in the midst of that bliss, caused them to experience the nature of their mind.

In working with illness, you need to prolong the state of even placement while looking at the nature of the thought. If you can meditate in a prolonged way, then your experience of illness as being intensely painful or uncomfortable will start to dissolve, as will your experience of illness as something that exists independent of you. The pain per se will not go away, but your experience of it as pain will change. It will become more like the sensation of a shiver. If you can meditate in that way for a long

time, not only will you not be as affected by pain and sickness, but your wrongdoing and obscurations will be purified, and finally sickness and harm from spirits will be pacified in their own places.

If you wonder where this instruction comes from, it was not invented by Chakme Rinpoche himself, but it is the essential point of the teaching of *ro nyam* or “equal taste,” which was composed or codified by Lord Gotsangpa.

You may also use this when you experience mental suffering, such as when someone close to you passes away, when you are afraid, when you are being reviled or denigrated without any justification, when you are verbally abused, when you feel that you are being victimized by wild demons, gods, spirits, and so on, or when someone tells you that you have broken samaya and you are a sinner who behaves badly. In short, whenever anything happens that upsets you, or when any thought arises that you just cannot stand having in your mind, if you look at the nature of that thought and allow the thought to dissolve through experiencing it as having no independent existence, this will bring tremendous enhancement to your practice. It is said that meditating under such circumstances is one hundred times better than meditating while at ease. The intensity of physical

or mental discomfort is what enables you to gain progress or enhancement in such a situation.

However if you do not do this technique long enough, the discomfort of illness or mental suffering will come back. For example, if you look at the nature of the thought until the immediate discomfort is pacified or dissolved and then you stop doing it, your discomfort will come back. This is called the “re-arising of the leftover or corpse of the poisons.” If this happens, it simply means that you did not do the technique long enough, and you need to look at the nature of thought again. Make the aspiration that you and all those connected with you be born in the realm in which you attain perfect awakening, and that none of them have to undergo such an uncomfortable or unpleasant thought again. In short, seal the meditation with that type of dedication and aspiration.

Enhancement of the Three Aspects of Meditation Practice

The three aspects of meditation practice are bliss or well-being, lucidity or clarity, and nonconceptuality. The necessity of enhancing bliss is that if you do not realize the unity of bliss and emptiness, then even if you have a stable samadhi of meditation

on emptiness, this is not true mahamudra, the mahamudra of the anuttara yoga tantras. If you wish to attain liberation in one life and one body, you must practice the methods of the channels, winds, and drops, which bring about the realization of bliss and emptiness. These methods consist of chandali or tummo practices, the corresponding visualizations, the practices of the channels and winds, and the physical exercises that supplement these.

First of all, these practices generate warmth or heat. Through the generation of warmth, bliss arises, and then the practice consists of looking at the nature of the bliss that arises. Through doing this, the experience of bliss and the recognition of the emptiness of the bliss mix; this brings the realization of the unity of bliss and emptiness, and therefore it brings this enhancement to your practice. This is important because all siddhas, without exception, have attained buddhahood through the realization of the unity of bliss and emptiness.

Enhancement of Clarity

Ideally enhancement of clarity would be achieved through the practice of *tögal*, “leapover,” which makes up part of the practice of Dzokchen or the Great Perfection. If you do this practice, you physically see rainbow light; spheres or tiny drops of mul-

ticolored light; and the forms of deities and other things such as mantras, scepters, and so forth. If you are doing the practice properly, while viewing these appearances you do not fixate on them as being wondrous or worthwhile. You look at the nature of the appearance and recognize that it is empty of substantial or independent existence — in short, you mix your experience of the mind's nature with your experience of looking at the appearances. This will bring about great enhancement of your realization of the unity of lucidity and emptiness.

Enhancement through Natural States of Nonconceptuality

Perhaps the most profound enhancement is bringing about enhancement through the use of natural states of nonconceptuality. Fundamentally this is bringing the state of sleep to the path. In order to do this, go to sleep in the posture of the sleeping lion, which is the posture adopted by the Buddha at his parinirvana. Start by dissolving your self-visualization. As a practitioner of Secret Mantra, you constantly maintain the self-visualization of yourself as whatever deity you practice, and therefore the last thing you do before going to sleep is dissolve this self-visualization in the manner prescribed by your particular practice. Then until

you fall asleep, rest in the nature that you are left with after the dissolution of the visualization.

The state of sleep and the state of death are similar, although obviously they are not the same. The experiences culminating in the moment of death are more intense, which means that the clear light that arises in both states arises far more intensely and vividly at death than during sleep. Nevertheless it does arise during the process of going to sleep and during sleep itself, and this is what you are trying to make use of in this technique. The various stages leading up to the **ground clear light** that arise when you die — white appearance, red increase, black attainment, and so on — also arise when you fall asleep, but they are by no means as vivid as they are at death.

When you actually fall asleep, the eight consciousnesses become inactive and dissolve into the central channel at the level of the heart. When they do so, which happens at the conclusion of the white, red, and black appearances, the clear light arises to some extent in one's experience. It is very difficult for anyone, especially a beginner, to recognize each of these different stages as you go to sleep — the white, red, black, and clear light stages. By going to sleep in a state of meditation, as soon as you have gone to sleep and before you start to dream, it is possible that you will recognize your mind's nature. If you go to sleep in a state

of meditation and you recognize your mind's nature vividly after falling asleep and before dreaming, this is called "grasping the clear light of sleep." If you do that seven times, then according to Guru Rinpoche, even if at the time of death no one is there to remind you to attend to the ground clear light, you will recognize it and achieve liberation.

There are variations on how this recognition or apprehension of the clear light occurs during sleep. The previous example was recognizing the clear light during sleep *per se*. The second variation is "recognition or apprehension of the clear light during deep sleep." This is where you are able to remain undistracted until you go to sleep, then once you go to sleep and until you wake up, your sleep is completely uneventful; it is a deep sleep without any dreams. You do not really remember whether or not you recognized the clear light, but you went to sleep undistracted and there were no dreams whatsoever. If as soon as you wake up, you wake up in a recognition of your mind's nature, with your mind completely fresh, vivid, and clear in that recognition, then even if you do not remember what happened during sleep and there were no dreams, this is what is called the "apprehension or grasping of the clear light of deep sleep."

According to Lord Gampopa, if you go to sleep in recognition of the mind's nature and you wake up with that same recognition,

then even if you do not remember anything happening during the night, you did apprehend the clear light of deep sleep. This is similar but not identical to, for example, going to sleep saying a mantra and then waking up saying it. You do not remember saying it during the night, but somehow the momentum was established.

There is a third variation on the clear light of sleep, which is called the “clear light of light sleep.” This is where as soon as you fall asleep, you are undistracted and so you recognize your mind’s nature — that is to say, your mind’s nature becomes an object of direct experience. Within that state, because your sleep is very, very light, there is a little bit of movement within the mind. In other words, the sixth consciousness is functioning a little bit. You know that you are asleep, and you can actually see your room. If in that state you remain undistracted in the recognition of your mind’s nature, then different visions can occur, such as visions of deities and so forth, and you can also see and hear various other things occurring. That is called “grasping the clear light in or of light sleep.”

Another thing that can happen in sleep is that immediately after going to sleep, you do not recognize your mind’s nature as in the previous example, but you see things. For example, you are asleep but still slightly conscious, and a light shaped like a

radung (a long, telescopic alpine horn) shoots out from both eyes. This means that the light starts off narrow and then gets wider, like a funnel. Or you might see things like drops of light, things like the sun or moon, or rays of sunlight and so on. As a result of seeing those things, you recognize your mind's nature.

In this case you did not recognize your mind's nature at first, but you saw things that caused you to recognize it. In this experience the light serves as a condition for your ability to see things at a great distance without them obscuring one another. This could be buildings, mountains, rock faces on mountains, and so on. You can see what people are doing, hear what people are saying, see places, and so on. If that happens a few times, it is called the "clear light of experience."

All of these methods of using the state of sleep for practice are ways of bringing about enhancement through nonconceptuality. If you do not apprehend the clear light while you are asleep, then the all-basis consciousness, which has been withdrawn into the central channel at the heart, is led back out of the central channel by karmic winds and then it wanders around through the channels of your body. This is what produces various dreams. Thus if you do not recognize the clear light of sleep, you will start to have dreams.

While you are dreaming, if you get to a state where you wonder if you are in fact dreaming, where you are not completely sure that you are dreaming but you question the reality of what you see or experience, then you can apply the techniques of generation and completion that you normally practice: you can do the visualizations, rest in the nature of mind, and so on. This is called the “clear light of dreams.” Especially if you can start clearly recognizing through lucid dreaming — not just wondering, but clearly recognizing — that you are dreaming, and you then practice the generation and completion stages, they will be more clear and powerful than when you do them in the waking state during the day. You will also be able to transform yourself into different animals or birds, go to pure realms, meet deities and teachers, receive teachings, and so on. All of those things are ways of bringing enhancement to your practice through sleep.

The *Hevajra Tantra* says, “Sleep is not to be abandoned and the senses are not to be blocked.” The statement, “sleep is not to be abandoned” refers to the fact that we usually consider sleep to be a state of stupor because normally it is one. But it need not be; we can use sleep in a different way. In the same way, the experience of dreams, which we normally consider a state of mental nonclarity, need not be so; it can also be brought to the path.

Enhancement through Working with Disturbing Sounds

As a beginner, when you are practicing meditation you may prefer to be isolated so you can be free from loud or unpleasant sounds that might disturb you. For instance, in Tibet you might try to avoid foxes and crows because of the loud chattering noises they make. Other common noise problems in Tibet are barking dogs and waterfalls; mother sheep and their babies mingling in a flock also make a lot of noise. If you have no other place to go, such clamor and distraction can provoke thoughts and create difficulty, and have an adverse impact on your meditation.

In a country like the United States, there are a great number of cars, motorcycles, children shouting and crying, and other sources of disruptive noise. Background sounds of aircraft and motor traffic, whether during the day or at night, can seem detrimental to the stability of your meditation. There are all kinds of loud sounds and noises everywhere, and some individuals may feel they cannot practice meditation because of this. Whether you can successfully circumvent these factors or not, the problem is not that these disruptions need to be abandoned or eliminated; rather it is necessary to employ methods of protecting your state of mind so external factors will not be capable of disturbing your practice.

One method for diffusing the negative impact of such disturbances in meditation involves focusing your awareness on the sound of the birdcalls or whatever kind of noise you are hearing. For example, if it is the sound of crows cawing, bring your awareness to the cawing sound and then examine it. “Does the noise exist substantially? Who is being affected by it? Is anything really there?” As you investigate in this way, you discover that neither the sound nor your mind are truly established. Once you discover that the sound and the essential nature of your mind are indistinct from one another, then look at that nature itself. When you do this, the sound will not be eliminated, although you are not hearing the sound as “something.” If you hear the sound, but then feel agitated by it and respond with the thought, “That sound bothers me,” you surrender to fixation. Through correctly recognizing that neither your mind nor the sounds truly exist, then meditating on individual sounds with this technique, noises will not disturb you so much.

Doing this only once will not be sufficient to dispel the irritation, but if you earnestly apply this technique repeatedly, you will discover that your meditation will improve in this regard, and eventually it will develop to the point where no matter what noises are around you, sounds will not have any impact on you.

I can definitely attest to this personally. When I left Tibet I ended up in a place in India called Buxador. It was terribly hot and uncomfortable, and there were thousands of monks living all together. There was a lot of noise among the monks, and there were many other noises as well, so it was very difficult for me to be there. Whenever I found time I moved up to an isolated area on a hill where it was much cooler. Sometimes it was so tranquil there while I was meditating that even quiet sounds seemed like a disturbance. As I tried this again and again, my practice became worse, to the point where I found that even the sound of an occasional leaf falling on the ground provoked thoughts of irritation. Having been through this repeatedly, I eventually concluded, “Even in this quiet environment my meditation is still affected. Nothing is really helping.”

One day I was wondering what to do, since the slightest noises were causing so much difficulty and discursive thought. I decided to go back among the crowds of monks down in the refugee camp. As I tried to meditate there, at one point I discovered that I was able to do so very comfortably, and the sources of noise and irritation no longer bothered me at all. Thus on the basis of my own experience, I can say this method is definitely beneficial.

Similarly, at one point Lama Yeshe Losal was in retreat practicing tranquillity meditation. At this time the shrine building

was being constructed and we were using bulldozers and other heavy machinery. One day Lama Yeshe Losal complained, “It is not possible to practice tranquillity meditation here with all the bulldozing going on. How can I meditate while you are making such a huge racket?” I advised him, “We may be digging up the ground, but we are not coming to destroy your retreat house. There is no need to be upset. You need to examine the nature of the sound itself from the perspective of **absolute truth**. When you do, you will find that there is no sound abiding anywhere at all. That is just how it is. Whatever it may be, it is nothing other than the nature of your mind. You have to look at it this way. If you feel disturbed by every sound you hear, that is just fixation; there is actually no one to fixate on or be affected by these sounds.” He tried to practice with this understanding, and naturally his experience improved.

Most of us feel we need to have ideal conditions when practicing meditation. In the absence of perfect conditions, when something happens or we hear some kind of noise, we react with irritation or anger and we think that our meditation has been disturbed. This is completely unnecessary. The essential nature of the noise is empty, and when you recognize this, it will greatly benefit the quality of your practice. If you sustain and cultivate your practice in that way, then each time you hear a loud sound, the experience will change from being a disruption to being a

positive element in your meditation. By always looking at the essential nature, any and all sounds you hear will arise as the essence of your meditation.

For example, the nature of the sky is not something truly established. Airplanes produce sound as they fly through the sky, and birds also make sounds while flying, but however loud or quiet the sounds are, no impact or impression is left behind. The sky is not damaged in any way whatsoever. In the same way, the nature of mind has never been a truly established entity. When you observe this by resting in even placement within that nature, then even when there is a lot of noise, it will not become an obstacle or disturbance to your meditation.

Enhancement through Working with Visual Disturbances

Just as sounds might become a disturbance in meditation, it is the same with the variety of forms we encounter visually. Since visible forms will inevitably appear, you might try to guard against them by closing your eyes, but your meditation will not be any better. As forms appear to you, if you appraise them with thoughts like, “That is better,” “That is worse,” “This is beautiful,” or “That is ugly,” if you do not recognize these thoughts as just

your own concepts, then the forms become detrimental to your meditation. Instead, if while you are clearly seeing forms you refrain from engaging in apprehending them in terms of what they are or what they are not, you should be able to simply rest within the nature of your mind. Knowing that visible forms are like forms in a dream, they will not present an obstacle or disturbance to your meditation.

For instance, consider a young child viewing the interior of a shrine room. The child sees all the different paintings and images, but he does not identify them in terms of thoughts like “This is a statue,” “This is gold,” “This is good,” or “This is not good.” In the same way, regardless of whatever you might see, if you can rest in even placement free from fixation within that nature, it will not have an impact on your meditation.

Similarly, people might say different things to you — pleasant or unpleasant words — but no matter what they say, the essence of those words is empty, as we have seen. On the basis of recognizing emptiness as the nature of mind, the words you perceive will not provoke an emotional reaction of either delight or aversion, and therefore you will not fall under the influence of attachment or aversion.

Seeing that your own mind is naturally free from all conceptual extremes — seeing that it is not truly existent, that it is insubstantial, that it does not conceive of fixation on good or bad, and that there is no established entity therein — you realize that your mind is empty. This is the practice of sustaining or abiding within the nature of mind free from elaboration. “Free from elaboration” means that you remain in even placement within the mind’s nature without fixating on good and bad, pleasure and displeasure, large and small, or any other such conceptual elaborations whatsoever.

Even if through such practice you understand and directly experience the nature of mind as emptiness, if you still regard apprehended objects as being externally established or substantially existent and you fail to recognize that this is fixation, your realization is just like a bird with no wings.

One method that can lead to realization of the empty nature of apprehended phenomena begins with focusing your awareness on a small object, such as a vajra or a bell. Place the object in front of you, then slowly examine it. Look carefully at how the bell is made, what its proportions are, what the outside is like, and so on. The nature of the object and the nature of the mind that apprehends it (conceiving of the vajra or bell as being good, bad,

or whatever) cannot be differentiated from one another, and yet even while you focus on the vajra or bell, it does not disappear.

The lack of any established entity is the very nature of the object, and recognizing this empty nature is like discovering the gold therein. We only obscure that gold with thoughts like “This truly exists,” “This is real,” “This is good,” and so on. Therefore while you rest in even placement within your mind’s nature, the vajra or bell is not negated. Otherwise, maintaining any such conceptual thoughts of good and bad, large and small, or pleasant and unpleasant will obstruct the experience of even placement.

Once you have developed a good sense of familiarization with this technique, you can then apply it to meditation with a much larger object, such as a mountain. When you first try this, you may find that the mountain appears very impressive, and you have thoughts like “It is tall, it is very beautiful, it is massive, it looks so clear,” and so on. If you go deeper into the nature of the qualities of your apparent object of focus, and you do this while resting the mind (which itself is not truly existent) in even placement within that empty nature, you find that the mountain is not somehow dismissed or negated.

On the basis of that, thoughts conceiving of objects as great, small, or anything else will not arise, and because of this dis-

engagement from concepts, you will eliminate the potential difference between successful meditation with a small object or difficulty with a large one. Then any and all forms you encounter as objects of vision, whatever their size, will blend together with the nature of mind. As this blending occurs, you will still see those appearances directly; however the fixation that conceives of them as being truly established, substantial, and real will not come into play. As a result you will be able to view all visible forms as blending or integrating perfectly with the true nature of your mind.

On the basis of having developed your facility to that extent, you can further expand the scope of this perception to include the entire world, Mount Meru, the four main continents, and even entire realms. When the idea of substantial reality initially occurs, if you simply rest in even placement within that nature, you will be abiding in the essential recognition that nothing in those realms is truly established, and that all appearances in those realms are devoid of intrinsic identity. If you repeatedly apply this technique of blending appearances with mind, then regardless of whatever appears visually or aurally, in the very instant that it arises you will eventually be able to recognize that it is not truly existent because its nature is emptiness.

At the same time, those sounds or forms will not simply cease to exist. To draw an analogy in terms of the external phenomenal world, the moon and all the stars in the night sky appear distinctly as reflections in the surface of the ocean. The reflected images of the moon and the stars have no true existence whatsoever, yet they appear distinctly. All externally perceived objects are like this.

With regard to your mind's essential nature, even if you do not fixate on appearances as being fixed and real, the variety of external appearances remains unlimited. Once you have arrived at the direct realization of this unimpeded quality of phenomenal appearances, the possibility of anything you might hear or see disturbing your meditation will be fully eliminated. In this way, although an entity appears clearly, at the same time its essential nature is emptiness.

Nevertheless we might try to achieve some kind of clarity through negation. Such an approach — conceiving of the act of negating or blocking something as being the way to clarify or reveal something else — is not meditation. *Meditation* means resting the mind evenly within the essence of whatever there is, as it is naturally. We are and have been habituated since time immemorial to the bewilderment of thoughts that fixate on duality. “Forms

are other; they are external to me.” “Sounds are other, they are external to me.” “That sounds pleasant; that is unpleasant.”

But although we were previously in a state of delusion, through gradually developing the correct practice of even placement, eventually the true nature of all things will be directly revealed to us. As you repeatedly practice meditation that is continually embraced in this manner, gradually you will come to a point when meditation is no longer necessary, and all appearances will be recognized as arising of their own potential while at the same time being devoid of intrinsic reality. As the dualistic mind gradually diminishes in strength, the ultimate truth of nonduality becomes more and more evident.

While we are meditating on any given entity, although it is in fact insubstantial like what we refer to as *space*, we still might conceptually think of it as being empty, vast, and limitless — another form of fixation. Because space as well as one’s own mind are both utterly devoid of true existence, space and mind can mix with one another. This does not mean that we regard space and mind as being two different things. Both space and mind are equally devoid of intrinsic identity; therefore the essential nature of both is exactly the same, and this essential nature is precisely where one rests in the practice of even placement. Through sustained cultivation within that nature, which

is the abiding nature of all things, space and mind will blend inseparably with one another. *Blend* here means that there is no fixation on these two things as being different. It is necessary to identify with their true, essential nature, which itself is free from any established identity. While remaining in mind's true nature, any conception of space and mind as being dualistically separate becomes transparent. Although space and mind are the same in that both are equally empty of true existence, our ordinary dualistic conception of space and mind creates a distinction between the two. Since they are nondual, mind and space are already inseparable.

When mind and space unite in this way, you will no longer conceive of making any differentiation at all between “This is mind” and “This is space,” because within even placement there will no longer be any form of separation that departs from the true nature. Because of this, all external sensory phenomena — visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations — will not be differentiated from the nature of mind. Not only that, but in terms of regarding all phenomena as either substantial or empty, both the mentality that fixates on substantiality as well as the mentality that fixates on emptiness will be overcome by the absence of separation within the true nature.

Enhancement through Focusing on Pure and Impure Forms

You can shift your focus to a pure form by identifying with the form of a yidam or buddha. When you do this, you might feel there is a gap between the perfect buddha or yidam who possesses all qualities and you who are afflicted and disturbed. This is just grasping at duality; instead you must recognize the nonduality of both.

For example, you can meditate on a clear visualization of the body of any particular yidam or buddha. As with all other phenomena, since they have no true existence of their own, the body, speech, and mind of the buddha and your own body, speech, and mind are essentially the same, and that is how they should be viewed. Through doing this with any one yidam or buddha and identifying the buddha's mind with your own mind, once you can look at this nature without differentiation, you will thereafter be able to do so with any and all buddhas and yidams, and you will see the essence of the true nature of mind and the aspect of the deity blended as one. Because all buddhas and yidam deities are ultimately devoid of true existence, the eventual result of resting the mind evenly in this way is that the mind of the buddhas and your own mind will merge and become inseparable.

In the same way, you can identify yourself with an impure form. This is done on the basis of the principle just described: given that all buddhas and bodhisattvas are equally inseparable from one another, you can equally remain in even placement within the essential nature of any one of them. Now, when we say “impure form,” the text says that you take as your focus an ordinary animal in front of you. You give rise to the view that there is no difference between its mind and your own mind because they are fundamentally inseparable. Because they are inseparable, you rest evenly within that nature as the mind of the animal and your own mind blend without differentiation. Likewise, by extension the mind of any possible species of sentient being and your own mind can blend inseparably with one another. When they do, you will recognize their equality free from either “self and other” or any other type of distinction.

The way we ordinarily conceive the two states of samsara and nirvana is that what we call “samsara” is inherently flawed, and conversely “nirvana” is naturally perfect in its qualities. However once you achieve the state of even placement as described above, since all phenomena are free from elaboration and are ultimately the same within the true nature, you recognize that all phenomena of both samsara and nirvana consist entirely of the appearances of your own mind. In this way, when you directly realize that they are not truly established, this will bring about

an experience of tremendous improvement; in other words, the qualities of your meditation will be greatly enhanced.

Progress or enhancement generally unfolds in stages. Initially you learn by means of intellectual understanding, but since this is only intellectual understanding, no qualities of realization will arise from it alone. The techniques that have been learned must actually be implemented in the practice of meditation. Since it is meditation, it is not ultimate perfection. What eventually occurs in these stages of progress is that devices such as logical scrutiny will become increasingly unnecessary, and meditation techniques will also become increasingly unnecessary. This is because, as we have seen, the essential nature of whatever appears, whatever is heard, or whatever arises as thoughts is ultimately not established; as this becomes evident, relinquishment and realization will arise. In this way, the point when you discover the deepest degree of unchanging certainty will be the point when you genuinely attain the perfect qualities of mind. As long as that point has not been attained, meditation practices will still be necessary.

Enhancement through Working with Distraction

Although we may have a complete understanding of how to practice, occasionally we forget things. This happens because of previously developed habits and other hidden tendencies. Because of that possibility, we must constantly recall death and impermanence. When we fail to recollect death and impermanence, we may lose all trace of diligence, or at best that diligence will be erratic and fluctuating. When we happen to remember impermanence we are diligent, but once we forget we are unable to find that diligence again.

For these reasons, in the past a certain custom developed in areas of central Tibet around Lhasa and Tsang. Individual practitioners in retreat would take white chalk, black ink, red ocher, or whatever was available, and inside their retreat dwelling they would write in large letters on all the walls in each direction phrases such as DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE ARE IMMINENT; DO NOT ALLOW YOUR MIND TO BE DISTRACTED; PRACTICE EVEN PLACEMENT, and so on. For those individuals in isolated retreat, seeing these phrases served as an immediate reminder, instilling them with the sense of urgency that is necessary in order to be diligent when practicing meditation. Chakme Rinpoche saw firsthand this custom in use among many practitioners. For practitioners like ourselves, regarding death and impermanence

as they did also serves as recollection of our true nature. Using written-out phrases as reminders to recall death and mortality is an excellent way to prompt us to look at the essential nature of mind and rest within it.

For an individual who directly realizes that all phenomena are of the nature of mind and are free from elaboration, and who directly realizes that, although conventionally samsara is defective by nature and nirvana is perfect, in truth neither of them really exist, the achievement of even placement within the nature of mind will lead to certain experiences in meditation. There will be a time when an intense experience of bliss or well-being arises both physically and mentally; this experience is typically devoid of conceptual thought or bewilderment, and as such there seems to be no differentiation among appearances.

The intense or deep quality describes what is known as “great bliss,” in which the experience of both physical and mental wellbeing arises in an overwhelming degree. *Experience* here means that which comes before the dawning of realization — the experience itself does not constitute realization. For some people such an experience might last for a month at a time, without any distinction in terms of day and night. In some situations it might last a while longer, and for other people it might even

last as long as a year. Nevertheless things will change sooner or later because the experience is transitory.

Although the actual basis of realization has arisen at this point, there will still be many instances of distraction or forgetfulness. Sometimes the mind will become distracted, while at other times you may forget something concerning the meditation technique — such lapses will happen often. On those occasions if you think, “That was not my intention; I just forgot,” you can simply bring your recollection back into effect. When you realize that you have been distracted and you regret it, remind yourself again each time you practice that you should not be distracted.

On the other hand, thinking to yourself, “I am not practicing meditation correctly” may cause you to feel overly regretful. Whenever you become distracted and you continue to dwell on it, you are just pursuing the distraction. If you continue to speculate, thinking, “What was it that distracted me?”, you are following after the distraction. Thinking about what happened before you got distracted and what happened after will not retrieve your attention after the fact, and you will want to escape the uncomfortable feeling of being in this kind of quandary. Therefore it is necessary to know the methods of enhancing the strengths and qualities of your meditation.

One technique for improving this situation is as follows: As soon as you catch yourself in a state of distraction, look back at however many instances of distraction or discursive thought may have occurred during that time. When you take into account the number of such instances and then trace them individually up to the point when you regained your recollection, you discover that all of those discursive thoughts were completely groundless to begin with, even though some of them were coarse enough for you to take notice of them. On the basis of recognizing this, rest evenly within the nature of whatever thoughts arose for you. By doing so, in that very instant they will all be resolved as being empty in nature; in other words, there will be no fixation on discursive thoughts. When you do this successfully it should bring you a sense of contentment. Whereas initially you felt disappointed because you were distracted, that experience is now replaced with a feeling of contented happiness.

Through practicing in this way, it is taught that every instance of distraction can actually play a useful role in your meditation. The peerless Lord Gampopa himself attested to this. He said that once you have realized the essential nature of mind, it is still possible to become briefly distracted, but the discursive thoughts that caused the distraction will have no capacity whatsoever to obscure that fundamental nature. This is because when you rest in even placement within the nature of whatever thoughts

occurred to you, the thoughts are automatically purified of their own accord; that is to say, once you have directly realized the nature of discursive thoughts, they become powerless to affect your state of mind.

In any case, for us at this point there is no possibility of our meditation being completely free from distraction. Such a degree of stability in which there is no distraction at all will not be achieved until the fourth and final stage of mahamudra practice, the stage of no-meditation. The term *no-meditation* really refers to the final state of awakening, so once the stage of no-meditation has been attained, there will no longer be any occasion for distraction. At that point, the true absence of all distraction has been fully realized. Until then the possibility of occasional distraction — or likewise, no-distraction — will continue to be present. In the instructional text *Nondual Wind-Mind*, Lhodrak Marpa clearly explained this, saying that until the stage of no-meditation is realized, one will remain subject to the possibility of distraction.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche mentions that in his own time, there were many meditation practitioners who claimed to be totally free from all distraction. In reality the majority of these people were actually obscured by their own meditative experience of well-being because they had misconstrued an experience that

seemed to be a state of true no-distraction. However it was only a transitory experience; authentic realization had not yet arisen for them. By mistaking that experience as the final fruition, those individuals were misapprehending the nature of mind.

In general, unless you possess tremendous diligence, intense faith and devotion, and the special instructions and guidance of your guru, when transitory experiences arise in meditation and are mistaken as the final result — when you believe that you have achieved realization, even prior to knowing anything of the qualities of the paths and stages — it is possible that you may develop a great deal of pride. You will regard yourself as being a siddha who has already attained accomplishment, and as a result you will only experience numerous obstacles in your meditation. If you properly understand the problem with such fixation on experiences before they arise, then you will recognize whatever qualities or defects arise as your practice evolves. To that end, Chakme Rinpoche's *Mountain Dharma* is one of the most inconceivably outstanding resources available to us.

Along similar lines, Sakya Pandita said that if an ignorant person attempts to meditate on mahamudra, there is a danger they will be reborn either in the animal realm or one of the formless realms. This is definitely true; a person who is ignorant will not properly understand the real meaning of Dharma. It

would be foolish to try to meditate on “mahamudra” having no knowledge of anything but the word *mahamudra*. If someone were to do so, thinking, “I know nothing at all about meditation, but that’s okay,” they would eventually take rebirth as an animal. Furthermore if someone develops a notion like, “Everything is just nonexistent; it doesn’t matter if I am ignorant. Everything is just nothing,” if they do not understand that such an attitude constitutes nihilism and they bring this view into meditation, it will lead to rebirth in a formless realm. On the other hand, if a person meditates on mahamudra with the proper knowledge at their disposal, then realization of the true nature of mind will be achieved. For these reasons learning, thinking, and meditation are all absolutely necessary.

The practitioners from Karma Chakme’s time, who erroneously claimed to be able to meditate day and night with no distraction, would never reach the actual state of perfect no-distraction. He explains this by saying that the mind of a buddha never departs from the state of even placement, one of the eighteen unique attributes of a buddha. All buddhas are endowed with these eighteen unique and consummate qualities. With the exception of a buddha in whom they are manifest, these qualities are only spoken of in the teachings and there is no way for us to perceive or experience them. For that reason, since we are presently only

beginners, simply hoping for the perfect absence of all distraction will not be enough to actually achieve it.

Nevertheless once the nature of mind has been perfectly realized, there will be no difference at all whether you are distracted or not distracted, whether you recollect or forget, or whether you are asleep or awake. This is because realization of this nature is unchanging. If it did change — that is to say, if it was not of a lasting quality — this would mean there was still room for continued improvement. As long as something is only an experience, it remains subject to change.

Once you have actually realized the essential nature of mind, regardless of whether you are distracted or undistracted, remembering or forgetting, sleeping or awake, or whatever the case may be, the emptiness that is the nature of all phenomena will be nakedly evident as the dharmakaya. For someone who has already directly received introduction to the true nature, an instance of distraction has no harmful impact, nor does the absence of distraction have a particularly beneficial effect. This is simply because the quality of realization is unchanging, permanently beyond any such deterioration or fluctuation. It is like gold in its inherently pure state: if gold is pure and genuine, its quality is not affected whether it remains underground or is exposed above ground, whether it is left out in the rain or under the sun.

No matter what happens, its essential nature does not change. In the same way, for someone who has realized the nature of mind, circumstantial factors, flaws, or deficiencies of any kind have no capacity whatsoever to impact that realization.

Enhancement through Working with Arrogance

At this point we have an intellectual understanding of these teachings. Based on this, some might develop an arrogant, self-assured attitude and come to the conclusion, “I no longer need to improve because I already understand what realization is.” A merely literal understanding of the teachings in no way qualifies as true attainment of realization. Thinking, “I do not have to practice virtue anymore; I do not need to practice meditation,” presents a very serious obstacle. Although you may have gained a strong sense of confidence that in terms of realization there is no fundamental difference between distraction and no-distraction, it is essential that you continue to repeatedly clarify and refine your practice through recollection, enhancing your meditation, and engaging in virtuous activities.

Previous masters have attested to this truth. Before Lord Gampopa met Jetsun Milarepa, he practiced many different forms of meditation under the guidance of his teachers from the Kadampa

tradition, but those experiences produced no realization in him. Yet by relying on just one special instruction from Milarepa and without a great deal of thought, realization instantaneously became manifest within him as if a lamp had been lit, illuminating everything. This is why what we call “special instructions” are so essential. These special instructions come from the guru’s own experience and are given directly to the disciple without concealment. Through the proper implementation of those instructions, the qualities that arise within the continuum of the disciple will be of the greatest, most unsurpassable caliber.

Throughout the teachings of the Kagyu tradition, it is said in the context of mahamudra practice that when a disciple who is an appropriate vessel relies on the special instructions given to him by a fully-qualified guru, liberation will be achieved. In order for this to be possible, the guru who provides instruction must have achieved realization himself, and in turn the disciple must also possess tremendous merit and unshakable faith. The peerless Lord Gampopa had searched extensively for an unmistakable method of practicing meditation according to the true nature of mind. He was unable to find this, despite training in numerous meditation techniques and undergoing great hardship with the aim of authentically and perfectly realizing the true nature of mind; until he met Jetsun Milarepa he was unable to achieve realization. This historical account comes to us through Lord

Gampopa himself, who related this in response to an inquiry by Lord Phakmo Drupa.

As a result of practicing well, the positive qualities and potential of meditation will become evident within your mind, along with an understanding of what is meant by the “true nature” or “abiding nature.” When you reflect on the fact that you have already come to a good understanding of this on your own, it will inspire greater faith and conviction in you. Nevertheless if you are on your own it is difficult to properly understand the difference between experience and realization. This is why there are so many different instructional texts dealing with mahamudra. All manner of discoveries can occur to you while reading these books: “Oh, these are the different kinds of experiences that can arise,” “These are the qualities that are generated in the continuum,” or “Look, these teachings from two different mahamudra texts correspond with each other.” You can further relate your knowledge to the teachings of great teachers and yogis — for example, you could be listening to and thinking about Mahamudra teachings given by His Eminence Situ Rinpoche. In doing so, you may come to a conclusion like, “There really is no gap at all between what the teacher is describing and the realization that will eventually arise in my own mind. Now I feel sure that this approach is unmistakable.” When you find that the

teachings are in agreement with your own personal experience, you will discover a genuine ease of mind, free from anxiety.

When you regard the teachings as being unmistakable and free from confusion, and when you rely on textual instruction in conjunction with the oral instructions of your guru, you will obtain the perfect benefit for yourself. Correct ascertainment arises in the mind, and through practicing meditation with this view, the distinction between meditation and postmeditation is gradually minimized. As the abiding nature naturally becomes evident, you will not have to invest so much effort in your practice. When these excellent qualities arise, it is a clear indication of tremendous improvement and strength in your meditation.

For some individuals this will involve the experience of bliss or well-being. When such experiences arise, they do so in terms of both the mind and the body. The great bliss experienced in the mind is characterized by the absence of any conceptual thought or fluctuation, and the great sense of well-being that arises physically is devoid of any illness, pain, discomfort, and so on. During the day there will be no distraction or digression from this experience for even an instant, and you will be capable of remaining in a state of effortless meditation on your mind's true nature. Along with the experience of great bliss, certainty

will also arise in your mind when you recognize the authenticity of your meditation.

Similarly, Karma Chakme says that cognitive lucidity and emptiness will be nakedly exposed from within the mind, in a manner devoid of bewilderment. *Nakedly exposed* means that the lucid and empty aspects of mind are beyond the influence of any tendency toward bewilderment. Like the sun rising in a sky free from elaboration, *clearly and nakedly* describes the manner of ascertainment that allows you to realize the abiding nature of mind. This ascertainment is filled with confidence or conviction, which means it is free from all errors and deviations. For example, when the sun appears in a cloudless sky, it is not as though another mistaken version of the sun can be found somewhere else — you can be sure there is only one sun. In a similar way, such ascertainment means being confident about the clarity and emptiness of the mind's essential nature, as well as its perfect qualities and potential.

In addition, most of the time while you are asleep at night you will be able to rest within the mind's natural aspects of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. Without any need to meditate on the clear light as such, even those afflicted thoughts that might otherwise have the power to affect you at night will mostly remain immersed in the clear light nature of mind.

If someone who achieves such a degree of accomplishment develops a *tokden* mentality (*tokden* means “possessing realization,” and here it carries a pejorative connotation), they become very proud and arrogant, thinking, “I am special and unique in my realization; no other practitioners could have the kind of realization that I do.” They have an inflated sense of self-worth, regarding themselves with an extremely conceited attitude: “I am so great; I am number one. I have realized the true nature of mind. I am just like the mahamudra yogis of the past.” They cling to the notion that they are unique and no one else can match them in their achievement, and they develop a proud and condescending mindset.

With regard to such accomplishment, if you have this kind of dualistic notion, thinking on the one hand that you are superior and on the other hand that no one else could be as great as you, this is definitely not realization but rather just experience. If you have no such dualistic notion at all, then this accomplishment would qualify as realization. Therefore condescension toward others and pride regarding yourself must both be thoroughly eradicated. Failing to destroy these attitudes and then continuing to practice meditation anyway is just like holding onto a piece of brass and pretending that it is gold.

How can these two notions of pride and condescension be dissolved or eliminated? There is a way to do this: you must destroy the rigid sense of overconfidence that entertains the twofold idea, “I am the greatest. There is no one else who could be like me.” Both of these views are conceptual, and being conceptual they are in fact delusional. There is no conceptual thought or delusion in the true nature that is mahamudra. Since this is the case, the presumption of thinking, “I am the best; no one else could be as great as I am” is the kind of conceptual thought that can only cause you to wander through cyclic existence. The conceptual mind is fundamentally a bewildered mind — in other words, it is ignorance. It is contradictory to think that the true nature of mind and conceptual thought are not distinct from one another, while at the same time fixating on yourself as being superior and others as being inferior. Such a dualistic mentality is actually ignorance, and ignorance is the cause of wandering throughout the three realms of existence. By contrast, what we call “mahamudra” is the utterly nonconceptual essential nature — the ultimate wisdom itself. Realizing this constitutes liberation.

The great Kagyu masters of the past said that there are many teachers who can teach meditation to disciples and there are many disciples who can understand the instructions, but when defects or problems arise it is rare to find teachers or disciples

who know how to find a solution. This is especially true in this context. When the “realization” of transitory experiences arises, as it were, people fixate on it and automatically tend to generate the wrong view of regarding themselves as superior and others as inferior. Teachers who know the correct way to eliminate this problem are rare, and the Kagyu gurus said this with the true intention of the teachings in mind.

The Proper Approach to Practice

You might ask, “Well then, how are you supposed to approach meditation? What should you practice, and how?” According to the text, one factor is the activation of karmic imprints from previous lifetimes. This refers to having had experience in previous lifetimes where you came into contact with good teachers or practitioners with some degree of realization. Through the karmic potency of the merit involved, when you later encounter an authentic emanation body or nirmanakaya and recognize the meaning of the guru’s words in the environment of his compassion, in that instant you will actually come to an understanding or realization. The way this happens is much like striking a match: in the instant of contact between the match and the striking surface, fire is immediately produced. The activation of karmic

imprints from previous lifetimes is achieved in this manner, and this is the first factor involved.

In connection with such previously established karmic factors, you have presently obtained the resulting physical support of a human body. This is the necessary basis for the second factor, which is gathering the accumulations and purifying obscurations. You do this by practicing the preliminaries of the Mahamudra tradition, in which you accumulate 100,000 prostrations with refuge prayers, then 100,000 recitations of the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, then 100,000 mandala offerings, and then 100,000 repetitions of the guru yoga practice. As you perform each of these, you do so without thinking of them primarily in terms of accumulating numbers, but rather in terms of doing them in a proper and meaningful way.

How does this process of gathering the accumulations and purifying obscurations work? The gathering of the accumulations is simply what happens as you gradually build up your store of merit and wisdom. The purification of obscurations is the process of removing the negative karma you accumulated in previous lifetimes. By doing these things you create favorable conditions and remove adverse conditions, making it possible for the qualities of realization to be obtained. For those who practice meditation but do not make a significant effort in

gathering the accumulations, purifying their obscurations, and developing devotion through guru yoga, there is no possibility that the qualities of realization will actually arise.

On the other hand, through doing the approach practice of a yidam deity such as Vajravaraḥi, you can very effectively accomplish the accumulation of merit. The real meaning of what we call the “siddhis” or “accomplishments” of the yidam is not merely a superficial attainment. Obscurations in the mental continuum are eliminated, identification of qualities takes place, and therefore it is through siddhis that the conditions of liberation become a certainty.

We can attribute our present situation to the excellent karma we have accumulated in our previous lifetimes. If we had not done positive things in the past, we would never have obtained the physical human body that we now possess. The genuine faith and enthusiasm in Dharma that each of us now possesses is clear evidence of our having made pure aspiration prayers in the past. Nevertheless, in terms of gathering the accumulations and purifying obscurations, there are three different degrees of practitioners. Practitioners of the highest acumen may directly achieve realization of mahāmudrā within one lifetime. Those of intermediate capacity will achieve realization more gradually, in the next or a subsequent lifetime. For practitioners of lesser

ability, due to the presence of obstacles they will achieve realization at an uncertain point in the future.

In a similar manner, the approach and accomplishment stages of yidam practices can be regarded at three different levels. The highest degree of accomplishment in yidam practice is the attainment of what is known as “supreme siddhi” within one lifetime. Attaining this in the interval after death or in the next lifetime constitutes the intermediate level. For practitioners of lesser capacity, such attainment will be reached within seven or sixteen lifetimes.

When you are actually introduced to the true nature of mind, you find that it is nothing whatsoever. “Nothing whatsoever” means that it is completely beyond the bewilderment of mental concepts. Fixating on that nature as being anything at all is conceptuality, and therefore the concept of a self “is also laughable,” as the text says. With this understanding in mind, you can take into account your history of previous practice, the whole range of experiences and how you assessed each of them: what was difficult; what you viewed as positive and the realizations that came with that; what you saw as unsatisfactory and the realizations that came with that. When you do this, all of the previous “experiences” and “realizations” are fully exposed as they are, and you discover that none of them were really the authentic

true nature, and at the same time your fixation on them is fully exposed. In the very instant that realization becomes manifest, all of these presumptions that “This must be it; that must be it” are utterly discarded. What we might call “true meditation” is devoid of any fixation, either on oneself as being someone following a path or on the idea of something to be meditated on.

If you are a practitioner with the kind of mentality that has overlooked or disregarded the ordinary, experiential side of Dharma, you might arrive at some superficial realization of mahamudra and react with amazement: “Ah! This is it — the ‘true nature of reality.’” You might then jump to the conclusion, “Why didn’t the teacher tell me this in the first place? He lied to me! Gathering accumulations, purifying obscurations — what was the point of going through all these different meditation practices? He must have deceived me!” The guru is not deceiving you. He is teaching you the methods for removing all obscuring and obstructing defilements. You will be astonished, thinking, “I didn’t see this; I was blind like a statue. There is no reason why I could not have figured this out on my own. Why didn’t I realize that it was like that?” This sort of astonished reaction is a delusional concept; it is your own idea, and you have fallen under its influence.

When one achieves the state of even placement in accord with the abiding nature, this true nature will be revealed within the mind exactly as it is. At the point when someone has truly achieved this realization of the nature of mind, there is no longer any meditation to be done at all, and it is sufficient to simply sit quietly.

There is a difference between ourselves and such an individual. We might try to “just sit quietly,” but nevertheless all kinds of discursive thoughts arise in our mind, and since the body is also subject to that mind, we are actually in a state of agitation. For a realized person who sits quietly, both body and mind are without confusion. For example, once you break the strings of a guitar there is no longer any way to produce any sound. In a similar way, authentic realization is a state in which there is no longer any mechanism for confusion or agitation. This is the difference between “sitting quietly” for an ordinary individual and for a realized individual. In the terminology of Mahamudra, this is known as *sem nyi ngal so*, which refers to the mind that is completely free from confusion, remaining in a state of natural rest within dharmata.

Kagyupas also speak of mahamudra as *thamal shepa*, which means “ordinary mind” or “ordinary cognition.” This describes a state of nonconceptual abiding, free from the bewilderment of discursive

thoughts, a state in which such thoughts instantly cease in an “ordinary” or uncontrived manner. *Cognition* here refers to the dharmadhatu; in other words, the manifestation of ultimate realization as the expanse of reality itself.

Regarding all of this, right now we cannot do much more than think, “It must be something like that.” Until we gain firsthand experience of these things, there is no possibility that we will really grasp their true meaning through intellectual understanding. Mahamudra terminology describes the true nature as being “inaccessible to the intellect of the three great things.” *Three great things* refers to the three times: past, present, and future. This means that the true nature is not an object of thoughts situated in the past, it is not an object of thoughts situated in the present, nor is it an object of thoughts situated in the future. Whatever thoughts arise, whether they are in the past, present, or future, they find no access to the essential abiding nature, because that nature is free from the bewilderment that conceives of the three times.

Likewise in the Sutrayana we find the phrase, “Beyond speech, thought, or expression — it is the perfection of *prajna*,” which equally refers to this same nature. It is not an object of speech, it is not an object of thought, and it cannot be depicted or expressed; therefore it is completely free from all forms of bewilderment.

Numerous metaphors are used in the teachings, but whether we speak of “resting within the mind itself,” “ordinary cognition,” “inaccessible to the intellect of the three great things,” “beyond speech, thought, or expression,” or any other such description, they nevertheless all have the same point. For example, no matter how many different arrows you shoot at a target, they are all headed for the same place. In the same way, although the terminology used to describe the nature of mind varies widely throughout the Sutrayana and Mantrayana, the essential meaning is ultimately the same. There is no difference.

Once you have successfully achieved even placement within the nature of mind, from that point onward there will no longer be any notion that you are “meditating on mahamudra,” as it were. Regardless of whether you are moving about, sitting, eating, or sleeping, the actual attainment of realization is such that you will always remain in a fundamental state of meditation. Thus there will be no need to adopt any particular physical posture for meditation. However at this stage the possibility of occasional distraction still remains. For that reason it is necessary to continue to maintain recollection and awareness in order to rectify instances of distraction.

If you have not heard many teachings, but nevertheless you have become a very diligent meditation practitioner, when

you reach a point at which actual realization starts to become evident, you will not be satisfied with that achievement. You will have the idea that you need to get to something far better than this “arising of realization” — some tremendous experience of overwhelming physical and mental bliss. You will yearn for the chance to see what it feels like to have the naked experience of cognitive lucidity and emptiness, the experience of bliss, the experience of clarity, and so on. The desire to have further such experiences will continue in that way.

You might then surrender to an attitude of doubt, thinking it is very unlikely that you will ever again enjoy the same kind of physical and mental well-being and other such sensations that arose for you when you were practicing tranquillity meditation. You will take the limited view that such experiences will not arise again, and that you will never be able to reach any such realization or come to recognize the lucidity and emptiness of mind. With the idea that these things will not happen for you, you will come to the frustrated conclusion, “Now my practice has gotten worse.”

If this happens, your apparent realization has degenerated to the level of mere experience. This is like wanting to catch an elephant in the jungle: you know that the elephant is in the jungle and you follow the trail of its footsteps in order to track it down,

but when you actually find the elephant, instead of catching it you turn around and go back the way you came, and you look for the elephant elsewhere. If you reach the point where this happens, things have gone wrong.

Having progressed to whatever level of experience and realization you have reached, you might ask, “What should I do from here?” The answer is to simply continue to cultivate the same methods of improvement that you have been using all along. The way to deal with the mentality that hankers after “something better still” is precisely to rest the mind in even placement within the very nature of that mentality, and thereby be liberated from it. In this manner you should relinquish your desire to have better experiences and better realizations.

Once realization has arisen for you, then numerous deviations, errors, lapses, and so on will be eliminated. All such apparent problems are baseless, and to the extent you can perceive this clearly, the true nature will be revealed and your progress will unfold accordingly. For example, the degree of clarity with which a visible form will be seen depends on the quality of the viewer’s eyesight. If someone has very clear vision, they can see things very clearly. If their eyes are just average, they can see fairly well. If their eyes are not very good, they see things poorly.

Regardless of these differences, it should be understood that there is not and has never been any change in the essential nature of whatever is seen; that is to say, mahamudra. The difference between recognizing or not recognizing this abiding nature is therefore contingent on an individual's ability to perceive it clearly, which is relative to their own degree of obscuration. The variety of appearances is displayed in a manner according to an individual's mental disposition and degree of ascertainment. If the abiding nature is not recognized as it is with perfect clarity, then the variety of appearances will be seen instead.

Karma Chakme then says that this series of oral instructions on mahamudra was given in the Wood Snake Year, during the evening breaks between sessions on the eleventh and twelfth days of the month of the constellation Go, at the request of Lama Tsondru Gyamtso. Chakme Rinpoche explains that he did not plan or prepare in advance to give these instructions; rather they were spoken just as they occurred to him. For that reason, he admits that the order may be a little incorrect, and confesses whatever mistakes he made to all beings endowed with omniscience and knowledge. Nevertheless he says that any such errors can be clarified by referring to the instructional texts in which these details are clearly presented in the proper sequence. In those texts, the teachings are given in an ordered and systematic manner, starting with beginning-level instruc-

tions for those who are ignorant, and continuing progressively all the way up to the achievement of perfection.

Regarding this, there are generally two kinds of practitioners: one is the “gradual progressor” and the other is the “leaper” or “sudden advancer.” In the case of the latter, who are endowed with great intelligence and discernment, when their previously established karmic imprints meet with the right conditions, it is unnecessary for them to go through the long and gradual path with all of its particular steps. Such a practitioner might simply receive mahamudra instruction from a guru and then achieve realization without having to do anything else at all.

For example, once there was a meeting between the mahasiddha Karma Pakshi, the Second Gyalwang Karmapa, and the learned and accomplished Urgyenpa, a great master from the Nyingma tradition. At one point during their meeting, Karma Pakshi filled a shrine plate with some barley, took a riding crop and stirred the barley three times, and then placed it on Urgyenpa’s head. As soon as he did this, Urgyenpa gave rise to the supreme realization of mahamudra, and on the basis of that he received full transmission of the ultimate lineage of the Karma Kagyu in its entirety. Nevertheless they were together for no longer than twenty-four hours.

An individual like Urgyenpa does not need to do anything at all to achieve full realization. As such, for great masters there are no distinctions between different teachings or the order in which they are received. This is why Karma Chakme says that although his instructions may be somewhat disordered, it will not present any serious problem or contradiction for those making use of them.

Since these instructions are concerned with the advanced-level Mahamudra introduction to the nature of mind, they are not intended to be given as teachings to public audiences or common monastics, and therefore such devices as a topical outline, a progressive sequence of steps, or quotations from the Buddha or scholar-practitioners have been all but left out here. Because this is not a poetically composed commentary, Chakme Rinpoche says that he has not taken the beauty of the words into consideration.

He continues by saying that these are not teachings from the corpus of scripture such as the Prajnaparamita or Madhyamaka literature, and as such no statements declaring his own doctrinal position, the doctrinal position of others, or any other formal assertions or refutations are to be found here. This is not a commentary that will appeal to scholars. It has not been designed to evoke responses like, “Oh, the author of this work is said to be a great scholar”; therefore it has not been written in the manner

of condensing the contents of numerous other textbooks. It is not a repetition of what others have said, and so the great mahasiddhas of the past have not been quoted here as saying such-and-such about this and that. One might suspect, “Then isn’t it just some stupid nonsense he made up himself?” Karma Chakme says it is not a bunch of stupid nonsense invented by a fool. He explains that although these teachings have not been directly taken from the sutras or tantras, their true meaning does not in any way contradict the meaning of anything that has been said in the sutras or tantras.

Then what kind of teaching is this? Chakme Rinpoche says that it is what he has realized through his own actual experience, given without the slightest reservation to his disciples out of loving compassion for them and told in just that manner. As to the purpose of this teaching, he says that it has been written with the intention that it might at least be of benefit for some individuals who are as lowly as himself. For that reason, Guru Virya Sagara — the Sanskrit equivalent of Lama Tsondru Gyamtso’s name — wrote these instructions down while hunched over in front of a very weak lamp on a freezing cold night with no shelter. The chapter closes with the aspiration, “May the virtue of transcribing these teachings, together with all previously accumulated virtues, bring about the achievement of ultimate realization in the mind of anyone who sees these words.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: How can I know if I am an emanation or a sentient being?

RINPOCHE: You can know. If you have no mental afflictions whatsoever, then you are an emanation. If you have mental afflictions, then you are a sentient being.

STUDENT: Some years ago I believe His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche mentioned clear-light practitioners. I did not really know what that meant and I wondered what exactly it was. I am thinking that it is someone whose major practice is clear light, but I need clarification.

RINPOCHE: I cannot say for sure because I do not know what His Eminence was thinking of when he said that, but such a term is normally used in our tradition to refer to people who have successfully completed or stabilized the practices of chandali, illusory body, and dream, and thereafter focused on the practice of the clear light.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you mentioned the necessity of full realization being the union of bliss and emptiness. Why is that so

important, and how is it different from mahamudra realization or other unions such as clarity-emptiness?

RINPOCHE: The difference is that in the context of the gradual path of the Mahayana, such as the way it is generally set forth in the Middle Way school, the path of a bodhisattva takes at least three periods and as many as thirty-seven periods of innumerable aeons to achieve buddhahood. This path leads to the ultimate recognition, which is the recognition of the unity of emptiness and appearance, the union of emptiness and anything.

According to the special path of Secret Mantra, in order to achieve that recognition more quickly, the method aspect of the path must be especially powerful, and only bliss is powerful enough. Thus the way the siddhas of the past achieved this realization under the guidance of a realized master, in one life and one body, was through recognizing the emptiness of bliss, or recognizing the unity of bliss and emptiness. The emptiness is the same, but the method aspect, or the bliss, is what makes the path so quick.

STUDENT: Why would bliss be important rather than recognizing pain?

RINPOCHE: In terms of bringing you quickly to the completion of the path, the reason why realizing the emptiness of bliss is so much more powerful than realizing the emptiness of suffering or pain, is that bliss is what we are most attached to. Bliss is what we aspire to and want the most. No one is attached to suffering; suffering is something we want to get rid of. Yet everyone wants bliss and happiness. Thus the realization of the emptiness of bliss is the most powerful way or context in which to realize emptiness.

Bliss is like a huge pile of wood, and the realization of its emptiness is like setting fire to it: the wood not only becomes fuel for the fire, but in a sense it becomes fire itself. It is the most powerful way to realize emptiness, and therefore it brings this realization most completely and most quickly. However I say these things as a matter of inference based on what I have heard. I have not realized this myself.

STUDENT: Isn't pain a very intense emotion of rejection and therefore isn't it also as powerful as attachment?

RINPOCHE: The difference is in the way this realization comes about. The emptiness of suffering, in the case of working with sickness and other unpleasant things, is basically a matter of applying meditation to a pre-existing situation of suffering or

discomfort. The way you realize the emptiness of bliss, the unity of bliss and emptiness, is much more intense than that. I have been very vague about this, and I must remain vague because it involves the practices of the channels, winds, and drops, things I cannot speak of and will not speak of.

STUDENT: How does it relate to mahamudra realization?

RINPOCHE: Those practices are the method through which mahamudra is realized. There is no difference in what is realized, but there is a great deal of difference in how it is realized.

STUDENT: Are you saying that a person cannot have mahamudra realization without having the realization of bliss-emptiness?

RINPOCHE: You can, but it is a very long, gradual path.

STUDENT: Could you correct some assumptions that I am making, if they are wrong? One is regarding channels, winds, and drops. I am making the assumption that this is something learned through techniques like the six dharmas.

RINPOCHE: The **six dharmas of Naropa** is certainly an example of a complete system of such practices, but it is not the only one. The six dharmas of Naropa is a collection of techniques brought together by the mahapandita Naropa, drawing on many

different tantras. There are also complete systems that rely on the teachings of any one particular tantra, such as the completion stage of Chakrasamvara, Guhyasamaja, Kalachakra, and so on.

STUDENT: Is the practice of Chenrezik a complete path to realization? If one fully practices it, can one potentially come to realization in one lifetime?

RINPOCHE: This is hard to answer because it would really depend on the individual practitioner. Because Chenrezik does embody tremendous blessing, I cannot say that through practicing Chenrezik meditation alone someone could not attain perfect awakening. On the other hand, I could not guarantee that doing this practice alone would lead to perfect buddhahood. I can make the guarantee that by doing Chenrezik practice one can be assured of rebirth in Sukhavati. Having achieved that, one will definitely achieve buddhahood there. I cannot particularly guarantee that one will attain buddhahood in this body through doing the Chenrezik practice.

STUDENT: Is there a difference between the realization one attains in one lifetime through the union of bliss-emptiness and the state of mahamudra, and the realization one attains after death through the recognition of ground clear light?

RINPOCHE: One certain difference is the obvious one: when you attain realization in this life, you attain it before you die, and the other way you attain it after you die. Aside from that, I could not say that there is any difference in the degree or state of the attainment.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, what is meant by the term *realization*?

RINPOCHE: Realization is defined as the authentic or correct realization of at least an aspect of the ultimate nature. It is therefore unchanging. It may require or admit of expansion, and the speed and degree of expansion would depend on the practitioner's diligence, but in itself it is unchanging. It is often compared to experience, but the difference between experience and realization is that experience is still the experience of something. It is the perception of something, such as the perception of the presence of the deity, or the perception of emptiness in the sense of things being empty, such as your body and external appearance. With realization, there is no such dualistic perception, and therefore it is unchanging. Experience changes; you can have an intense experience, and it may vanish by the afternoon. Realization never degrades or changes in that way.

STUDENT: Does enlightenment consist of an accumulation of a number of realizations? Is it the result of realizations?

RINPOCHE: Remember I said that realization can be a partial recognition, a partial but correct recognition, of the absolute or ultimate nature. As you indicated in your question, awakening or enlightenment would therefore be the completion of that realization; in other words, enlightenment is the point at which the qualities of the realization are perfected.

STUDENT: Is the state of enlightenment the same as buddhahood?

RINPOCHE: The words can be used equivalently. Normally we use the term *awakening* — for example, awakening mind or bodhichitta — to refer to enlightenment from the standpoint of the cause, and the term *buddha* or *buddhahood* to refer to enlightenment from the standpoint of the result. Thus perfect awakening is synonymous with buddhahood.

STUDENT: What is the significance of placing the wish-fulfilling jewel on the victory banner? Why the victory banner?

RINPOCHE: The wish-fulfilling jewel is one of the standard possessions of a chakravartin. It seems that the chakravartin acquires the wishfulfilling jewel naturally as a result of their merit. If the wish-fulfilling jewel is placed on top of a victory banner, and if it is properly venerated and offerings are made

to it, then it will produce what is wished for. If you just keep it in a box somewhere, it will not.

From various accounts it sounds as though the wish-fulfilling jewel starts to emit light when it is placed atop a victory banner and properly venerated. If you supplicate it when it does so, it will send down a rain of whatever is needed or desired. This is why in the design of Tibetan monasteries, there is always an image of a wishfulfilling jewel on top of victory banners, roof ornaments, and so on.

STUDENT: I am wondering about the image of the blue jewel that stands for the mind's nature. Regarding clear light, is it completely clear or is it golden-clear, and is that the same or different from buddha nature? Having seen pictures of realized beings in rainbow light, I wondered what clear light is and why the mind is blue.

RINPOCHE: The wish-fulfilling jewel mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is the legendary wish-fulfilling jewel, which is what we always refer to when we talk about the wish-fulfilling jewel. It is a certain jewel that, according to legend, will grant any wish when placed atop a victory banner. This jewel was mentioned not because the mind is actually blue or a blue jewel, but as an analogy, which means something that is similar in

quality in at least one aspect to what you are actually talking about. Thus there is a difference between an analogy and what you are talking about.

According to legend, this jewel was a piece of vaidurya, which is a kind of blue jewel. I think it is sapphire and some people think it is lapis lazuli, but it does not matter — it is a beautiful blue jewel. It just so happens that the wish-fulfilling jewel is depicted as being blue, and this jewel is used in this analogy because it can grant wishes, while other jewels of other colors cannot. It is not that the mind is inherently blue. It is just an image, just an analogy.

With regard to the clear light, the situation is a little trickier. In general, the use of the terms *light* and *clear light* in this context is more often than not understood as referring to the brilliance of the unobstructed cognitive wisdom. Its primary meaning does not refer to visual, perceivable light. However it is also the case that under certain contexts such as those mentioned earlier, those who experience the clear light do experience it as appearances of light of various colors. Therefore you cannot say the clear light is a light of such-and-such color, nor can you definitely say that the idea of light is only metaphoric.

If the clear light is in any way a light, it is not a physical light that is perceived by the eyes. When we think of light, we think of something we see with our eyes, but the clear light is the mind experiencing its own brilliance. Therefore we cannot say that the clear light is white, red, or any other color because those colors are particular aspects or varieties of physical light.

STUDENT: When you say the mind realizing or perceiving its own brilliance, does that mean that the mind is brilliant or at a more subtle light than we can see? Could one say that this is the composition of mind or an aspect of the composition of mind? I am thinking about light we see in halos around a buddha, for instance. Is that depicting the mind of a buddha or a realized being?

RINPOCHE: The perception of the light surrounding the body of a buddha is a perception of individuals who are not themselves awakened. The actual nature of a buddha's wisdom is beyond any kind of specific physical manifestation of light or anything else, and also beyond the absolute absence of any such manifestation.

STUDENT: I am thinking that somehow mind has a frequency, and perhaps it has a wave or an energy quality to it. Is that only an aspect of the activity of mind?

RINPOCHE: I do not have any scientific training, so I cannot comment on the notion of things such as waves, but the mind is unique in having the inherent potential for all of the qualities for buddhahood or awakening, which would indicate that in its nature it is distinct from relative phenomena. As I understand this, the phenomena that are investigated by science are all relative phenomena, and the tremendous amount of knowledge that science has accumulated concerns the characteristics of relative phenomena. I could not say it is knowledge that pertains to the ultimate nature of those phenomena.

However I do not think that science goes against or contradicts Dharma. For example, the notion that things are composed of subtle particles is something the Buddha spoke of 2,600 years ago. The fact that the nature of things is flux or change seems to be similar to the idea that things are also, in a sense, of the nature of waves in their behavior.

STUDENT: I have one more question about the blue jewel. I have seen rupas of Shakyamuni Buddha where the hair is painted blue. Is there some meaning in that regard associated with the jewel?

RINPOCHE: The traditional expression for the color of the Buddha's hair is high blue, but it does not mean light blue. It

means like the blue of the darkest depths of the highest point of the sky. Therefore it is the same color as that jewel.

STUDENT: There is a commonality between the two?

RINPOCHE: The same words are used to describe the color of the Buddha's hair and the color of the jewel, but since I have never seen a wish-fulfilling jewel and did not have the good fortune to see the Buddha's hair, I cannot say.

STUDENT: Ever since I first heard about the channels, winds, and drops, I have had a nagging doubt. I feel like it was taught about male Tibetan bodies and might not apply to a female Caucasian because there are a lot of differences between the physical bodies. It worries me that it would not work on my body.

RINPOCHE: We will treat gender and race as separate issues here. In terms of gender, based on historical evidence, there seems to be no real difference in the effectiveness of these methods for either a male or a female practitioner. For example, both Naropa and his sister Nagupta, who is usually called Niguma, attained siddhi through the same methods.

In terms of race, since the purpose of these methods is to reveal the innate qualities of the mind by working with the body, race

should make no difference whatsoever. However I cannot appeal to historical precedent as proof of this, since so far I have not heard or seen evidence of any Westerner attaining realization through these methods. No doubt that is simply because they have not been practicing them for very long.

While I cannot say that there is a record of any Westerner attaining buddhahood in one lifetime through the practice of the channels and winds, there are several instances of Westerners who have achieved the state of liberation at death, possibly through these methods. One of the best known was Sister Palmo, or Freda Bedi, who was a disciple of His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa and who received instructions from him in the practices of channels and winds. According to Ngodrup Tsering, when she passed away in New Delhi in 1977, she remained sitting upright for three days after death, which is considered an indication of the achievement of liberation.

STUDENT: You mentioned Naropa and his sister attaining siddhi. Is that the same as realization or enlightenment?

RINPOCHE: Ultimately speaking, what they attained was buddhahood. The technical term for the state that both Naropa and Nagupta attained is *khechhari siddhi*, which means “attainment of the celestial state.” This means that under certain circumstances

they continued to remain accessible in a certain type of form, but they did in fact attain perfect buddhahood.

When someone attains buddhahood, there is no guarantee that they are going to immediately exhibit the external signs of buddhahood in the manner of Buddha Shakyamuni. They are not necessarily going to turn golden, exhibit the marks and signs, wear three robes, and so on. It does mean that when it becomes appropriate for them to exhibit such signs, they will be able to do so. When we say “buddhahood,” we mean that the attainment of the dharmakaya and the display of the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya are done on the basis of that attainment for and in the experience of others.

STUDENT: Are attainment and realization the same thing?

RINPOCHE: Usually when we say that someone achieved attainment or siddhi and this term is not qualified, or when we say that someone generated realization and the word is not specified, it means something preliminary to final awakening. From the point of view of a beginner, it means that they achieved something definite on the path. At that point the process of their awakening has certainly begun. When we say someone achieved awakening or enlightenment, it usually refers to the final result.

STUDENT: Am I correct in saying that attainment and realization are similar?

RINPOCHE: Attainment can be of different degrees, but what it always refers to is someone achieving the result of a given practice. However after they achieved certain attainments, they would always go on to further attainments. Realization refers to seeing for the first time that which has never been seen, that which has never been realized — namely, the innate wisdom or qualities of the mind. It is the first time this is seen and, more than just seen or merely recognized, it is the first time this is fully revealed.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I think you called the realization of the true nature of mind “thamal shepa”? Did I hear that right?

RINPOCHE: Yes. *Thamal shepa* or “ordinary cognition” is a term used frequently in the course of study. For instance, we might say something like, “I need to meditate on *thamal shepa*.” Nevertheless the real meaning of ordinary cognition is something utterly beyond conceptual thought. It is nonconceptual original wisdom devoid of all obscurations and impediments. For the time being, the way in which we should understand this term *ordinary cognition* and practice accordingly is that it is simply a name that refers to the fruition.

STUDENT: After you reach this realization — which I think you said was permanent and unchanging — and you can't go any farther with meditation, or you can't go any farther with a contrived sort of forced meditation, does that mean you stop practicing?

RINPOCHE: That would be a mistaken approach. Once ordinary cognition has been revealed there is never any regression or changing back in any way, but nevertheless its qualities should still be increased, refined, and further developed.

To draw an analogy, following the second night of the lunar month, on the third night the visible part of the moon appears to be a very fine crescent. This does not decrease after the third night; rather the visible part of the moon waxes more and more and therefore you see a little more of it each night. No matter how much the visible part of the moon increases, you are actually seeing the same moon. In the same way, there is no regression from direct realization back to lesser states of awareness. As the mind gradually becomes more and more free of obscurations, its qualities will continue to increase and develop accordingly without conceivable limit. This process of development is delineated in terms of the ten levels through which a bodhisattva progresses.

STUDENT: After a person reaches the realization of *thamal shepa*, does he never get distracted again, and does he never have discursive thoughts anymore? Or does he have distractions and discursive thoughts, but it's somehow different?

RINPOCHE: Thoughts and distractions will still occur even subsequent to the realization of ordinary cognition; however at that point they will no longer have any impact on you. For example, even if you are temporarily under the influence of discursive thoughts, the afflictive emotions that might otherwise be associated with those thoughts will have no effect on you whatsoever. This does not mean that the variety of conventional appearances will cease to arise altogether; thoughts will still come and go, but regardless of any such thought processes, your awareness will not be compromised. Moreover the arising of wisdom at this stage is endowed to some extent with direct perception of the propensities, afflictions, and positive and negative accumulated karma present in the continuums of individual sentient beings, as well as the circumstances of their previous and future lifetimes; that is to say, it chronologically encompasses the past, present, and future.

With the degree of mental faculty we have presently, we cannot directly perceive either the past or the future. All that is evident to us is the present moment — the slightest instant that

we can directly perceive. Once you have achieved realization, you will also be able to see the past and the future. The way we experience things right now is through the perspective of a bewildered conceptual mind, where we think of moments as being fixed and relative to each other. Each moment seems to arise in succession, replacing the one that preceded it, but this is not the way things really are. As soon as you put someone face-to-face with a large mirror, instantly everything in front of the mirror appears as a reflection within it. Given the mental faculty we now possess, things do not appear to us in that way but only in a gradual and limited manner. Since we have not yet reached such a point, it is necessary for us to continue to expand our knowledge. As for discursive thoughts, some will arise in postmeditation experience, but not during meditation.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, do you know of a substance in this country that is like shudak?

RINPOCHE: This is probably something very common. By the stream at Karme Ling it grows very, very tall; the leaves are sharp and look like sword blades. The flowers are black when they first appear, but then they open up and there is something in them that looks like cotton. Maybe it is milkweed. There was not much when we first arrived, but after spreading it around, there is a lot of it now. There is not any here at KTD, although

I have seen it in other places in America. The final stage of it produces something that looks a lot like cotton.

STUDENT: It increases warmth?

RINPOCHE: Yes. You have to mix it with your urine and old butter.

STUDENT: I didn't know that part. I thought there was an alternative to that. How would you use this method?

RINPOCHE: You have to already have a stable practice of chandali. If you do not, this will not help. Zero times a million is still zero.

STUDENT: You mentioned nirvana and samsara, and I was trying to understand the concept of those two being inseparable. I'm doing exactly what you said when you mentioned that some people think about samsara as very undesirable, and they think about liberation as something to look forward to. This is what's happening in my case.

There is a line in the Mahamudra lineage prayer, "Grant your blessing that the inseparability of samsara and nirvana be realized." But in my mind it's like, "This is samsara and it's bad, and then there is liberation, which is good." I'm assuming that I should strive for those two not to be separate; but maybe I'm wrong?

RINPOCHE: What you are doing is simply making an aspiration. You have not actually achieved that which you are aspiring toward. The obstacles to realizing the inseparability of samsara and nirvana have not been overcome yet.

When we supplicate the gurus of the Mahamudra lineage by saying, “Please bless me so that I may realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana,” we do so from the standpoint of not yet having this realization. Until we do realize it, it is necessary to make the aspiration that the same realization they have achieved will eventually happen for us as well. When will we actually realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana?

Beginning with the ordinary level, which is our present state, this realization will first become evident once ordinary cognition is actualized. From that stage onward, we continue to progress gradually until the attainment of the tenth bodhisattva level and finally perfect awakening. At this point the true inseparability of samsara and nirvana will be fully realized in its entirety.

STUDENT: My question regards the inseparability of samsara and nirvana. In the past I remember you said that buddhas pervade all of space, and in a sense all sentient beings pervade all of space, but we cannot see this because of our karmic existence. Is this inseparability more like the space that we’re in at this point,

or is it really because of our karmic existence and our state of mind that we cannot see? I don't know if the space I'm talking about is the inseparability, and I'm confused. Are buddhas and sentient beings inseparable but we just can't see this?

RINPOCHE: Fundamentally they are inseparable. There are no parts or divisions to be conceived of within sugatagarbha. For us in our present condition, there is a difference due to the presence of defilements and afflictions in our minds, and as a result sugatagarbha remains obscured. In the mind of a buddha there are no afflictions, and therefore all obscuring factors have been eliminated.

When you say, "Please bless me that I may realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana," you are making an aspiration. By requesting to be blessed in this way, you are praying with the intention that you may eventually realize the true qualities of mind in the same way as the Mahamudra gurus. Such realization has not happened yet.

As we saw previously, there are two general possibilities regarding actual realization of the abiding nature. In the best cases, realization can take place when the imprints of excellent karma accumulated in previous lifetimes come into contact with the appropriate activating circumstances, namely when the dis-

ciple relies on the instructions of the guru and receives direct introduction to the nature of mind. For most others, through gathering the accumulation of merit, purifying obscurations, and practicing deity meditation and mantra recitation, as the obscurations are gradually and accordingly purified, the nature of mind will become increasingly clear and evident. In either case, realization is an eventual certainty.

STUDENT: When you visualize the guru as Vajradhara on the top of your head, from what angle is it being visualized? From what perspective do you see it?

RINPOCHE: There is no such thing as perspective in this case because you are not physically looking at it with your eyes. You are imagining it. When you visualize the form of the guru above your head, you can clarify any detail of his form — the front, the back, or any detail whatsoever — because it is not dependent on perspective or physical visibility.

STUDENT: Should it not be in the guru's form? Should it be in the form of, say, Vajradhara?

RINPOCHE: There are two reasons why it is important to visualize the guru as Vajradhara rather than in his or her ordinary form. If you visualize the guru in their ordinary form, by implication

you are thinking of them as a body of flesh and blood, which means that you solidify the image. This is the first problem.

The second problem is that if you visualize the guru in their ordinary form, because they are appearing among us as a human being, their features will not be perfect. They may have a big belly, their mouth may be too big or larger at one side than the other, their nose may be a funny shape, and so on. You will fixate on any imperfections in the guru's appearance and this will harm your faith and pure perception.

STUDENT: When the guru dissolves, do you visualize being bathed in blue light?

RINPOCHE: There are two ways to do this. One way is to think that the guru melts into blue light, and this pervades your whole body, causing the body, speech, and mind of the guru and your own body, speech, and mind to become completely mixed. Another way is to think that the guru becomes a small sphere of blue light that comes to rest in the center of your heart. This latter way of dissolving the guru into yourself is particularly recommended before you go to sleep in order for you to grasp the luminosity of sleep.

STUDENT: How long would you do either of these visualizations, or does it matter? How long would you keep thinking of the blue light?

RINPOCHE: Before you go to sleep at night and until you finally go to sleep, you maintain the sense of the presence of the guru in the form of a small sphere of light in your heart. In the case of dissolving the guru into yourself at the conclusion of the session of guru yoga practice, once you think that the guru dissolves into you, you no longer generate any image such as being filled with blue light or imagining your body as the guru's body. You let all of that go and simply rest without artifice.

STUDENT: Is it true of every completion stage that it is just for a short time, and then there is no more visualization of light?

RINPOCHE: If by completion stage you mean the process of dissolution, yes, although there can be slight differences among them.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you talked about three methods to understand that our mind is beyond fabrication. The first one was starting with a simple method of focusing on one thing. You used the vajra and the bell as an example, and you said to analyze it

for the true, absolute sense and realize the mental projections that we create. Could you expand on this method for analysis?

RINPOCHE: Yes. First of all, the object in front of you does not necessarily have to be a vajra or bell — anything is fine. When you initially see it, your first thought might be, “That is a bowl,” or “That is a vajra and a bell.” This thought might be followed by all kinds of discursive thoughts about the object: “This material is better quality,” “This material is not very good,” “This is beautiful and well made,” “This is ugly and poorly made,” and so on. While you are evaluating things in this way, regarding objects in terms of good and bad, better and worse, the object is just there, unaffected by your appraisal. Your mind is the only entity involved with all these concepts, whereas the object has no such concepts of good or bad whatsoever — it is just an inanimate thing. As such, regardless of whatever notions of good, bad, real, unreal, and so on might occur, all of them are just mind.

When the mind looks at its own essential nature, no such concepts of form, color, shape, or substance will be seen whatsoever. Appearances will continue to arise, but the mind that fixates on those appearances has never been truly existent. Once this is directly realized, then regardless of whatever external appearances might arise, the mind that conceives of an apprehending cognition and an apprehended object is itself recognized to be

devoid of inherent existence, and as a result the lack of inherent existence of appearances will likewise be revealed.

Although this is true, remember that I am just speaking about this with words. Through reflecting and meditating on the meaning of the words, you will achieve realization when you arrive at a direct understanding. An intellectual understanding of these words alone cannot possibly bring about that achievement. If you bring your understanding into experience and continually work to integrate these elements through practice, you will inevitably discover certainty for yourself.

STUDENT: Do you suggest using this method when we do shamatha meditation, taking part of the time to look at an object and analyze the one looking and the shape and the color of the mind so we get used to doing that sort of analysis?

RINPOCHE: When you practice shamatha meditation you can use an object for a focal support, but the details of its substantiality or insubstantiality are of no concern. As our minds tend to be scattered by numerous outward distractions, the purpose of using an object as a support in shamatha meditation is simply a means to bring the scattered mind back inward. This is why such meditation is called “shinay” in Tibetan. *Shi* or “tranquil” describes a state in which the frequency of thoughts has been

reduced or minimized. Nay or “abide” means resting the mind — in this case, on an object as a focal support. In the context of shamatha practice, there is no analytical process whatsoever; you do not pursue thoughts like, “This is empty” or “This is not empty,” and so on. If you are using a support, simply rest your mind on that support.

Shamatha meditation is regarded as the common form of practice. It is “common” in that it has been and continues to be practiced traditionally by both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. In all of these traditions, the basic purpose of shamatha is to promote stability of mind. On the other hand, vipashyana or insight meditation is the uncommon practice; it is found only in the Buddhist tradition and nowhere else.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, at one point you were talking about hearing the teaching of Tai Situ Rinpoche and then hearing another lama’s teaching on Mahamudra. You ended by talking about identifying your experiences with the other lama’s. There was some point there that I didn’t get.

RINPOCHE: In general, there are many books available pertaining to Mahamudra instruction. Basically you read some of those books and then gain some personal experience through practice. Then you compare the understanding you have gained through

reading books with the understanding you have developed through practice to see for yourself how consistent they are with one another.

When great masters who have already achieved authentic realization of mahamudra, such as His Eminence Situ Rinpoche, give teachings in which they explain how things are in detail, this is not based merely on an understanding in terms of words or something indicated in a book, but rather in accordance with the realized knowledge they possess in their wisdom minds. Within the context of each teaching, things are presented in a certain way. As a student, when you relate the true meaning of these teachings with your own experience and impressions gained through meditation, wisdom is certain to arise because you are also receiving a kind of transmission.

When I was in the monastic refugee camp at Buxador, India, there was a senior Drukpa Kagyu lama there who was an excellent practitioner. We had one of our own senior lamas from Thrangu Monastery there as well. At one point these two lamas were having a discussion in which the Drukpa Kagyu lama was talking about his experiences. He was describing the different practices he was doing, and he asked the Thrangu lama if he was doing things correctly or not. The senior Thrangu lama responded to these questions with helpful and encouraging advice, and gave

the Drukpa Kagyu lama points about what he was practicing well, what could be improved, and so forth. The Drukpa Kagyu lama was very happy with what he had learned and how their meeting had turned out.

Some time thereafter, this Drukpa Kagyu lama died. After he died, the lama remained seated upright in a state of meditative absorption for one week. Buxador is extremely hot, but he stayed that way in that tremendous heat for seven days without the slightest sign of physical decay or odor — not even a fly drew near his body. Following those seven days, his state of absorption ended and the warmth finally departed from the body. This is something I actually witnessed myself.

STUDENT: With regard to Mahamudra, if the practice of mahamudra offers the opportunity for enlightenment within one lifetime, and other practices may take countless aeons, why would one not choose Mahamudra? Why would one choose the slow path? Is there a danger in taking a shortcut? Moreover, does this question indicate a lack of understanding on my part?

RINPOCHE: Frankly, the choice between paths is largely based on the degree of merit that someone has accumulated. Their degree of merit, their previous aspirations, and their different karmic connections or karmic residues will cause them to be

more or less receptive to various teachings. There are many people who have acquired a precious human existence and are generally enthusiastic about the practice of spirituality, but they cannot understand and therefore do not trust the most profound teachings such as Mahamudra. Because of their enthusiasm for spirituality, they do believe in cause and result and they do observe the defects of cyclic existence, but because they do not believe in the most profound path, they choose what they believe in — a more gradual path to liberation. There are others who due to their previous accumulation of merit, previous karmic connection, or previous aspiration, are naturally receptive to Mahamudra, understand it, and therefore become committed to its practice.

All of the different things taught by the Buddha were taught in response to the different needs of individuals, but it is not necessarily the case that the Buddha taught different things at different times; it is more the case that what he taught could be heard in different ways by different individuals. For example, normally we regard the first turning of the **dharmachakra**, the teaching of the **four noble truths**, as a teaching of the common vehicle and limited to the shravaka and pratyekabuddha yanas. According to our tradition, while all of the human listeners at that time heard the Buddha's message as being limited to the shravakayana and pratyekabuddhayana, at the same time the gods

who were listening — who had previously made a connection with the Mahayana — heard what the Buddha was teaching as Mahayana teachings, and they realized emptiness. Still others were established in the practice of Vajrayana; they heard what the Buddha was teaching at that time as Vajrayana teachings and became vajra holders. Therefore it was not the case that the Buddha decided to only teach so much to certain people, and so much to other people — it is that his teachings were heard in different ways.

STUDENT: Is it true what I read at the beginning of *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, namely that the Buddha prophesied that either seven or eleven years after his death he would be born from a lotus, and this was Padmasambhava? Is it correct that Buddha Shakyamuni returned to teach Vajrayana?

RINPOCHE: Yes, but it was twelve years.

STUDENT: Before we start our practice, one line in the refuge prayer says, “For all sentient beings.” I wondered if there was a prayer or some little practice we could do in the beginning of our practice to really raise bodhichitta, to make us really aware of other beings rather than just have it go by quickly and then remember about halfway through the practice.

RINPOCHE: The most important thing to keep the generation of bodhichitta from being merely words is to actually contemplate bodhichitta and, before you begin the practice, generate the resolution that since you have taken responsibility for the awakening of all beings, all of your virtuous actions must be dedicated to that end. By reminding yourself mentally that you have generated bodhichitta, you have committed yourself to bringing about the buddhahood of all beings, and this will truly direct the practice toward that end. Of course, there is also the generation or realization of absolute bodhichitta, which is the form of bodhichitta present in the mind of a practitioner who has realized emptiness.

STUDENT: Is there a particular practice or prayer in which we can generate bodhichitta, something that we can say as we sit down at the beginning of our practice?

TRANSLATOR: In answering your question, Rinpoche just recited the refuge and bodhichitta prayer found at the beginning of the Chenrezik practice, *Benefit for Beings Throughout Space*. He said that this prayer exists for this very purpose.

STUDENT: I had a situation during the summer where I was working for my father and we had a tradesman there who was giving me a very hard time because he felt that I was just given

things by my father and that life was very easy for me. He was extremely rude and insulting and it made me very angry. I specifically tried not to insult him, but I eventually had to say to him, “Look, either stop it or leave.” He got very upset. As it happens, my father showed up at that time, so the incident did not go any further. I almost felt that it was going to become a physical confrontation, because I couldn’t just let him insult me and walk all over me for various reasons, both on a personal level and in terms of the other people there. I felt extremely frustrated. It still bothers me a lot when I think about it, and it is still very disturbing. I do not really know what to do.

RINPOCHE: The job you get is largely a function of the merit you accumulated as an individual in previous lifetimes. Whether the circumstance of you acquiring a position is your right by birth or by your training and qualifications is ultimately irrelevant.

When someone says the sorts of things that this person was apparently saying to you, usually they are motivated by jealousy. If someone is that jealous and aggressive in a temporary situation such as you described, they are probably coming out of a long series of rebirths in lower realms and possibly headed for another long series. Certainly they are profoundly unhappy at this point, otherwise they would not be occupying their mind in that way.

When you reflect on the fact that the person is certainly more unhappy than you are, you will feel less angry and you will feel more compassion for him, and you will be inspired to pray for his welfare. When people abuse you verbally, you have to allow what they say to go in one ear and out the other and not assume that something is necessarily true just because someone says it.

This happened in the past. No doubt when these words were said to you, you felt hurt and depressed. Now the words he said to you are gone; they no longer exist. Words leave no physical trace: they only leave an imprint in our memory, and what maintains that imprint is your fixation on the feelings you had when those words were spoken. If you let go of that fixation, there will be nothing left of it.

The Great Peacock That Conquers Poison: The Nature of the Five Poisons

This chapter consists of supporting instructions that supplement the previous instructions, providing additional methods intended to benefit practitioners. The title of the chapter describes the means of bringing the five mental afflictions or poisons onto the path in terms of five different approaches: relinquishment, taming, transformation, recognition of their characteristic nature, and bringing them on the path. That is why this chapter is called “The Great Peacock That Conquers Poison.”

Not all peacocks have this special ability to overcome poison. Certain peacocks have a small stone pill or pebble in their stomachs, known as a wang-ril, and peacocks with this pill can safely consume any kind of poisonous substance. Because of the inherent power of the pill, the ingested poison does not kill the peacock; instead it enhances and intensifies the brilliant color of the bird’s plumage. Poachers will kill these birds in order to get this precious pill.

If you are bitten by a poisonous snake and you apply this pill to the bite wound, the poison is immediately neutralized and has

no effect on your body. Once you have applied the pill to the wounded area, it stays there like a magnet for up to twenty-four hours. Once the pill has absorbed the poison it falls off, and thus the poison is rendered completely harmless.

This is not merely a legend or myth from ancient times — this practice exists today in some Nepali villages. If a family has this pill and someone in another household gets bitten by a snake, they will immediately come over to borrow the pill. Of course, it will cost something to do so. They also say that the pill gets smaller in size each time you use it to neutralize poison. I do not know this for certain myself, but that is what they say. It is along these lines that the analogy of a peacock is drawn to describe the instructions at hand, based on the principle of gradually purifying the true poison of the mental afflictions or kleshas.

At this point Karma Chakme Rinpoche supplicates Buddha Shakyamuni with the Sanskrit invocation NAMO SHAKYAMUNEYE. He then says, “Perfect and complete awakened one, omniscient of all things.” The Buddha knows the true and unmistakable nature of all types of phenomena. Not only does he possess omniscience in this way, but as a result of actual practice he has attained the state of perfect awakening. As the Buddha’s words are unmistakable regarding the true meaning of all things,

Karma Chakme continues, “To that which you have spoken as truth, I pay homage.”

These teachings were requested by Lama Karma Tsonдру Gyamtso, who addressed Chakme Rinpoche with a heart of sadness: “KYE MA! The way things are! As long as one is incapable of liberating the five afflictive poisons by realizing that their nature is emptiness, there is no way at all to escape the influence of these five poisons. For that reason, please regard us with compassion and give profound instructions for not falling under the control of the five afflictive poisons.” Because the five poisons afflict all sentient beings, Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso has asked for methods that can be implemented in order to eliminate them; he recognizes that as long as realization of mahamudra has not yet arisen for us, these poisons will remain an obstacle. In response to this request, Chakme Rinpoche gives the following teaching.

The Five Poisons and the Four Noble Truths

The five poisons or kleshas are desire, hatred, bewilderment, pride, and jealousy. In the first turning of the dharmachakra, which occurred near Varanasi in India, the Buddha taught the four truths of superiors, commonly referred to as the “four noble truths.” In this teaching he explained that being under the influ-

ence of nonvirtue at the present time results in the experience of suffering later; this is to be known with certainty as infallibly true. This is the first truth: true suffering.

The Buddha said the five poisons are to be relinquished through recollecting what is fundamentally wrong with them. In this lifetime and in future lifetimes, we live in fear of all kinds of unwanted experiences, including the real possibility of taking rebirth in the realms of hell beings, pretas, or animals; we also fear the various kinds of relatively less intense suffering we presently undergo. In the first truth the Buddha explained that this anxiety itself is suffering.

The cause of all forms of suffering, which arise for hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, and so forth, is wrongdoing. Wrongdoing here means the five poisons. Most of the time these five poisons remain invisible in a state of latency. As soon as they come into contact with the conditions that trigger them, the poisons of desire, hatred, bewilderment, pride, and jealousy will immediately flare up like a fire and take control. Once this happens, whatever you might do, say, or think will be misguided due to the influence of those afflictions. These five poisons are unvirtuous; therefore they cannot lead to the experience of happiness, but will only result in the experience of suffering.

With a correct understanding based on the certainty of this fact, they are therefore to be relinquished.

For example, if there is a very attractive, colorful, delicious-looking pastry, we might assume it would be good to eat. If we eat the pastry without knowing that it contains poison, we are certainly going to suffer as a result, whereas if we know the pastry contains poison, we will stay away from it entirely. In the same way, recognizing that falling prey to these five poisons is the reason behind the experience of all suffering in the three realms of cyclic existence from one lifetime to another, and fearing the arising of such suffering, we should determine to relinquish these five poisons and not fall under their power.

Furthermore, because of the suffering connected with the negative karma we previously accumulated under the influence of the five poisons, we take everything to be truly existent. As long as the karmic tendency to experience things in this way continues to be reinforced within the mind-body continuum, there is no possibility of this tendency decreasing. On the basis of that, as the accumulated negative karma of the present body ultimately ripens, we continue to experience rebirth in subsequent lifetimes in numerous physical and mental embodiments. This will inevitably happen, and that is why this is called “true suffering.”

The five poisons are the cause or source from which wrongdoing originates. Thus the only result of being under the control of the five poisons is wrongdoing and nothing else. All forms of suffering found throughout the three realms of cyclic existence arise from these five poisons. For that reason they are known as “true origins,” which is the second truth. The origins are true because once there is any involvement with the five poisons, it is impossible that suffering will not arise in some way.

When you understand what is wrong with the five poisons you will be able to avoid them, and if you successfully bring them to an end through awareness, recollection, and vigilance, you will achieve liberation from suffering. In the absence of a cause, there can be no result. If you can reach the point where there is no longer a cause for suffering, you will definitely attain the levels and paths of liberation. This is called “true cessation,” which is the third truth. Here to cease means to be gone. If the five poisons are absent, nonvirtue will not occur. If we are not under the influence of the five poisons, it is impossible for suffering to arise; therefore the permanent cessation of suffering is called “true cessation.”

Thus far we have been introduced to true suffering, true origination, and true cessation. We now turn to the fourth truth, the “true path.” Through gradually eliminating the five poisons, and

on the basis of tremendous exertion in the conduct of the vinaya, the result of traversing the levels and paths and continually developing and improving in this way is the eventual attainment of the state of an arhat. *Arhat* means “foe destroyer,” which means that the foe or enemy consisting of the five poisons has been destroyed. Once those five poisons have been destroyed, it is no longer necessary to experience the sufferings of any of the six classes of beings. This constitutes final liberation from samsara, and the process of achieving it as described above is called the “true path.” It is the true path because when the means of relinquishing the five poisons has been accomplished, there is no other path to be pursued. Gradual progression along this path leads to the certain attainment of arhatship, and for this reason as well it is said to be the “true path.”

The Five Poisons and Rebirth in the Six Realms

What will be the consequences if the poisons are not relinquished? The result of being controlled by desire or attachment is to be reborn as a preta. In that state you are unable to find anything to eat or to relieve your thirst for long periods of time, and as a result you will experience inconceivable suffering. Being compelled by the power of anger or hatred leads to rebirth in the hell realms. Depending on the degree of intensity of your

hatred, you will be reborn in one of the eighteen different hell realms. The intolerable suffering of the hot and cold hells will be experienced for aeons on end. Being in a state of apathy or bewilderment leads to rebirth as an animal. From among the wide variety of animal species, the particular type you take rebirth as depends on the intensity of your bewilderment. Some animal species are so confused that they eat themselves, and while they are consuming their own bodies, in spite of the pain they experience they remain unaware of their own suffering. Other types of animals that do not behave this way still suffer from a constant cycle of restlessness and fear, with the more powerful animals preying on smaller ones, and all the animals struggling to sustain themselves on whatever they can find.

These three states of existence — as a preta, a hell being, or an animal — are collectively referred to as the “three bad migrations,” with the predominant cause of suffering in each state corresponding to the three poisons of desire, hatred, and bewilderment.

Although one may have accomplished some degree of virtue, falling under the sway of jealousy will nevertheless lead to rebirth in the **realms of the asuras** or demigods. Here there is no intense external suffering comparable to that of the hell beings, pretas, or animals; nevertheless asuras suffer from an internal obsession with the prosperity and abundance of the deva realms.

The asuras constantly feel unbearably jealous of the prosperity and status enjoyed by the devas, and yet they are completely powerless to get these things for themselves. Because of their tremendous jealousy, as long as they remain unaware of their own condition they will suffer endlessly in this way.

Even if someone practices virtue well and accumulates merit, if they are under the influence of pride they will be reborn in the deva or **god realms**. The devas enjoy the best of everything — a lavish abundance of prosperity, fame, and all other such favorable conditions. Nevertheless once their life span is exhausted, they clairvoyantly perceive the circumstances of the place where they will subsequently take rebirth. They are strongly attached to their life of pleasure, but when they see with their divine supercognition that they no longer have the freedom to continue living in such comfort and they perceive whatever suffering is imminent for them in the lower migrations, the mental anguish of their fearful reaction to this is even greater than the suffering of a hell being. On passing out of the deva realms, many devas are reborn in the hell realms where they directly witness and experience the sufferings found there.

Next we turn to the human realm, which we know on a first-hand basis. As human beings we do not possess the degree of comfort and pleasure enjoyed by devas, nor is our experience

like those of the bad migrations. Human existence is relatively very good. Nevertheless human beings suffer as well. First there is the suffering of birth, followed by the suffering of aging, the suffering of illness, and the suffering of death — the four types of suffering. In addition to these four, humans also experience the suffering of not getting what is wanted and the suffering of encountering what is not wanted, so in total there are six forms of suffering characteristic of this realm.

As we have seen, the suffering in the three bad migrations is excruciating and intolerable, yet the beings in those realms are powerless to do anything to end their own misery. In the three higher realms of humans, devas, and asuras, a state of temporary well-being is prevalent. Nevertheless a single moment of impermanence can swiftly change a situation of comfort into one of suffering. The experience of birth, aging, illness, death, and all of the other innumerable forms of suffering is not limited to just one body or even ten bodies. Rather, any of the six classes of beings under the influence of the five poisons will migrate in cyclic existence throughout a beginningless and endless succession of lifetimes. As long as this remains the case, we will not find the slightest instant of freedom by which to achieve liberation from cyclic existence, and therefore we will continue to remain in samsara.

The real root of the sufferings of all six classes of beings is the presence of the five poisons in the beings' individual continuums. While we presently exist in a human form, by thoroughly understanding what is fundamentally wrong with these five poisons, it is possible that we can bear with them while not falling under their control altogether. The experience of suffering in the lower realms is completely unbearable, and there is no possibility for beings in those realms to obtain liberation from their own misery. There is simply no comparison between the relatively slight suffering we feel in the process of relinquishing our mental afflictions and the sufferings of all other beings in samsara. We could say that the difference is as vast as the difference between the space within the eye of a needle and the space of the entire sky. Words are inadequate to truly describe the degree of contrast between our suffering and that of the lower realms. Although the five poisons will continue to arise for all of us human beings, we should keep these considerations in mind and realize that it is definitely worthwhile to avoid the influence of these five poisons as much as possible.

For instance, imagine a ruthless monarch or tyrant who issues strict and severe commands. As long as you obey him and carry out his orders, you will not suffer punishment or be executed. Similarly, in fearful recognition of the fact that the mental afflictions inevitably lead to the experience of unbearable suffering, if you refrain from coming under the power of those afflictions, you will not have to

experience the misery of bad migrations in the future at all. Such is the severity of the potential consequences involved.

To restate this analogy differently, the king of Dharma for practitioners is the Buddha, the Transcendent Conqueror. He established the rules for the maintenance of moral discipline for both fully ordained and novitiate monks and nuns. If monastics properly observe the guidelines of the vinaya, they will eventually attain the state of liberation and omniscience. If they transgress their vows, they will experience the inconceivable sufferings of the lower realms throughout tens of millions of rebirths. The difference here is that this is not a punishment exacted by the Buddha; it is none other than the fully ripened result of the negative karma that individual sentient beings have accumulated for themselves. At this point the ramifications of the suffering experienced in the lower realms will become a firsthand reality for those individuals.

In this world our death is one of the most tragic things that happens. If someone's life is taken, everyone reacts by saying things like, "Oh, it is so terrible she was killed!" We feel that nothing could be worse, but the anguish entailed by the degeneration of moral discipline is even worse than death, because we will have to endure suffering in the six realms for tens of millions of lifetimes to come. On the other hand, when a person who has

maintained excellent moral discipline dies, negative consequences do not ensue for them; in fact they do not really die, because after they die, as it were, they immediately regain an excellent physical body with which to continue engaging in the practice of authentic Buddhadharma. This is the acquisition of an even more favorable outcome.

Relinquishing Attachment

One cause leading to the impairment of moral discipline is attachment, such as attachment to attractive physical forms. Such attachment can cause a person to break their vows. It is the same as the way moths are drawn toward the light of a butter lamp at night — they dive right into it, and once they dive in there is no longer a chance for even an instant of comfort. Being compelled by the affliction of desire reinforces attachment to pleasure. A person who loses their moral discipline because of such attachment to pleasure will take rebirth in a great hell of blazing lava, where they will then burn in the depths of a mass of white-tongued flames for aeons and aeons on end.

Furthermore, consuming substances such as meat, alcoholic beverages, eggs, and so on can adversely affect the body and lead

to the degeneration of good moral discipline. To draw an analogy, this kind of craving is like honey on the edge of a razor blade: if you crave the sweetness of the honey and lick the razor, your tongue will be sliced in half. At that point the sweet taste will be of no benefit, and the result will be nothing but tremendous pain. In the same way, craving things and having attachment to them in the pursuit of temporary happiness or pleasure leads to the experience of great suffering.

Another example is how bees and other insects are attracted to honey. If a bee or an insect gets stuck in honey, it will die. At that point, working to store up honey will be of no benefit; once the bee is trapped in the honey, it is finished. Similarly, because people are attached to the desires and comforts of this life, they invest great effort in working day and night in a hectic lifestyle, all in order to build up material prosperity and wealth.

When people endlessly struggle in this way, they do not achieve any real peace or happiness; instead anger, pride, and the whole variety of mental afflictions proliferate further. Their basic intention is to create happiness in this life, but their involvement in such endeavors only amounts to great effort in accumulating negative karma, which in turn perpetuates permanent and endless samsara.

As the analogy suggests, bees store up their honey and make use of it later on, but if a bee gets stuck in the honey it is finished. Our situation is just like that. The point being conveyed here is that it is beneficial to be content with fewer sense pleasures and desires, and to generally be content with whatever you have.

Relinquishing Anger

Next we turn to anger and why it is fundamentally wrong. Consider what we call a serious enemy from a worldly perspective. If I have an enemy and that enemy wants to harm me or kill me, or steal all my property, I can do nothing at all. Anyone who would kill me and take everything I have is really just a nominal enemy, whereas anger is an enemy that can destroy and take away all the happiness of this lifetime and the happiness of hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even more future rebirths. It is an enemy that can even destroy the merit you have accumulated over the course of a hundred aeons. Even if your virtues are vast, and even if they have been accumulated over a great length of time, if their execution has not been followed by the seal of dedication — that is to say, dedication for the benefit of all sentient beings, with the ultimate intention of establishing them in the state of buddhahood — a single instance of anger can completely destroy all of them in an instant.

The worst possible enemy in any of the three realms of existence is the anger in our own minds, and therefore it is absolutely imperative that anger be relinquished. A person who has really abandoned their own anger can truly be regarded as heroic. Once the anger in your continuum has been eliminated, you are completely victorious over all the suffering of the six classes of beings in samsara.

Relinquishing Bewilderment

Earlier we looked at bewilderment or apathy, which at a gross level is much like being asleep. Apathetic sleep is like a thief of virtue because it steals away time that could otherwise be spent practicing virtue. For example, if a person lives out a life span of a hundred years, fifty years of that time is spent sleeping in a state of apathy. This is the reason why Dharma practitioners should get up early and go to bed late, minimizing the amount of time spent sleeping so they can devote more effort toward virtuous endeavors.

As human beings in the desire realm it is generally not possible for us to live without sleeping at all, because sleep is a necessary form of sustenance for the body. Here in the United States, practitioners in retreat sleep only about five to six hours. In the

beginning this can be very difficult, but later on they get used to it and everything turns out fine. For others who are used to sleeping a lot, even eight or nine hours may not be sufficient — they never seem to get enough sleep. In Tibet there are many yogis who do not sleep at all. If you gradually habituate yourself, you can definitely reduce the amount of sleep you require. Otherwise there may be no limit to the desire for sleep.

A much more severe form of bewilderment is to be unaware of your own ignorance; that is to say, ignorant of what is dharmic and what is not dharmic, of what constitutes virtue and what constitutes wrongdoing. One of the worst forms of delusion is to either denounce authentic Dharma as being untrue or faulty, or to claim that something nondharmic is true Dharma. Such distortions and denigrations are said to be like passing judgment on food without even eating a spoonful.

Any ideas we might have about what constitutes virtue and what constitutes wrongdoing must be eliminated. This is why great teachers place so much emphasis on karma, the benefits and qualities of virtue, the defects of wrongdoing, and other such topics; it is on the basis of the Buddha's great compassion and kindness that these teachings are regarded as being true, unmistaken, and infallible. Some people claim, "What these teachers say is not true; they are just trying to deceive people." To

uphold such wrong views constitutes the worst form of delusion or bewilderment. If someone harbors such an attitude, they do not possess the slightest particle's worth of virtuous qualities. As there is no way to effectively confess such perverse views, nor is there any limit to the negative karma entailed by maintaining them, the term endless samsara is especially applicable here.

Relinquishing Jealousy

In our time, as well as in other times in history, there are always individuals who want to become famous for being great practitioners, and in doing so they develop a jealous attitude toward holy beings and illustrious masters.

Anyone who harbors such jealousy has disqualified themselves from being a bodhisattva, because bodhisattvas regard holy beings as well as ordinary sentient beings with tremendous respect and compassion. For example, it would not be physically possible for an individual to kill all sentient beings of the three realms of samsara, but if it were, how severe would the consequences be for such an act of wrongdoing? They would be utterly beyond description, yet it is said that the intention to denigrate bodhisattvas out of jealousy is even worse than that.

Recognizing the negative ramifications of jealousy, we avoid jealousy as much as possible.

Relinquishing Pride

Next we look at pride. Someone might have the attitude, “I am a fully ordained monastic. I am a real holder of all the vows, and I maintain perfect moral discipline.” When such an attitude develops, that person might regard themselves as being superior and others as being inferior, thinking, “These laypeople do not hold vows like I do. They do not have the kind of discipline that I do. I am not like these ordinary people.” If a monk or nun has this kind of notion about pure moral discipline and precepts, they have become proud. What happens as a result of such thinking is that, despite purportedly observing moral discipline for him or herself, that moral discipline instantly becomes contaminated.

For example, although you might have a beautiful gown made of fine silken brocade and ornamented with precious stones, if you throw it into the toilet, the whole thing is fouled. No matter how fine the quality of brocade, it is now completely ruined. In the same way, having a proud attitude about one’s own moral principles while seeing others as being inferior to you only serves to contaminate your discipline. For that reason, even if

you are able to observe completely perfect moral discipline in your behavior, you should also regard with conviction all others who wear monastic robes as authentic members of the rare and supreme sangha. This is because, although someone's external behavior might seem crude or inappropriate for a monastic, or for that matter pleasant and becoming, an ordinary being cannot perceive the kind of inner qualities that a monk or nun might truly possess.

We can consider an example from the past, the great master Shantideva. In one period of his life he was living as a monk at Nalanda University in ancient India. He wore old robes and in his outward appearance seemed very ordinary. At mealtimes he would get up and eat as much food as he wanted, then afterwards he would return to his room below the vestibule and go back to sleep. Later he would wake up again to get more food, then go back to sleep again.

He did not divide these activities between day and night; he just seemed to do this all the time. This is why Shantideva had a bad reputation with the other monks in residence; they disliked him and nicknamed him Bhusuku, which means "someone who only knows how to do three things: eat, sleep, and use the toilet." There were thousands of monks in the sangha, and many of them thought, "It is a disgrace to have such a person around here. If

others see this, it will just be embarrassing, so he should probably be kicked out.” However the abbot did not expel Shantideva, and he allowed him to stay.

These sangha members decided to put Shantideva to a test. The custom at Nalanda was that each abbot was at some point required to give a teaching presentation to the general assembly. On the occasion of a teaching event, the disciples would prepare a throne, clean the area, and decorate the entire venue with flowers, then all the abbots would give teachings, taking turns one at a time in succession. On the day before the monks planned to expose Shantideva at the teaching event, they informed him, “Tomorrow it will be your turn to teach, so you had better be ready to speak. Everyone has finished making your throne and preparing the teaching venue.” They expected him to get scared and try to run away, but he simply replied, “Okay.”

The next day, the place where Shantideva was supposed to teach was filthy with garbage. Suddenly a powerful wind came up and blew out all the garbage, leaving the venue clean. This was followed by a drizzle of rain that gently settled the dust in the area. Nobody had actually prepared a throne, so in order to make a mockery of Shantideva, these monks built a throne that was so absurdly high no one could possibly reach it because there was no ladder. As was the usual custom, there would be a

formal procession with a white parasol under which the teacher would walk to the throne. With burning incense and banners in hand, they brought the procession to Shantideva's room and summoned him, "Now it is time for you to teach." He just said, "Okay," and got up.

He wore the same old dirty clothes he always wore since he had no other robes, and he walked with the procession to the throne. All of the monks in the assembly were watching eagerly, elbowing each other and saying, "Look, here comes the stupid guy." People saw Shantideva walk up to the throne and touch it with his hand, but without seeing anything else happen, the next thing they knew he had already taken his seat atop the throne. Smiling widely, he asked the audience, "Would you like me to teach on a subject that has been taught here at Nalanda previously? Or would you like me to teach something no one has heard before?" The abbot replied, "Please teach something that has not been taught before." Shantideva then proceeded to expound the ten chapters of his *Bodhicharyavatara*, a text that was previously unknown.

As he was presenting the ninth chapter, an exposition of the perfection of prajna, Shantideva's throne gradually ascended higher and higher into the sky. By the time he reached the tenth chapter, the concluding dedication and aspiration prayer, people

could no longer see him at all, although they continued to hear his voice speaking. On completion of the entire *Bodhicharyavatara*, even his voice ceased to be heard. All that remained was a magnificent sound resounding in the air and a rain of flowers falling from the sky. Upon subsequent investigation into Shantideva's disappearance, they discovered he had gone to the south to the residence of his master, Nagarjuna.

As this story demonstrates, looking at the external behavior of holy beings is not a viable way to judge the inner qualities of their wisdom minds. True recognition of such qualities leads to ascertaining those qualities in oneself. Otherwise, as long as someone harbors condescension toward others, viewing them as inferior, this pride remains one of the worst forms of all mental afflictions. For that reason, regardless of how others may appear outwardly in terms of their individual mannerisms, clothing, and so on, it is essential that you train in seeing everything with a very pure outlook. Another essential aspect of genuine Buddhist practice is to always cultivate the attitude of regarding yourself as less important than everyone else.

The two forms of perception just described together comprise what is known as the “path of relinquishing the five poisons.” If you acknowledge the five poisons and what is wrong with them, and if you correctly understand the qualities to be gained

through relinquishing them, then on the basis of the patience you cultivate in the face of whatever temporary hardships you encounter while avoiding the influence of these five poisons, you will eventually arrive at the ultimate, unsurpassable fruition.

In terms of the gradation of Buddhist vehicles, this constitutes the main path of practice for Shravakayana practitioners. In the Bodhisattvayana and Secret Mantrayana, it is not necessary to regard this particular path as being of primary importance; however this is only because in each of these vehicles there are methods available other than the path of relinquishing the five poisons, as we will see.

Taming Attachment

When someone feels attraction for another person, they see that person's physical appearance as beautiful, attractive, with a nice complexion, and they feel sexually attracted to them. When you really examine logically what is involved when your own desire arises on seeing those qualities in someone's appearance, you find that the bodies of both persons — not only that of the other person, but yours as well — are like golden urns filled with urine and feces.

When you look at the outside of the body, everything looks wonderful and beautiful, but if you think about what is on the inside, the contents naturally found within are all foul substances. The upper body is filled with blood, pus, and other such unclean humors, whereas the lower body contains urine and feces. These and other excretions such as mucus, phlegm, bile, and so on comprise the thirty-two different impure bodily substances enumerated by the Buddha — substances equally inherent to one's own body as well as the bodies of others.

When you reflect well on this, the human body is just like a pouch made of animal skin, a big bag full of foul slime. How could you delight in such a thing, whether it belongs to you or someone else? In your body, as well as in others' bodies, there reside eightyfour thousand different kinds of germs. That body is the repository for all the liquid and solid waste discharged by the intestinal worms, bacteria, and microorganisms that dwell within it. Is it not utterly delusional to desire and take pleasure in something that is just like a giant anthill full of bugs and germs?

In thinking along these lines, the intention is not to espouse a pejorative view of the body, but simply to acknowledge the reality of what it is. This kind of contemplation is the basis for the samadhi of meditation on the impure aspects of the body.

In Tibet one of the customary ways of disposing a human corpse is to offer it to the birds for consumption. The corpse is dismembered piece by piece, and as it is cut apart, you can clearly see the exposed bones, flesh, blood, and all the other unclean elements inherent within the human body. When you witness how foul and gruesome all of this is, you do not see it with enjoyment or delight. If you really think about this, what you are seeing is exactly the same stuff that is found inside your own body and everyone else's. Once you have really taken the reality of this to heart, how could you have any attachment to the body at all? With that understanding, you will become capable of eliminating notions of desire.

You can do this by visualizing in front of you a rotting corpse infested with insects, and as you do so think about the putrid decay of the bloated corpse and its stench. Similarly, imagine a skeleton with no flesh staring at you with gaping red eye sockets and no eyeballs. By thinking about and meditating on other sentient beings and yourself in this way, knowing that we are all headed for this inevitable destination, you will have no problem with desire or attachment.

You can also imagine your body or the body of the person who is the object of your desire as follows: first the skull splits open, then all the skin gradually peels away. Then the flesh and blood

of the entire body falls off the bones and decays, leaving nothing but a barren skeleton. At that point there will no longer be much of an object of desire left. Yet another approach is to meditate on turning your body inside out. Imagine that all the innards — lungs, heart, liver, intestines, and so on — emerge vividly on the outside. What is so pure and pleasant about that?

All of these methods are employed in the Shravaka tradition of meditation on the unpleasant aspects of the body. Everything described above is none other than a reflection of how things really are, as they are — these are not merely derogatory critiques of the body. It is because we fail to see and understand these facts that we fall subject to the compulsion of desire when we take the mere external aspect of appearances to be something real. There is no intention here to disparage the body in any sense, regardless of whether it is one's own body or the bodies of others; the intention is simply to point out the reality of what the body is. Methods such as these were taught by the Buddha as the main practices in the context of the vinaya for the purpose of enabling one to conquer the affliction of desire and attachment.

Taming Anger

Just as the text previously presented the meditation on the unpleasant as a remedy for attachment (which is the main meditation of the vinaya), it now presents the meditation on loving-kindness — including exchanging yourself for others — and the motivation of bodhichitta as a remedy for reversing aversion or anger (which is the main meditation presented in the sutras).

The start of the Mahayana way of viewing and dealing with mental afflictions is to recollect the fact that each of us has been born countless times. In most of these births we have had parents, since most forms of birth involve parentage. Because we have been born of parents so many times, this means that each and every sentient being has been our father and our mother innumerable times. Not only has each and every being at one time or another been our parent, but they have been our parent many, many times. In each of those births, these beings have done a great deal for us out of kindness; as well, in order to protect and nourish us, they engaged in negative deeds that ultimately harmed them. Thus not only have all beings been kind to us, but much of the trouble they are currently in was caused by their wish to benefit us.

When you think about someone in this life who seems to be your enemy, someone who wishes to harm you — and remember that the subject here is the mental afflictions, including aversion or hatred — remember that from the point of view of the Mahayana and from the point of view of bodhichitta, the very person who you regard as your enemy and who has made an attempt to harm you has been your mother innumerable times in previous lifetimes.

The reason they are attempting to harm you is because they do not recognize that you are their child. Just as you cannot look at them and recognize that they are your mother, they cannot recognize you as their child. The reason they do not recognize you as their child is because they are afflicted by ignorance and other kleshas, and they are afflicted by ignorance and other kleshas because they have accumulated the afflicted actions or karmas that perpetuate these kleshas. Moreover, the main reason they accumulated these kleshas is because of the things they did in order to protect and nourish you when you were their responsibility.

When beings harm other beings, it is because they fail to recognize the beings whom they harm as their former children. In a sense they are not to blame for harming you because they do not recognize their relationship with you. If you know about

previous lifetimes and therefore understand that these persons who wish to harm you have been your parents innumerable times, far more often than they have been your enemy, and if knowing that you still respond aggressively to the harm they attempt to inflict on you, are you not far more at fault than they are? They are attempting to harm you out of ignorance, not knowing that you are their child, but you respond to their harm even though you know that they have been your mother. In short, if you understand that all beings have been your parents many, many times in previous lifetimes, how could you fail to respond to even the worst aggression with kindness and patience? How could you dare to be aggressive, how could you bear it?

In this way you should recollect that all beings have been your parents in previous lifetimes and cultivate immeasurable love for your enemies. *Immeasurable* here means not only cultivating this state of benevolence for the particular enemy afflicting you at the moment, but also cultivating this state of benevolence for all beings because you recognize that not only this person, but all beings, have been your parents in previous lifetimes.

According to the Mahayana, there is a second reason for cultivating love and compassion for enemies. In order to achieve full awakening, which is the goal of Mahayana practice, one of the main virtues that must be perfected is patience. But patience can

only be developed when it is being exercised; if there is nothing that exercises or strains your patience, there is simply no way to increase or develop it. Since you need strain on your patience in order to achieve perfect awakening, and since the greatest strain on one's patience is the aggression of others, people who are aggressive and abuse you are the most responsible for your future awakening. They give you the greatest opportunity to cultivate the most difficult virtue — and patience is the most difficult and greatest of virtues, just as aversion or anger is the worst of mental afflictions. You must understand that your enemies are your best friends because they give you the greatest opportunity for the accumulation of virtue.

In an extreme situation, when you are accused of things that are not true — for example, when you are reviled or denigrated without the slightest justification, when you are called a thief, a murderer, a samaya breaker, or whatever insults others make up about you — if you simply remain patient with this utterly unjustified abuse, you purify tremendous amounts of your wrongdoing and obscuration. If you are patient with those who revile and abuse you, they are purifying your negative actions and your obscurations, and this occurs without you doing anything except being patient.

We also suffer from greed and selfishness. None of us like to give because we all want to take care of ourselves, and we do not like to see things that are unpleasant or depressing. However if you think about it, just as you must cultivate the perfection of patience, you must also cultivate the perfection of generosity. If you are not exposed to the sufferings and needs of others, you have no opportunity to develop compassion and you have no object for the practice of generosity. If everyone you see needs nothing and if everyone is happy, how can you ever develop compassion? Dharma flourishes in periods of degeneration rather than in a golden age because during a golden age everyone is happy and so no one sees enough suffering, and as a result no one develops much compassion. The reason why Dharma flourishes in an age like the present is that we constantly see things we can respond to with compassion.

There is simply no way to achieve awakening without the development of compassion. Moreover, there is no way to develop compassion without witnessing situations that cause one to respond compassionately. There is no way to practice generosity toward others without being around beings that actually need what you can give them. Therefore every time you witness another's misfortune, you have an opportunity to develop compassion, and you have an opportunity to practice a true and real generosity.

Finally, it must be admitted that sentient beings are more beneficial to us than buddhas because it is primarily in reliance on the needs of other sentient beings that we achieve the causes of unsurpassable awakening. You cannot develop benevolence and compassion based on the contemplation of buddhas. Buddhas do not require anyone's compassion; they are not suffering. Thinking about buddhas does not produce compassion, whereas reflecting on the situation of sentient beings does produce it. Of course, you can make offerings to buddhas, but the principal practice of generosity is giving to those in need, and buddhas do not need anything. Sentient beings are the ones that need what we have to give.

The first three of the six perfections — the perfections of generosity, moral discipline, and patience — are all practiced primarily with reference to sentient beings and not with reference to buddhas.

We can only really be generous to sentient beings. You cannot give something to nothing; you have to give it to someone, and that means a sentient being. It is with respect to sentient beings that we must exercise moral discipline and patience. Moral discipline involves, among other things, how we relate to the sentient beings we experience as pleasant or attractive. Patience,

among other things, is how we relate to the sentient beings we regard as unpleasant or repellant.

All of this involves sentient beings, and therefore the practice of the Mahayana path depends on the kindness and existence of others. Therefore you should understand that every time sentient beings interact with you in even the most unpleasant way, they are giving you the best opportunity for cultivating the path and virtue. If despite that understanding you still get angry at someone else's abuse, you are the stupidest among the stupid.

This is true historically as well. When we think about the Buddha's relationship with his cousin Devadatta, which was pretty much the same relationship they had throughout many previous lifetimes, we tend to vilify Devadatta. We think that Devadatta, with his constant attempts to harm and kill the Buddha and his constant challenges of the Buddha's wisdom, was nothing but an emanation of Mara. Yet according to the Buddha's statements, he achieved awakening as quickly as he did because of Devadatta — because of Devadatta's attempts to harm him and derail him from the Mahayana path for many, many lifetimes.

In terms of when the fifth buddha, Maitreya, and the present Shakyamuni Buddha first generated bodhichitta, and in terms of how long their respective paths should have taken, Maitreya

should have come first; he should have reached the finish line before Buddha Shakyamuni, but he did not. Although Buddha Shakyamuni generated bodhichitta after Maitreya, he attained buddhahood first because he had to put up with Devadatta lifetime after lifetime. Therefore it is taught that Buddha Shakyamuni's achievement of buddhahood before Maitreya was due to the kindness of Devadatta's constant abuse.

Although we know that all beings have been our parents and it is therefore horrific if we become angry with them, simply knowing this may not be enough to stop the habit of becoming angry with them, especially when they abuse us. If you find that due to the strength of your habit of anger or for whatever other reason the method already presented here is not enough for overcoming anger, the Mahayana presents other methods that may help.

Imagine that your enemy, the person you are angry with, is the person you love the most. You imagine that enemy as your mother or whoever it is that you love most in this life. This is not purely an act of imagination because in previous lifetimes, this very person who is your worst enemy in this life was your mother, who is the person you loved most again and again. When you imagine your enemy to be the person you love most now, although you are doing something imaginary, it is not untrue.

Imagine them in that way, and think about whether or not it is appropriate to be vengeful, angry, and harmful.

If this is not sufficient, another method is to literally put yourself in their place. In other words, imagine yourself to be your enemy and imagine your enemy to be you. By changing your perception and your perspective, you can actually pacify the habit of anger. This is the cultivation of the samadhi of loving-kindness, which is to say a one-pointed absorption in or maintenance of a state of benevolence. This is how anger and aversion are tamed.

Taming Bewilderment

Apathy, which is connected with bewilderment and ignorance, comes from having no understanding why things are happening and what you can do about them. It is taught that in order to tame bewilderment we should first contemplate the twelve deeds of the Buddha, starting with his descent from the heaven of Tushita, his entrance into the womb of his mother, his awakening, his teaching, his parinirvana, and so forth. We should first recognize that all of these twelve deeds were done for the benefit of others; however the main method of meditation taught as a remedy for apathy is meditation on interdependence.

Interdependence is the twelve links or stages that produce and maintain samsara or cyclic existence. The first of these stages is ignorance. Ignorance is the root of our wandering in samsara; without ignorance, none of this could be happening. The first step in overcoming apathy is to understand that the original problem is ignorance because from ignorance arises the state called “formation.” Formation means the formation of impressions in the mind. Formation is the beginning of karma, the forming of impressions or imprints in the mind based on deeds, and formation comes from ignorance.

Because all karma is generated through the process of formation and because it is karma that leads to birth, if you summarize the twelve links you can say that from ignorance comes formation, and from that comes all the remaining stages up to and including birth. Birth obviously causes aging, and aging causes death. All of the suffering that we experience — the misery, the mental suffering, and the physical suffering — starts with ignorance, continues with formation, and culminates with birth, aging, and death.

What we mean by cyclic existence or samsara is visually depicted as a wheel, which is usually called the “wheel of becoming” or “wheel of existence.” You have probably seen this many times. Usually the whole wheel of existence is shown as a disk divided

into various sections like a pie. The rim of the wheel is held in the mouth of a horrific demonic figure that has fangs and looks furious. The demonic figure is the Lord of Death, or Yama, and he represents impermanence, which is the nature of cyclic existence.

To show that once you give rise to ignorance you are thereafter swallowed by death, the six realms are shown inside Yama's belly, as though he has swallowed them and they are inside him. In other words, we are caught within the belly of death. This is supposed to be painted on the left side of the exterior door to any monastery so that all the members of the sangha understand the cause of cyclic existence and remember why we are here and why we are doing this.

This process of cyclic existence is called "forward interdependence." Forward normally means something positive, but here it does not. Progressive or forward interdependence is, as we would say, the bad news. There is also the reversal of interdependence, "reversed interdependence." This means that just as ignorance leads to formation and therefore to birth and death, if ignorance stops there will be no formation, no accumulation of karma, no birth, no aging, no death, and no suffering. In order to remind the sangha that they must stop ignorance, on the right side of the door there should be a painting of a white eight-spoked wheel,

which represents the eightfold noble path; in other words, it represents the effort to stop ignorance.

When we talk about stopping ignorance, we mean that ignorance is a mistake. It is a misapprehension; it is not seeing things as they are. You may think of ignorance as something within you that has to be expunged, or you may think of the wheel of existence or the wheel of becoming as some kind of prison from which you must escape, but the way to escape the wheel of existence and the way to expunge ignorance is actually to correct a mistake.

The first step in remedying the affliction of apathy is to enumerate the twelve links for yourself, to study and mentally review again and again the process of ignorance leading to formation, formation leading to consciousness, and so on. In addition to that, we need to understand what ignorance really is. Although we talk about ignorance constantly, we may have no idea what we are referring to. Ignorance is a state in which a mind does not know itself; it does not see or know itself as it is. When a mind knows itself, we call that *rikpa* or “knowing.” When a mind does not know itself, we call that *marikpa* or “not knowing.”

What we do not know is what we commonly call “buddha nature.” This is what a mind really is. It is the innate capacity for the transcendence of all limitation, for the perfection of all

qualities. Not knowing that, not seeing our mind as it is, we wander in this wheel or cycle of existence. If you understand that, and then through this understanding you reverse apathy, you will understand that only through knowing your own mind, only through the mind knowing itself, can this whole thing stop. When your mind knows itself, this is the stopping or cessation of ignorance. That is what we are trying to do. It is through the mind's familiarity with itself that we attain the path of a bodhisattva.

For example, the cup in front of me has tea in it. Suppose I had no idea what was really in the cup, and for some reason I became deluded and thought the cup held poison. Prey to the misapprehension or ignorance of what was actually in the cup, I would fail to drink the tea and I would remain thirsty; I would suffer. Once I finally understood that the cup held tea and not poison, then because my ignorance about the contents of the cup was removed, I would drink the tea and I would no longer be thirsty. This is an analogy for how ignorance causes us to wander in samsara and how the removal of ignorance causes us not to.

In particular, in order to dispel the aspect of apathy that is mental dullness and sleepiness, it is recommended you take steps to reduce sleep in the early night and early morning. There are several ways to do this. The traditional remedy is to make

your room cold — in short, do the opposite of everything you would do in order to make yourself sleep properly. In Tibet it was traditional to wear light upper garments and warm lower garments. By wearing warm lower garments you keep your body temperature warm, but by wearing light upper garments, in spite of being warm enough for health, you are not sleepy and you are still aware. If you wear light or few upper garments, your awareness is supposedly clarified. Whether or not this is the case, I do know that it reduces the tendency to fall asleep.

Here in our text another method is given, which Chakme Rinpoche says is based on his own experience and may be more convenient. On a column — this presupposes there are columns or pillars in your room, as there would be if you were in Tibet — you attach the three supports: a statue of the Buddha, a volume or a book of Dharma, and a stupa. Then you circumambulate these while reciting mantra. By doing so, you accumulate the benefit of the circumambulation and the repetition of mantra, and it keeps you awake. In this way, you get in the habit of being awake in the early period of the night and the early period of the morning. The more you get into this habit, the more you will tend not to sleep at these times. Sleep is something inexhaustible; you can never fully catch up on your sleep. We always think that if we sleep a little more, we will need less sleep later on, but the

need for sleep seems to be cumulative: the more you get, the more you need.

There is another method given for keeping yourself awake at night and also lightening your sleep so it is easier to wake up. Before you go to sleep, imagine a very bright light above your head — like the light of a butter lamp or an electric light — and direct your awareness to that light. This will promote wakefulness.

In short, if you do the opposite of all the things you normally do to make sure you sleep snugly, you can stay awake. Normally when we want to go to sleep, we close the windows tight, we put out the lights, and we try to make the room as dark as possible. However if you keep the windows wide open, allowing the wind to blow through your room, and keep the room bright — or if you cannot, imagine a bright light — that will help keep you awake.

These meditations on interdependence and lightening sleep are the main topics of meditations taught in the third body of scriptures, the abhidharma. We saw that the vinaya taught meditation on the unpleasant to reverse attachment, and the sutras taught meditation on love to reverse anger. Here the abhidharma teaches meditation on interdependence as a remedy for apathy and mental dullness. Through meditating on interdependence, what you are trying to do is actually reverse

ignorance. Even if you cannot do this, you will be able to reverse the apathy that comes from failing to recognize ignorance as the basic problem. You will become confident that ignorance is the source of cyclic existence, and therefore you will be diligent about trying to reverse it.

Taming Pride

Taming pride consists of simply recollecting all the reasons why we should not be proud of ourselves. First, we have been undergoing rebirth throughout innumerable aeons. The Buddha taught that cyclic existence is beginningless. If we try to think back to when it might have started, we will conclude that we have no idea. If you reason it out, you see that cyclic existence could not have had a beginning because the cause of rebirth is the accumulation of karma; in other words, the accumulation of the imprints of actions causes rebirth. However for actions to have been implemented, for imprints to have been created by actions, one must have already been there in the first place. Therefore there is no beginning: birth is caused by actions, actions take place after birth.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that we know cyclic existence is beginningless, in spite of the fact that we know how much we

suffer, in spite of how many times we have been born in lower states, and in spite of all of the suffering we have undergone again and again as a result of our own actions, our hearts are so hard that we are not yet tired of cyclic existence. If we really were tired of it, we would have gotten out of it; we are still in it, so therefore we are hardhearted.

In case you misunderstand, do not think of *hardhearted* as meaning courageous. By hardhearted, I mean stupid. We cannot say that buddhas have not attempted to liberate us. Throughout this beginningless cyclic existence, billions and billions of buddhas have been teaching. Not all beings are still in cyclic existence; countless sentient beings got the message and were liberated by the teachings of previous buddhas, but not us. We are inferior to those beings in the sense that they have achieved liberation and we have not. We need not wonder whether we have achieved liberation or not — if we are here, we are not liberated.

Let us focus on this life. At this point I feel that many of these statements are going to be autobiographical. I do not know how much they apply to others, but they do apply to me. In this life we have received so many empowerments, so many reading transmissions, so much instruction, and yet our minds are not the least bit liberated. We are still just as bewildered, just as ignorant as we were before. We are lousy practitioners.

Achieving liberation is the only point of practice, and we are not good practitioners because we are not liberated. Having entered the teachings, we have taken all sorts of vows — the pratimoksha vows, the bodhisattva vow, and samaya vows — yet we have broken them. Violations of these vows have descended on us like raindrops in a rainstorm, and therefore we have violated our promises.

We may have done a great deal of yidam practice, and we may have recited the requisite number of mantras for many different deities. We may think this makes us something special, but not only are we not liberated, we have never had even a trace of an authentic vision of any of these deities, which is the point of doing these practices. We are failures. Despite all our practice, our obscurations are unaffected; we are still just as obscured as we were in the beginning.

From an early age until we die, we devote our lives to the consumption of others' offerings; we consume the generosity of others and the wealth of the sangha. We are never satisfied; our minds are filled with the five poisons and it seems we can never get enough of taking advantage of others' generosity and devotion. We carefully preserve the five poisons, and we repel with great effectiveness anything that might damage or in any way impinge on them. We manage to conceal these poisons:

we dress up as practitioners, we wear robes and we wear them very, very carefully, but in fact we are not really Buddhists or practitioners; we are clever hypocrites who are good at pretending to be what we think people want to see. There is a traditional saying for this: it is like a used handkerchief wrapped in silk. This is what we are.

We may not know how to correctly explain or defend in debate the meaning of even one book of Dharma, yet we strut around thinking of ourselves as learned and scholarly. We are careful not to allow any weakening of our five poisons. We make sure they are preserved in their full strength, and yet we think we are great; we think we are benevolent and well behaved. We have our heads in the sand and we deceive others as well.

Because we are ignorant, we have no idea whatsoever what is going to happen to us after death. We do not know. I suppose that based on our conduct we can infer that we are going to lower realms; aside from that we really do not know anything, and yet we dare to claim that we can lead other beings' consciousness to liberation. We cannot lead ourselves, so how can we lead others? In our ignorance, we have no idea when we will die. We do not know if we are going to die tomorrow or years from now. Yet we claim to have the blessing to remove others' obstacles. We say,

“I can remove your sickness; I can protect you from untimely death,” and so on.

If you think about these things, you should become depressed. You should think about these things until you cannot help but beat your own chest, not like a gorilla does as a show of strength, but in a miserable way. Thinking of all the reasons why we should not be proud of ourselves is the way to conquer the affliction of pride.

Taming Jealousy

All of us have generated bodhichitta, which means that formally and in our aspirations we have taken on responsibility for the awakening of others. When we took the bodhisattva vow, we requested the attention of all buddhas. Being awakened, buddhas are omniscient, so on that day our promise was actually witnessed by all buddhas. They know what we have promised: we promised that through our efforts alone as individuals, we will establish each and every being in a state of full awakening. Essentially this means that every bit of virtue we do, even one repetition of OM MANI PADME HUM, we must do only for the benefit of others. According to our commitment, our motivation in all practice is supposed to be altruistic. We are

supposed to be actively wishing for and attempting to bring about the happiness and causes of happiness of all other beings.

Yet we only pay lip service to this vow. We chant the words of the four immeasurables, saying, “May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness” and so forth, but although we have taken the bodhisattva vow, although all buddhas know we have taken it, and although we continue to pay lip service to bodhichitta and the four immeasurables, what is really going on is that we immediately become jealous when anyone else is in any way better off, superior, or happier than we are. We have promised to be altruistic and we have promised to put aside our own needs, yet we cannot stand the slightest bit of affluence or happiness on the part of anyone else.

When you find yourself filled with jealousy, remember the state of mind that wishes for all beings to be happy. The simple thought, “Wouldn’t it be nice if all beings were happy?” is sufficient to cause rebirth as Brahma. Even if you do not attain buddhahood in a hurry, simply thinking, “I wish all beings could be happy” is the karmic cause of being reborn as the god Brahma. Conversely, the state of mind that dislikes the happiness and prosperity of others, that is irritated by the affluence of others, is the cause of being reborn in the crushing hell. The crushing hell is a place where the inhabitants are crushed to pulp between iron

mountains. When the mountains part, the bodies reconstitute, and then they are crushed again and again. That is the result of jealousy. Even when you transcend this state, jealousy causes rebirth as an asura, and asuras spend their entire lives pursuing and cultivating jealousy and jealous activity. If you think about what jealousy leads to and what altruism leads to, this will pacify the tendency toward jealousy.

These sections described how to tame the five poisons and how to apply their remedies: meditation on the unpleasant as a remedy to attachment; meditation on love as a remedy to anger; meditation on interdependence as a remedy to apathy; meditation on one's own shortcomings as a remedy to pride; and meditation on the benefits of altruism and the defects of jealousy as a remedy to jealousy. This is the approach of the common vehicle in dealing with mental afflictions, meaning that this approach of taming mental afflictions is the approach of the common vehicle characteristic of the vinaya, the sutras, and of the teachings of both the Hinayana and Mahayana.

Transforming The Five Poisons

Now we discuss transforming one's perception of mental afflictions, which is the uncommon approach of the Vajrayana. There are different levels of practitioners within Vajrayana: those of the highest, middle, and lowest degree. By *degree* we mean the degree of diligence, the degree of previous training, the degree of discernment, and so on. Nevertheless what is presented next is designed for any Vajrayana practitioner of any of the three levels who has unimpaired samaya and therefore has faith and confidence in the Vajrayana practice.

With regard to the five mental afflictions, a distinction can be made between them. Attachment, aversion, pride, and jealousy are what we call “sporadic,” which is to say they arise and cease. Sometimes they are there, and sometimes they are not. The fifth, apathy or bewilderment, is more or less constant. It fluctuates in intensity, but there is always some degree of bewilderment present in your mind because bewilderment is symptomatic of ignorance. Despite this distinction, the following technique should be applied whenever you experience any of the five mental afflictions — in other words, when a thought arises that is fueled by one or more of the mental afflictions.

When such a thought arises, the first thing you do is recite the SVABHAVA mantra once. When you recite it, you think that this purifies the mental affliction and everything into emptiness. It is important to understand what is and what is not the true function of the recitation of this mantra. The meaning of the mantra is a statement designed to bring recollection of the true nature of all things, in other words, to recollect that all things are without substantial existence. The idea of reciting the mantra is to make you recollect the fact that the nature of all things is insubstantial. Do not think that the magical power of the mantra in some way destroys or literally dissolves all things or changes them. When you recite this mantra, you are not attempting to change phenomena; you are attempting to change your perception of them and replace a deluded perception of phenomena with a recollection of phenomena as they truly are.

After reciting the mantra, rest in the recollection of emptiness as best you can. If you actually rest in the recognition of emptiness, no thoughts will arise, and therefore no kleshas will arise because kleshas have to occur as thoughts. This state of rest will not last very long; therefore from within that state of emptiness, generate yourself as the deity. The deity that you generate yourself as corresponds to whichever mental affliction has arisen.

We need to understand the relationship between these deities, the buddhas of the five families, and the corresponding mental afflictions. These deities are not substitutes for the mental afflictions. You must not think that you have gotten rid of the mental afflictions and replaced them with something better. The understanding or view behind this practice of Secret Mantra is that the deities and the wisdoms they embody are the true nature of mental afflictions. Mental afflictions are experienced as mental afflictions only if we fail to see them as they are. When they are seen as they are, we see they are not inherently mental afflictions; they are the wisdoms that are embodied as the five buddhas. The visualization is done in order to acknowledge this.

The relationship between mental afflictions and the five buddhas or five wisdoms is very much like the relationship between ice and water. Ice is solid, but its nature is the same as water. We do not recognize ice as water because its appearance is different, but when the ice melts, you have water. In the same way, when the nature of a mental affliction is recognized, it is no longer experienced as a mental affliction. Therefore you visualize anger or aversion as Vajrasattva, pride as Ratnasambhava, attachment as Amitabha, jealousy as Amoghasiddhi, and bewilderment as Vairochana. Again, you are not clearing away the mental afflictions and replacing them with the deities; you are accurately

seeing what these mental afflictions really are when their nature is unveiled.

Visualize yourself as the appropriate deity, identifying that deity with the mental affliction. Mental afflictions are characterized as afflictions as opposed to wisdom because of their selfishness, so now you reverse that selfishness. For example, consider the first affliction, anger: the nature of anger is aggression toward others. Here you reverse that. If you are working with anger, visualize yourself as Vajrasattva and think that rays of light emanate from your body, purifying all of the anger and all of the other mental afflictions of all beings. By doing this visualization, which is altruistic and unselfish in intent, you neutralize the selfishness that otherwise causes the mental afflictions to be poison. You do this practice in the same way for all five mental afflictions, regardless of which one you are working with.

When the rays of light go out from your body visualized as the deity, they purify all of the five mental afflictions of all beings. This prevents beings from entering what are called the “five paths.” Here the five paths are not the good five paths of gradual progress toward awakening, but the unfortunate five paths to rebirth in the six realms. (The six realms are condensed into five to correspond to the five mental afflictions.) Rebirth in hell is the path or result of anger, rebirth as a preta is the path of greed

or desire, rebirth as an animal the path of apathy, rebirth as an asura the path of jealousy, and rebirth as a human or god the path of pride.

By removing the mental afflictions of all beings, think that you close the gates to those paths; in other words, you close the gates to rebirth in those realms. You close the gates in the sense that when you remove the cause of something, its result will not occur. As you do the visualization, think that from this time forward no being will ever be reborn in any of those realms. This is your aspiration. After that, think that the rays of light emanating from your form are withdrawn back into yourself, into you as that buddha, and then the rays of light simply dissolve into emptiness, which means they cease to be visualized. At that point, rest in even placement on emptiness for as long as appropriate. This is the meditation.

The postmeditation is sealing up your meditation with a particular aspiration. The aspiration is extremely important because all of the beneficial activity of buddhas arises from the aspirations they made while previously on the path. Make the aspiration that from this birth onward, throughout all of your future lifetimes, all beings that come into contact with you — who see you, hear you, or think of you — will be able to purify their mental afflictions, the five poisons. You also aspire that anyone

who has any contact with you be freed of mental affliction at the moment of contact.

This may sound grandiose, but it is important to make such far-reaching aspirations. Although we cannot fulfill these aspirations right now, making these aspirations will cause their fulfillment on our awakening. The ability that great enlightened teachers have to bestow liberation on being seen, heard, or thought of, comes from their having made these aspirations while training on the path.

You make the further aspiration, “When I come to attain perfect awakening, may the realm in which I attain it be utterly free of the five poisons.” This is similar to the aspiration made by the buddha Amitabha when he was a bodhisattva and first generated bodhichitta. Because Amitabha initially made the aspiration that the realm in which he attained buddhahood be utterly free from any kind of suffering, mental affliction, and so on, Sukhavati is the pure land that it is. The purity of realms such as Sukhavati and Abhirati comes from the aspirations that were made by the buddhas presiding in those realms when they were bodhisattvas. In the same way, if we make the aspiration that the realm of our eventual buddhahood be free not only of coarse mental afflictions but even the traces or names of them, this aspiration will cause that to occur. You can make these aspirations verbally or simply

think them, but in any case making them is very important for the reasons that have been explained.

The meaning behind all of this, and what makes all of this true and effective, is that the external environment is actually a palace. Palace here means that its nature is perfectly pure; it is not what we experience it to be. The actual nature of the environment experienced by any sentient being is always pure, in and of itself. It is as though it were made entirely of precious materials such as jewels, and contains all necessary resources, spontaneously present without having to be accomplished or created, and yet it is all insubstantial, made of light. Because we are afflicted by many varieties of ignorance, we experience the environment in many different ways. For example, beings in lower realms corresponding to their particular type of obscuration experience a realm as a particular type of — to say the least — unfriendly environment. If you are a hell being, you see the environment as being made entirely of molten metal engulfed in flames, utterly harmful, not beneficial or pleasant in any way. If you are a preta, you see it as being filled with unclean substances and devoid of any source of true nourishment.

Although we see the realm or environment in these ways, this is never what it is or what it ever has been. As ignorance is removed, there is a correspondingly purer and purer perception

of the environment around us, and when it is fully removed, the environment is seen as being utterly pure. In the same way, while in appearance beings such as ourselves seem so impure, so afflicted, and so full of suffering, our nature has never changed. Our nature itself has never been affected or afflicted by our bewilderment, and therefore our nature does not need liberation. Therefore the nature of any sentient being is beyond bewilderment and liberation. The true nature of beings is the yidam deity, any yidam deity.

This is how things truly are, and this is how they have always been. When you recollect this, when you bring your attitude toward things in line with how they really are, this is the pacification of bewilderment, ignorance, and apathy. Through starting to see things as they are, even just considering them to be what they truly are although you still cannot see it, you will pacify bewilderment. If you view or recognize all beings as really being the yidam deity, this will pacify attachment, because if as the yidam deity you are perfect and other beings are perfect, there is no preference to be made among them and no need for attachment to anything whatsoever.

When we say “yidam deity,” *deity* is not to be understood as being like a samsaric god, such as a god of the desire realm. The term *deity* here means that which is form and wisdom at the

same time; it is wisdom appearing as form. This is what we are in our true nature; this is what sentient beings truly are. If you understand this, or to the extent that you understand this, you will be free of attachment. Because if all beings are the deity, how could you become angry? Seeing beings in that way, there will be no reason to get irritated with other beings or speak harshly to them. And if all beings are the deity, then everyone is equal. There is no higher or lower status, and therefore no grounds for pride. If everyone is the same, there is also no basis for jealousy.

Through understanding the pure nature of the environment and the beings that inhabit the environment, the five poisons will automatically cease. This is the practice of the generation stage and how a practitioner of the generation stage works with mental afflictions from within the practices of Secret Mantra. From among the various ways of working with mental afflictions — relinquishing them, taming them, transforming them, recognizing their nature, and bringing them on the path — this is the third approach, which is transforming them. It does not mean transforming the affliction itself; it means transforming your perception of the affliction and everything else that has been explained.

Recognizing the Nature of the Five Poisons

Among the commitments of Secret Mantra is a set of five commitments or samayas called the “five things not to be abandoned.” Somewhat ironically, the five things not to be abandoned sound like the five mental afflictions. It is a commitment of Vajrayana not to abandon attachment, aversion, bewilderment, pride, and jealousy. The commandment not to abandon these may seem somewhat superfluous. After all, it seems that no one does abandon them. Does this mean that all beings are naturally ideal practitioners of Secret Mantra? Obviously it does not, because the concealed meaning in the commandment not to abandon these five things is not just that you shouldn’t abandon them, but that you must unveil their true nature.

As we have seen, according to Vajrayana the true nature of these mental afflictions is the five wisdoms or the five buddhas. The injunction not to abandon them means to recognize that without these five poisons, there are not five wisdoms. As we saw in the previous technique, we might think that the five poisons are removed and replaced by the five buddhas or the five wisdoms, but it is not like that at all. If you abandon the five poisons, if you give up on them and try to get rid of them, you will not discover any wisdom in their absence. In fact, the path of abandoning or repressing the five poisons is the path of

the Hinayana, the path of a shravaka. You cannot do that either in the Mahayana or the Vajrayana because according to both the Mahayana and Vajrayana, wisdom is found in the true nature of these mental afflictions.

You may ask, “If there is no wisdom apart from the mental afflictions, what is the difference between an ordinary person and someone who practices this?” The difference is that an ordinary person, a person without training, follows the mental afflictions in their poisonous or unrecognized state. Failing to recognize their true nature, we follow the commands of the mental afflictions, and this causes us to accumulate karma and be reborn in the six realms.

Even worse is if you misunderstand the injunction not to abandon the five poisons thinking it means to freely indulge them and to actually cultivate them; this is the activity of Mara. This is worse than a conventional samsaric being; this is the opposite of what is intended here, and this is how to get to places like vajra hell and other unmentionable environments. As long as you are dualistic, as long as the mental affliction arises as an interplay between you as a subject and something else as an object of attachment, aversion, or bewilderment, it is still mental affliction and not wisdom. If you indulge the affliction in its dualistic form, you will do something terrible.

What should you do? You are not supposed to abandon mental afflictions; you are not supposed to indulge them; you are not supposed to act them out. The only thing left is to look straight at them and their nature, not attempting to get rid of them and not attempting to indulge them. You simply look at them as they are. This is very different from indulging them. Indulging in a mental affliction is actually a way of avoiding its true substance. When you stop avoiding a mental affliction and look at it directly, you see its nature. By seeing its nature, it is self-liberated, which means that without you having to do anything to it, you see it as it is, and thus the wisdom that is the kernel or essence of the mental affliction is unveiled.

What we normally experience as anger, antipathy, hatred, and that entire group of related emotional states, we now see as mirrorlike wisdom and Vajrasattva in their essence. Here each of the mental afflictions is correlated not only with a buddha, but also with a wisdom. It may sound as if we are saying that each mental affliction is two different things, but in fact mirrorlike wisdom and Vajrasattva are synonymous.

What we call a “buddha” is the unity of expanse and wisdom. The term expanse refers to wisdom, the revealed nature. The embodiment of that wisdom is what, in the context of expanse and wisdom, is wisdom. From the point of view of the nature

that is recognized, anger is mirrorlike wisdom. From the point of view of the embodiment of that recognition, or the presence of that recognition, it is Vajrasattva. In the same way, when pride is seen as it truly is, it is the wisdom of equality, which is Ratnasambhava. Attachment or desire is the wisdom of discrimination, which is Amitabha. Self-liberated jealousy is the wisdom of accomplishment, which is Amoghasiddhi. Self-liberated apathy or bewilderment is the wisdom of the dharmadhatu, which is Vairochana.

In this approach you do not abandon, attempt to suppress, or get rid of mental afflictions; instead you look directly at their nature. In this way the mental afflictions are purified of your ignorance or misperception of them, and then without the afflictions going anywhere, they arise as the five wisdoms. If you do this, you spontaneously achieve the wisdom of the five victors, the buddhas of the five families, beyond the need to visualize them or attempt to accomplish them. You spontaneously achieve their wisdom by recognizing their indwelling presence within your mind. This is the practice of the Mahamudra and Great Perfection traditions, and this is the way these traditions teach us to deal with mental afflictions through recognition. This is like possessing one medicine that cures a hundred, a thousand, or a million different sicknesses. I do not know whether there is actually such

a physical medicine, but there is such a mental medicine, namely the recognition of the nature of mental afflictions.

Earlier I mentioned that Vajrayana practitioners basically come in three levels. You are of the highest level if you have the highest degree of discernment, the highest degree of diligence, and the greatest degree of training. If you have less, you are intermediate. If you have even less than that, you are more like a beginner. This technique will work for any of the three levels if it is diligently applied, but it will work in three different ways, so it is best to understand the three different ways in which this technique may be applied.

For one with the highest degree of training, their ability to respond to the appearance of a mental affliction will be quickest. As soon as a mental affliction arises to even the slightest extent, they can stamp it out right away because of their degree of training and mindfulness. Stamping it out does not mean abandoning it, which is what the path of the common vehicle teaches; here it means responding to the mental affliction with direct looking and recognition. This is an immediate response; for example, when the first spark of a tiny flame appears in a field of dry grass, you stamp on that spark before it becomes a real fire. This is what happens when this technique is applied by someone of the highest degree of training.

Someone of an intermediate degree of training will probably only be able to recognize the presence and therefore the nature of a mental affliction when the actual mental affliction has arisen. This is like the appearance of more than a spark, when there is actually a little bit of fire. For someone of the intermediate degree of training, when the actual mental affliction has arisen, you still look directly at it. Nothing else is necessary; it is simply that this direct looking occurs slightly later because the response time is not quite as quick as in the first case.

When the person looks directly and nakedly at the mental affliction, without prejudice, ideas, or filters of any kind, the mental affliction will be pacified through being seen as it is. It will therefore be self-liberated, and the person will directly see that the relationship between the mental affliction and wisdom is like the relationship between waves and water. We can distinguish between waves and water because waves are an upsurge on the surface of a body of water. Similarly mental afflictions are merely an upsurge or shape on the surface of the wisdom that is our mind's nature. Just as the nature of a wave is seen to be merely part of the ocean's water, something that will simply subside back into the ocean without needing to do anything to it, in the same way when the nature of a mental affliction is seen to be nothing other than the nature of the mind, the mental affliction naturally subsides back into the mind itself.

Someone of the least degree of training, but who is still an authentic practitioner of the Vajrayana, will only generate remedial mindfulness: the awareness of the arising of a mental affliction, and then the ability to be aware of its nature. This is the slowest response time. This is a little bit like becoming temporarily insane, and then afterward regaining your sanity and realizing that you were crazy when you said or did something earlier. It occurs after the fact, but nevertheless there is still a possibility for that person to look at the nature of the mental affliction.

This practice of recognizing the nature of mental afflictions is the most beneficial and most convenient form of practice that exists. If this practice is implemented, it is completely effective; and since there is always an opportunity for this practice, it is also very convenient. At this point Chakme Rinpoche says, “And I believe that I have been able to practice it to a slight extent.” He is saying that he is not simply repeating information about a tradition; this is not only something taught by the scholars and siddhas, something found in the sutras and tantras, but something he can verify from his own experience.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche concludes this section of the chapter on recognition with the injunction, “Therefore Tsonдру Gyamtso,” addressing Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso who requested the teachings in this book, “please practice that.” By saying, “please

practice that,” Chakme Rinpoche is actually saying quite a bit. By implication, he is saying that it is through this method that he achieved liberation in one life and one body. It is through this method that you will achieve buddhahood either in this life or in the bardo, so please practice it.

Bringing Mental Afflictions on the Path

There is one final section remaining in this chapter. Up to this point, there have been four: how to relinquish mental afflictions, how to tame them, how to transform them, and how to recognize them. Now we come to a fifth technique, which is even more profound than the recognition of mental afflictions. It is called “bringing them on the path” or “making them into the path.”

Unlike the preceding techniques, this is not something everyone can practice. To be able to bring mental afflictions on the path, you have to have some degree of attainment or siddhi. If you attempt to do so without having any attainment, it can actually be very dangerous. For example, a bird can jump out of its nest on the face of a cliff and safely soar down to the ground or fly up the surface of the cliff. If we attempted to do the same thing, we would find ourselves plummeting to the ground in a very sorry state.

Like the bird's ability to fly, if you can practice these techniques they are very elegant and profitable, they will bring great enhancement to your practice. Yet like the act of flight, if you lack wings, they are potentially very dangerous.

In the text Chakme Rinpoche actually says you are not supposed to teach this section. He says, "Conceal this from ordinary practitioners, who are unreceptive to it, and especially from those who might have antipathy toward it." While I cannot tell how receptive you may be to this teaching, I feel confident that you have no antipathy toward it simply because you are here of your own free will. This is, as we like to say, a free country. You chose to come here; therefore I presume you are interested in these teachings, and I further presume that you have no antipathy to them.

Nevertheless I must warn you that what follows is not something that an ordinary practitioner should attempt to practice. The techniques that have been presented in this chapter up to this point are all very effective, convenient, and easy to practice, and they are not regarded as dangerous. What follows is not easy to practice and is regarded as dangerous.

Bringing Bewilderment on the Path

Working with bewilderment or apathy consists of using the intense state of bewilderment, especially the state of sleep, to conquer bewilderment. In other words, you conquer bewilderment with itself.

In order to practice this, you need to be in an isolated situation, such as an isolated retreat. Indeed for this type of practice, retreat is considered to be most essential. The place needs to be clean, which means not merely physically clean in the mundane sense, but free of factors that are conducive to obscurations or spiritual contamination; ideally it should be a practice place consecrated by great masters of the past. It needs to be isolated and free of any kind of disturbance or dealings with other people.

You especially need to avoid any cause of spiritual contamination, principally the contamination that comes from partaking of unjustified offerings. If you think of the songs of Jetsun Milarepa, you may remember one in which he says, “My not partaking of offerings has allowed me to enjoy the food of the gods.” Partaking of offerings pertains to when you are given food or other means of sustenance in return for doing certain ritual observances and saying certain prayers, chiefly for those who have died but also for the living. There is no problem with this provided you fulfill

the expectations or wishes of those who gave you the offerings. If you say the prayers you are supposed to say with the proper motivation, and you actually achieve the result that the people who gave the food or other offerings wanted you to achieve, there is no obscuration.

The problem is that quite often you do not say the prayers, or you do not say them with the proper motivation, or they are not as successful as you might have wished. At this point you are partaking of offerings under false premises, and this is when it becomes a source of contamination. Every time you partake of offerings in that way, you obscure yourself further, which will definitely prevent any kind of realization. Therefore in this practice of using bewilderment to conquer bewilderment, you must at all costs avoid such situations and contamination.

Further, you must wash. This is more than simply the mundane act of washing, which we do all the time anyway. This means to ritually wash using vase water that has been consecrated using purification dharanis such as those of Vajravidharana. In addition you must burn incense. This is not done simply so that you have a nice smell in your practice place. It is done so that the substances in the incense, which must be the proper substances for this practice, will actually purify the environment

of obstructors, obstructive influences, and so forth. Also you must not see anyone else.

You begin this practice by performing a feast practice or ganachakra of your yidam. Obviously anyone who is doing this practice has already accomplished at least one yidam practice. You perform the practice in accordance with your own degree of affluence, offering as much as you can. In order to purify obscurations you would also recite as many times as you can the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva in connection with the Vajrasattva practice.

In order for the practice to be effective, you need to be very tired, so that you go into a state of deep sleep. Therefore throughout the day you have to make sure you do not nap or fall asleep even for a moment. You do many things, not only to keep yourself awake, but also to be so active that you become physically exhausted. You emphasize physical practices such as prostrations, circumambulation and so on, ensuring that you do enough of these so you become physically tired. At night when you go to sleep, sleep on a comfortable mattress or cushion. Do not sleep in an ordinary posture, but in the sleeping posture of a lion, which is the posture adopted by the Buddha on his parinirvana.

Prepare for sleep as follows. First, do not conceive of yourself in your ordinary form, but visualize yourself as your yidam. A practitioner who has reached this level would already have accomplished a yidam. Depending on their tradition, it might vary; in the Karma Kagyu tradition, it would principally be Vajravaraḥi. Visualizing yourself in this form, think that in the midst of your heart is a fourpetaled lotus, and above the center there is a white OM, above the eastern petal a blue AH, above the southern one a yellow NU, above the western one a red TA, and above the northern one a green RA.

Maintain that general visualization of the lotus and syllables in your heart. Because you are so tired, you quickly start to fall asleep. The trick here — and you will see why this cannot be done by a beginning practitioner — is to fall fully asleep without losing consciousness. As you start to fall asleep, which means as your physical senses and physical body go to sleep, transfer your attention first from the whole visualization, then to each of the syllables in turn — the AH, the NU, the TA, the RA — and finally direct your attention one-pointedly on the OM in the middle of the lotus. As you retain that one-pointed focus, adjust the degree of exertion so that you do not lose focus and you do not lose consciousness, but you are relaxed enough to physically fall fully asleep.

You must also remain in a state of recognition of your mind's nature, so not only are you conscious, but you are consciously aware of the mind's nature. Whenever anyone goes to sleep, not only someone doing this practice but whenever any of us go to sleep, the eight consciousnesses are all withdrawn into one. By the eight consciousnesses we mean the five sense consciousnesses, the sixth consciousness (the mental consciousness, the process of thought), the seventh consciousness (the mental afflictions), and the eighth consciousness (the all-basis consciousness). They withdraw into one and stop being present as separate functions of mind.

Once the eight consciousnesses are withdrawn into one, when you first enter the state of deep dreamless sleep, your mind briefly enters the central channel — this is something that occurs whenever anyone goes to sleep. When this happens, the state of luminosity, the clear light, appears. Because we are normally unconscious when we are deeply asleep, we do not consciously experience this and therefore we do not recognize it. The purpose in this practice is to enter that state of deep sleep and full withdrawal of the senses and other consciousnesses without losing consciousness or awareness, and thereby experience the clear light or luminosity when it naturally arises.

Once you have fully entered the state of deep sleep, when the clear light arises you remain in even placement in the experience of the clear light. If you are successful, if you go to sleep without losing consciousness and therefore recognize the clear light when it first appears as you start to enter deep sleep, you will remember this experience the next morning when you awake. This is the grasping, or recognition, or conscious experience of the clear light in light sleep. This means that although you are entering a state of deep sleep, this experience happens at the beginning while you are in a fairly light state of sleep. You did not lose consciousness before the recognition.

Sometimes it does not happen in this way. You can practice the technique and be successful to some extent, but the experience of the clear light does not happen at the beginning of the state of sleep. Sometimes you remain mindful of the practice, the visualization and so forth, as you are going to sleep, but as soon as you actually fall asleep you lose consciousness. The technique is still working because you did not allow any other thought to occur in between the meditation and unconsciousness. Your last thought was the visualization, but you were not able to maintain consciousness as your body fell into sleep.

Nevertheless because you went to sleep in the state of practice, even though you could not maintain it after falling asleep and

therefore became unconscious, no dreams arise. As soon as you awake, you find that you are spontaneously within a direct experience of your mind's nature. Also you find that you are cheerful and even a little exhilarated, and you feel physically and mentally light and lustrous. You do not know what happened; you do not remember whether you recognized or experienced the clear light or not.

According to Lord Gampopa, this is called “grasping or recognizing the clear light within deep sleep.” Because you actually lost consciousness before you experienced the clear light, you do not have a conscious memory of it, but the fact that no dreams whatsoever occurred indicates that you recognized it.

Apparently Lord Gampopa made this statement in reference to a dream he had. Once he dreamed that he had a baby, and he cut off the baby's head. When he did so, he heard the words, “You will now undergo no more rebirth.” That was the last dream he ever had; he never dreamed again. The symbolism of Lord Gampopa cutting off the baby's head represented the termination of the subtle conceptuality that produces dreams. After that point, sleep for him was simply the state of the clear light or luminosity. This is similar to what we referred to as the recognition of the clear light in deep sleep.

Bringing Attachment On The Path

Bringing attachment or desire on the path essentially involves four different practices that are called the “four seals” or “four mudras.” These are four different ways to bring desire on the path, and they are designed for four different types of individuals, as will become clear.

The first of the four seals or mudras is the karma mudra, or “action seal.” Karma mudra refers to an authentic or qualified consort for the practice of karma mudra. There is a problem concerning who can actually practice this; you should not practice this unless you have attained one of the ten bodhisattva levels and therefore have the ability to display miracles. If you rely on a consort and you have not attained one of the **bhumis**, then if you have taken the the monastic vows of the vinaya, you are in violation of those vows. Through violating your vows, you will be reborn in a lower realm.

Unless they have subsequently attained the state of a bodhisattva, anyone who has taken either the novitiate or full monastic ordination is not allowed to practice karma mudra. If you have not taken the novitiate or full monastic ordination and you are therefore an upasaka or lay disciple, you may practice the karma mudra, provided that you have gained full control over the chan-

nels and winds. Someone who has full control over their channels and winds while living as a layperson is called a “householder,” “vajraholder,” or sometimes an “upasaka vajraholder.” This is not as common as it might sound because of what we mean by the phrase “full control over the channels and winds.”

We need to ask, “Who can really do this?” A historical example of those considered capable of doing the practice of karma mudra properly are tertons or treasure revealers, who have appeared throughout Tibetan Buddhist history. Generally speaking they find their authentic mudra or consort through prophecy. Through the discoveries they make, their appropriate consort is predicted by Guru Rinpoche, and through relating to that consort, the terton is able to complete further discoveries. Thus treasure revealers are one set of people for whom this practice is appropriate.

The second set of individuals for whom karma mudra is appropriate is the holders of the great family lineages. Family lineages are based on the principle that if an enlightened being has a child, another enlightened being might be born as their child, and therefore an authentic family lineage will be upheld or created. The historical examples of this include the glorious Sakya tradition, where the lineage is transmitted from the parents to the children based on the principle that the children

are also liable to be awakened beings because of the wisdom or awakening of the parents.

Another famous example of this is the family lineage of the Mindrolling tradition, exemplified by His Holiness Minling Trichen Rinpoche, the head of the Nyingma school. The Kyura family lineage of the Drikung Kagyu is another example as well. For those rare individuals, the practice of karma mudra is an appropriate way to take desire on the path.

The second method and second mudra is called samaya mudra. Samaya mudra is less restrictive in terms of who can practice it. Because samaya mudra does not involve sexual activity, it can be practiced by upasakas, novices, or fully ordained monastics. Essentially samaya mudra is the practice of chandali or tummo. Through meditation you cause warmth or heat to generate in your body, which causes an increase of bodhichitta. As bodhichitta increases, sexual desire naturally arises, and therefore the practice is not without danger. The arising of sexual desire during the practice of tummo is called the “time of desire within tummo.” It is a critical and dangerous stage of this practice. At this point it is essential for the practitioner to seal the experience of desire or bliss with the recognition of emptiness, which means there must be some recognition of emptiness. If the practitioner succeeds in recognizing emptiness, they mix the experience of

bliss with the experience of emptiness such that they have some degree of realization of bliss-emptiness. Although this practice is less restrictive than karma mudra, it is also demanding and somewhat restricted.

Further, when you practice samaya mudra, you must keep your bodhichitta, or bindu, completely unimpaired. You must not lose even a mustard seed's worth of bodhichitta. You must guard it as you would your life because once you allow it to be impaired to even the slightest degree, you have violated the samaya — and this is what gives samaya mudra its name — and the practice becomes utterly worthless.

Samaya mudra (or tummo or chandali) is practiced by all the traditions of Vajrayana, including the Kagyu, Geluk, Sakya, and Nyingma traditions. Principally it is the approach taken by the Dakpo Kagyu, including the Karma Kagyu, in dealing with bringing desire on the path. It is the basis of the practice of the six dharmas of Naropa.

The third mudra is called the jnana mudra, or “wisdom mudra.” This is essentially classified as a mental or imagined seal. It consists of visualizing oneself as a deity in sexual union with another deity. One purpose of this is to induce a realization of the nature of bliss, which brings enhancement to one's path.

The fourth and final mudra is called mahamudra, the “great seal.” This consists of taking your mind itself as the seal. Normally we would not consider the mind to be either a consort or a seal. The reason why it fulfills the same function in both cases is because your mind is emptiness, which in this context is called “mahamudra.” The realization of emptiness is the source of all realizations. The mind’s nature is somewhat realized by shravaka arhats, partially realized by pratyekabuddhas, well realized by bodhisattvas, and completely realized by buddhas. Therefore this nature — emptiness or mahamudra or prajnaparamita or the nature of your mind, whatever you wish to call it — is like the mother of all buddhas of the three times, and it is the mother or source of the four superiors: the two types of arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. It is the ultimate seal or the ultimate consort as well.

The practice of mahamudra is both the greatest and most profound of the practices of the four mudras, and it is also the most convenient to practice because it involves no external methods. It is also the least restricted in terms of who can practice it. Therefore mahamudra can be relied on by anyone of any age, even those who are practicing at an age when it is difficult to pursue the physical disciplines of subduing the channels and winds.

Those four methods, the four mudras or seals, are how to take desire on the path. Nevertheless, when the term taking desire on the path is used, it needs to be understood that the desire taken on the path is not the affliction of desire. It is what we would call “apparent desire” or something that appears in the circumstances of desire. In spite of the term, you are not literally using a klesha. You are using a similitude, or something that resembles that klesha. It is a little bit like using fire to burn brush and debris in order to cleanse a field.

Bringing Anger on the Path

This is equally true with our next topic, which is taking anger or aversion on the path. Again, in spite of the fact you are taking anger on the path, you are not literally working with anger. When you do the practices mentioned here, the text makes clear that they are not done in a state of anger. The practices consist of our relationship with anger, but they must not be done in a state of anger or they will be utterly ineffective.

The practices that are concerned with taking anger on the path are the practices of liberation. In this case, *liberation* means to abruptly liberate someone else’s consciousness. This does not refer to physically attacking them with a weapon such as a gun

or a sword, or by poisoning them. It refers to liberating them from their present existence with the power of your realization and the power of forceful mantra. In order to do this practice at all, you obviously need to have realization and you need to have mastered the power of forceful mantra.

Furthermore, you are not allowed to just go around liberating anyone in this way. There are ten criteria, and the object of liberation must be one of the ten objects corresponding to these ten criteria. In other words, there has to be a very good reason for this person to be liberated. They have to be someone who will continue to harm many beings if left alone on their present course, and someone who will definitely go to the lower realms if they die naturally. The principal reason for liberating someone with this type of intervention is the wish to prevent them from harming themselves and others; therefore your motivation must be compassionate.

The ten objects include those who attempt, successfully or unsuccessfully, to destroy the Buddha's teachings; those who attempt to damage or assassinate the sangha; those who attempt to kill or otherwise harm one's guru; those who attempt to impede the transmission of one's lineage; and those who attempt to harm many beings in some major way. Especially among the ten objects are those who have received empowerments, transmissions, and

instructions, but have subsequently turned against the guru and the teachings and actively attempt to harm them. Such persons are fit objects for this type of intervention.

If someone is your enemy but does not fit into any of the ten categories, then regardless how much they hate you and how much you hate them, you are absolutely not allowed to do anything about it. You simply have to be patient. If someone fits one of the ten criteria and is therefore fit for intervention, it is not necessarily the case that you are allowed to perform the intervention. First, you obviously must have the ability to do this. Second, you have to receive permission to do it. In other words, you are not allowed to make a judgment call on your own. You must perform the intensive practice of your yidam, including the rituals of confession, purification, and so on until you receive a decisive indication from that yidam — at least in your dreams, and at best in an actual vision — as to whether intervention is or is not appropriate. Unless you receive positive assurance from the deity that intervention is called for, even if the person qualifies as being one of the ten objects, you are still not allowed to do anything. According to the tantras connected with Mahakali, these are the basic prerequisites for the act of ngönchö or “direct action.”

If someone is attempting to destroy the Buddha's teachings in general, and you have the ability to liberate them and you don't do it because they are your friend, you are breaking samaya. (Note that they must be attempting to destroy the teachings in general — if they are destroying one part of the Buddha's teachings but greatly helping another part, you are not allowed to do anything.) The samaya you break is the tenth of the fourteen root downfalls. The tenth samaya is broken when, due to apathy or because someone is your friend, you fail to bring them to immediate liberation even though you have the power to liberate them and they are in one of the ten categories of those to be liberated through direct intervention. If you can liberate them and they are fit objects for it, you must do it.

There are several other situations where you do not have to do it. For example, you do not have to do it if the person is an emanation and not an actual sentient being. Sometimes the emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas can behave in ways that seem terribly destructive, but if you had a greater view of the situation you would see that their actions will create tremendous good in the long run. Therefore if the person is not a human being but an emanation, you do not have to intervene. You are also not required to intervene if someone who upholds the teachings is better able to deal with the situation than you are. Finally, if like most of us you are simply unable to perform

this type of intervention, there is no downfall in not doing it; you are not breaking samaya by not intervening.

Further, even if you are required to liberate someone, the motivation with which you do it must not be anger or hatred. Performing an intervention out of anger will not work because the motivation has to be compassionate. Your motivation must be the desire to stop this sentient being from committing further wrongdoing, and you do this to benefit the being who is committing these acts as well as benefit those affected by the wrongdoing. You must do it to lead this sentient being to a state of happiness, to lead them to a state of higher rebirth, and to allow the Buddha's teachings to flourish without impediment. When all the qualifications and requirements are met — you have the ability not only to terminate the person's present existence but also to liberate their consciousness, they are a fit object for liberation, and you can do it with compassion as your motivation — then you do it with the application of forceful mantra.

It is important to understand the role of compassion in this regard. For example, in the *Vajrakumara Tantra* it says, "Liberation is effected through compassion and motivated by bodhichitta." The intervention will not work if you do it out of anger. The actual power of the intervention comes from your bodhichitta,

your wish to truly liberate and not merely terminate that being's consciousness.

When you perform the act of liberation, think that you offer that person's body, the aggregate of flesh and blood, to all of the deities and protectors. It is not that the deities and protectors particularly want flesh and blood; the purpose of offering the body like this is that the person will gather the accumulations at the time of their passing. Then without physical intervention you send their consciousness to a pure realm at best, or a higher realm at least.

The reason why this is called "liberation" rather than simply killing or destruction is that you are liberating the person's consciousness. Further, because you have established a connection with them through this act of liberation, they will remain connected with you life after life and they will be your disciple. When you liberate the person's consciousness, you have a perennial responsibility for their spiritual welfare. Therefore when you perform the intervention, your intention is to gradually lead them to perfect buddhahood.

To give you a historical example of this, during the time of Arya Nagarjuna there was a tirthika wanderer named Surya, or Sun. He disliked the Buddha's teachings intensely; he hated

Buddhadharma so much that he spent twelve years meditating on the sun with his eyes squeezed shut. Meditating on the sun basically means cultivating some kind of samadhi of fire. When arhats and bodhisattvas cultivate the samadhi of fire, they gain the ability to change their appearance into a mass of fire, but they do not burn or hurt anybody. This fellow, however, was doing it in order to gain the ability to project heat as a weapon. He meditated on the sun for twelve years, never opening his eyes, and once he gained the ability he wanted, he went to the Vajrasana in Bodhgaya, where there were many Buddhist monasteries and especially great Buddhist libraries. In a state of great anger, he opened his eyes and looked at the Buddhist monasteries and libraries. Flames shot out of his eyes, and he burned down all of the Buddhist monasteries and libraries. He had become a great Rudra of the teachings; in other words, a great problem.

In order to prevent further problems, the great being Arya Nagarjuna prayed to many dharmapalas, or dharma protectors, to terminate the situation. Nothing happened; no signs of success arose. Finally Nagarjuna requested the intervention of the protector Vaishravana. Vaishravana quickly appeared to Nagarjuna carrying Surya's heart, which indicated that Surya had passed from this life, and Nagarjuna praised Vaishravana as being the chief among the protectors on that occasion.

The story is valuable because of what happened to Surya after Nagarjuna killed him through Vaishravana's compassionately motivated intervention. Surya was reborn in Tibet as a man named Khon Luyi Wangpo. He was the first of the Khon family, which we now know as the Sakya tradition, a great lineage holder of the Dharma. Because of Nagarjuna's intervention, far from falling into the lower realms, Surya was reborn as a Buddhist mahasiddha and great scholar who founded one of the greatest traditions of Buddhism that exists to this day.

Chakme Rinpoche says that the ability to liberate the consciousness of someone under those circumstances is the actual instruction for taking aversion or anger on the path. However he says that we have to make a distinction between the ability to terminate someone's existence through forceful mantra and the ability to actually liberate them. You need to have both abilities in order to do this.

Let us say that through whatever form of practice you have gained the ability to terminate someone's existence, but you do not have the ability to control what happens to the person's consciousness after death. In that case what you are doing is no different than killing them because you are not liberating them and you are not doing them any good. According to the vinaya, this is the same as killing because in the vinaya it says, "to kill

or cause to die.” Either one is a full violation of the vow not to kill. Therefore if you do this and you do not have the ability to send the person’s consciousness to a pure realm or at least a higher realm, you are simply a murderer.

Chakme Rinpoche says, “Do not be too delighted with magic and do not use magic to perform wrongdoing.” Here he is addressing individuals such as ngakpas who become excessively interested in the acquisition of magical power for its own sake, and who might be tempted to use this magical power although they are not really able to benefit beings. Furthermore he says it is largely unnecessary to consciously take action with some kind of intervention. He writes, “If someone has pure samaya, is diligent in the practice of approach and accomplishment (the stages of a yidam or protector practice), and performs the regular offering of torma, such as the daily dedication of torma (for example, the Mahakala practice performed every evening at KTD), the nine-day observance (the monthly offering of torma on the twenty-ninth day of every month and at the end of the year), and in supplication and fulfillment practices; if someone is diligent in them, then even without their intentionally engaging in an intervention, without ever focusing on a person in a negative way, and thinking that this person must be liberated, many signs of the result of intervention will be apparent.”

In other words, it is quite common for these situations to resolve themselves through your pure samaya and diligent practice, without you consciously engaging in direct intervention. If the timely liberation of someone who is attempting to destroy the Buddha's teachings occurs without you requesting the intervention of a deity or a protector, this is considered to be a sign of pure samaya and a sign of the deities and protectors surrounding you. When this happens, you are not at fault. You have never thought with anger that you wished so-and-so would be terminated and liberated; it just simply happened, so you have not intentionally done anything about it. Chakme Rinpoche says here, "I have experienced this myself, time and time again." In other words, in Chakme Rinpoche's experience it is quite common for these things to work out without the pursuit of direct intervention.

He continues, "About this point, this is how I see it." Here we have reached the very heart of the matter. If you do not engage in direct intervention or apply forceful mantra, but instead you get angry with this destructive person and think that you hate them and wish they would just go away, your anger will not make anything happen. Your wish that something bad will happen to them, your antipathy and aversion toward them, will prevent the correct resolution of the situation. However if you never give rise to anger or hatred no matter how much the other person harms you and the teachings, then in a timely fashion various

unpleasant things will naturally happen to them in accordance with how much they have harmed the teachings and holders of the teachings. Chakme Rinpoche says, “I have seen this many times in my own experience, not merely once, but many times.”

Ironically, any anger we have toward our enemies empowers them and allows them to continue to harm us. The early tertön Guru Chökyi Wangchuk experienced this. When he was being persecuted, he attempted to prevent the persecution through applying different types of magical ceremonies, cultivating magical power, dispatching offerings, and so on. Yet no matter how much he did this, nothing happened. There were no signs of any alleviation of the persecution. Yet when he gave up on these practices and just meditated on love and compassion for his persecutors, they were destroyed. Destroyed here does not necessarily mean they died. It means they either became inactive or their minds and attitudes changed; in any case, the situation was changed in a beneficial way.

Surprised by this, in a vision he asked Guru Rinpoche why he was unsuccessful when he tried to perform magical intervention, but the situation was alleviated when he simply meditated on compassion. Guru Rinpoche told him that when we feel aversion toward our enemies and attachment and yearning for our friends, this is a sign that our minds are overpowered by the

appearances of things. Once that happens, none of your wishes will be accomplished because everything has gone wrong from the start. When you have no aversion for your enemies but instead have only love and compassion for them, you are bringing appearances — such as the appearance of someone being your enemy — under the power of your mind. Through this, your wishes will be accomplished. Chakme Rinpoche says that this appears to be the view of the Kagyu lineage on this question of direct intervention; this is not to say that everyone in the Kagyu lineage has always taken this approach, but rather that it is the general approach taken.

Further, if you lack supercognition, which here means the ability to know the future completely, you cannot engage in direct intervention for the simple reason that even though someone may be harming the teachings and sentient beings at the present time, if left alone they might later perform great benefit for the teachings and sentient beings. Thus unless you know the future completely, you cannot engage in direct intervention.

From the point of view of the sutras, the Three Jewels are indestructible; they cannot be harmed. Therefore the sutras state that even if we just bring the Three Jewels to mind, we will be protected from all harm. Within the different vehicles, we find various views on harmers or enemies. From the point of view

of the common vehicle or the Hinayana, enemies that harm the teachings are referred to as “Mara and enemies of the teachings.” Therefore when someone is harmful to the Buddha’s teachings, according to the common vehicle we take the view that they are what they seem to be.

From the point of view of the Mahayana, we usually consider those who apparently harm the Buddha’s teachings as emanations of the Buddha that appear in order to reveal the greatness of the teachings. One example of this is Devadatta; from a historical point of view and from the point of view of the common vehicle, we would refer to him as a monarch among maras. He attempted to assassinate the Buddha on several occasions, he attempted to take over the sangha, and so on. Yet we have seen that according to the Buddha’s own statement, the Buddha attained buddhahood early because he had to put up with Devadatta lifetime after lifetime. Therefore Devadatta was of incomparable kindness to Buddha Shakyamuni, and it is because of Devadatta that Buddha Shakyamuni attained awakening before Maitreya.

Another example in Tibetan history is King Langdarma. He was a king in the late ninth and early tenth centuries who persecuted Buddhist teachers in Tibet. He is often referred to as the Mara King, or the demonic king. For seventy years he oppressed Buddhadharma in Tibet and almost wiped it out; he emptied

the monasteries, forbade ordination, and so on. If we simply look at him historically, we would say that he was bad, with nothing good about him at all. However according to Karma Chakme Rinpoche, who here quotes the Kadam tradition, he was actually of tremendous kindness to the Buddha's teachings. During King Langdarma's reign a lot of Dharma practice had become perverted and corrupt due to misunderstanding of Secret Mantra, or Vajrayana, and this corruption was flourishing. Through King Langdarma's persecution of Buddhism, the corrupt tradition of Buddhism that flourished during his reign was wiped out, so his persecution actually purified the Buddhist tradition. Then after King Langdarma's reign Atisha — who was like the second Buddha — came to Tibet, and according to the Kadam tradition, from that time onward the pure teachings of the Buddha flourished in Tibet. This view of Langdarma's reign was taught by the great Ngok Lotsawa and other teachers influenced by the Kadam tradition.

The point is that even when someone seems like the worst enemy of the Buddha's teachings, you cannot be sure that direct intervention is appropriate because you do not know what the effect of their actions is going to be in the long run.

Bringing Pride on the Path

According to the sutras, in the common vehicle you bring pride on the path by seeing your mind as somehow unclean and afflicted. During the meditation on the unpleasant, you see your body as especially impure, compounded of impure substances like flesh, blood, and so on. In the uncommon vehicle of the Mahayana, above and beyond seeing your mind and body as unclean, you generate bodhichitta and practice the six perfections. Yet even if you are someone of the highest capacity, if you follow the Mahayana path you cannot attain buddhahood in a period shorter than three periods of ten to the power of 59 (1059) aeons, an aeon being the duration of a universe.

In the tradition of Secret Mantra or Vajrayana, it is said you can attain buddhahood in one life and one body. This is true because of its profound method of recognizing your body as a deity; this method is what makes the path of the Vajrayana distinct and so extraordinarily effective. You might ask, “In what sense is my body a deity?” According to the Buddhist tradition, everything you are consists of the aggregates, the elements, and the senses (skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas). The true nature of your five aggregates is the **five male buddhas**; the true nature of the five elements (earth, water, fire, wind, and space) is the **five female buddhas**; and the true nature of the eight consciousnesses and the

objects of those consciousnesses (such as the objects of the senses and so forth) are the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas.

It is not a question of imagining this; the point is to acknowledge that this is what your being truly is. With that recognition or acknowledgment, you adopt the pride that thinks, “I actually am the deity; as the deity I am actually supreme in this world. Because my nature is perfect, I am as good as anyone.” Through having stable pride or confidence that you are the deity, you receive the deity’s blessing quite quickly. This is how to take pride on the path.

Bringing Jealousy on the Path

The final section is taking jealousy on the path. In many practices, rays of light emanate from the heart of yourself as the deity and absorb everything that is good, such as all the longevity and merit throughout the universe, and then dissolve all these good things into you. Also, in the practices of protection where you wish to protect someone else or reverse disaster, you think that all the obstructive forces that threaten you and others are bound and destroyed, the deities are fed their flesh and blood, and they are imprisoned under a tortoise vessel the weight and size of Mount Meru and the four continents. In short, all of these practices in

which you absorb the quintessence of the universe into yourself or those you wish to benefit, as well as those practices in which you protect yourself and others from harm, are a way of taking jealousy on the path.

In this chapter, five approaches have been taught with regard to the five poisons; therefore it is called a “chapter of five times five.” You can relinquish the five poisons, you can tame them, you can transform them, you can recognize the nature of the five poisons, or you can bring them on the path. Those are the five ways of working with any of the five poisons.

The chapter concludes, “These instructions of five groups of five, whatever I could remember on the subject, was written on the second day of the Thakar month in the Horse Year in the morning session by Raga Asya; it was written down as dictation by Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso. If there is anything in this that contradicts the tantras and authoritative texts, I apologize to the learned upholders of the textual tradition. Through the virtue of this, may many newly ordained monastics find their minds in accordance with the Dharma.”

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: When someone harms another person, is it always based on previous karma, or could it be new karma being created?

RINPOCHE: The harmful action could stem from previous karma, or it could arise through the current circumstances. Determining whether a harmful act was precipitated by previous karma or by circumstances is only possible for a buddha; as for ourselves, we cannot say.

The resulting karma also depends on the motivation of the person who is responsible for accumulating the karma and perpetrating the harm. If the person premeditated the harmful act for some time with the intention, “I am going to hurt someone,” and then actually followed through with it, they would suffer the results of that action for hundreds of lifetimes to come. On the other hand, if the person had no intention of harming anyone, but due to adventitious circumstances they somehow happened to cause harm, the fully ripened result would be far less severe.

STUDENT: If a person totally gets rid of ego, attachment, and desires, and if they do so without any knowledge of Buddhism, is that person enlightened?

RINPOCHE: If such a person could actually get rid of all those things it would be wonderful; I myself have never heard of such a thing.

STUDENT: Does Shantideva have a presence in the here and now, the way that Guru Rinpoche has?

RINPOCHE: Yes. He can hear whatever we say. That is how he was able to fly up into the sky, too.

STUDENT: I've always really admired Shantideva, but I find it hard to be like him because I don't want people to think I'm stupid or lazy. I'm attached to people thinking I'm really industrious and smart and good. What to do?

RINPOCHE: Shantideva was not like that. Right from the beginning he studied with other teachers, and through actively learning and thinking about the Dharma he became a great and learned scholar. Nevertheless the whole time he was doing this, his meditation practice was to continually remain — regardless of the passage of day and night — within the experience of the clear light. For our purposes, we can also understand this as resting within the state of even placement in mahamudra. For others who observed Shantideva's behavior outwardly, it seemed as though he did nothing but sleep. What he was really doing

was sustaining the continuity of the qualities arising through his meditation experience, and in that way attained siddhi.

STUDENT: That is hard for me because; I want everybody to know I'm really smart. I don't want people to think I'm lazy or stupid.

RINPOCHE: This would be an indication that you have not yet actually realized the true nature of mind as Shantideva did. Because Shantideva achieved and was remaining in authentic realization of the nature of mind, it would have made no difference to him whether people criticized him or praised him. Having already accomplished genuine realization of the nature of his own mind, he was as free as a bird in the sky.

STUDENT: I guess the heart of my question is, what do we do about very strong kleshas? I have certain kleshas, and they don't seem to go away. They're just as strong as they were when I took refuge.

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is why we cannot just sleep or sit around all the time. Apart from the worldly work and responsibilities we have to attend to, we need to engage in practice as much as possible.

STUDENT: You mentioned that Shantideva was doing clear light practice. Could you kindly say something about that?

RINPOCHE: I cannot say anything in terms of what Shantideva's personal experience was like. He learned the methods from his master Nagarjuna, then implemented them through meditation during his time at Nalanda University. While Shantideva did this, he remained continually immersed in the nature of mind, regardless of day or night. Unlike us he probably had no need to pay attention to any specific type of meditation practice. This is why I do not really know what his experience was like for him. The account of his life comes to us from literature, but he was the one actually living this out, and he did so with great exertion. Through his technique of cultivation, he perfected the qualities of the bodhisattva paths and stages.

STUDENT: What do you do about the really bad kleshas such as the people that you never get along with, people that you really hate? You think you're trying really hard to be nice, but the kleshas are so strong you almost enjoy continuing the fight.

RINPOCHE: I am not sure that the problem is necessarily the strength of whatever kleshas are involved, such as pride or confusion. I can say this is a clear indication that bodhichitta is not being sufficiently implemented here.

STUDENT: Do you think this is a problem of pride? Wanting to be better than the other person and wanting to fight because you want to prove that you are better?

RINPOCHE: I do not know for certain if what you are talking about is pride or not. In general we can say that pride involves the idea of oneself being in a higher position relative to someone else. Assuming that one understands and is properly practicing Dharma, if the purpose behind the sense of pride is to strive for excellence and improve oneself in whatever ways are necessary in order to benefit sentient beings, then pride is good. On the other hand, if one entertains notions like, “I am better than this other person; I deserve more attention, and I should be better liked by more people,” then that is definitely a mundane, worldly kind of pride.

STUDENT: I have had some interesting experiences dealing with irrational people — which of course has nothing to do with me! I need to know something more about skillful means in dealing with people in powerful positions, people who are powerful in my life. I have a lot of fear involved concerning one particular person, and I have been told to do Chenrezik, and so I do Chenrezik on the bus, because that’s the only time I have to do it. Still, I never know what to expect with this person, and

I don't know what skillful means I should use. I actually prayed to have compassion for her.

RINPOCHE: It is excellent to pray to Chenrezik for the benefit of other people. When we find ourselves in the midst of unwanted karmic situations or predicaments, when we are in the face of great adversity and conflict, we may very well be unable to do anything else.

We experience all kinds of hardship in our present lifetime as a result of negative karma accumulated in previous lifetimes. These problems are likely to be further intensified in the immediate moment or in the next lifetime, because feelings such as animosity, pride, and jealousy will flare up when the conditions are conducive in your present circumstances.

When you pray to Chenrezik and recite his mantra, the positive force of your actions works to purify negative karma. Furthermore the qualities of the merit generated through making aspiration prayers will lead to the future accomplishment of harmonious conditions, and that will contribute toward your eventual completion of gathering the accumulation of merit. This is why praying to and meditating on Chenrezik is really the best thing that you can do.

STUDENT: After the last time I did that, I actually felt the Dharma interceding on my behalf, almost like a physical presence. It was very unique and interesting and profound, and I cried with gratitude.

RINPOCHE: That is very good, and it indicates that you have a deep sense of trust in Dharma.

STUDENT: I do, but I'm also thinking that maybe an exorcism chant would be helpful.

RINPOCHE: Something like an exorcism is not going to help. I would recommend that you just stay with yidam deity practice. If you have a blazing fire and you start dousing it with water, gradually you will be able to bring the fire under control and extinguish it. But if you add oil, the fire will only flare up even more.

STUDENT: Thank you. Also, I used to have a wrong view; before I heard the Buddhist teachings, I thought it didn't matter what I thought because thoughts don't have a concrete existence.

RINPOCHE: If you no longer entertain this idea, then whatever karma you might have accumulated while subscribing to that notion will gradually be exhausted through the practice of virtue. As long as you do not uphold that view anymore, you will not

accumulate any such karma in the future. In terms of body, speech, and mind, thoughts are the most significant, because whatever unvirtuous actions we might engage in with any of those three gates always originate with thought.

STUDENT: What if you had wrongful thoughts but you did not act on them?

RINPOCHE: As long as you do not act on negative thoughts, there is little implication in terms of obscuration or wrongdoing. Once you are actually involved in harmful activity, then it becomes more serious.

STUDENT: If there is such a thing as ghosts, would you consider them in the **hungry ghost realm** or in the human realm?

RINPOCHE: There are ghosts in the human realm. We can speak of two types of ghosts: those that live collectively and haunt a certain location, and those that are widely scattered. The latter group, the wandering spirits, are in a state of inconceivable anguish and misery, and because of this they will attempt to inflict harm on other sentient beings, even though there may be no specific reason for directing their malevolence in this way. Many encounters with ghosts are of this variety, although it should be understood that not all instances of such harmful or

damaging activity are perpetrated by ghosts — there are other forces that may be responsible.

STUDENT: Are insects part of the animal realm?

RINPOCHE: Yes, they are included within the animal realm.

STUDENT: Please tell me a little more about the demigod realm. Do they do anything else beside fight all the time? Do they have other emotions such as happiness or love? Do they have any friends?

RINPOCHE: The demigods or asuras are physically enormous compared to humans. The difference in size is sometimes said to be a mile, or alternatively an asura's upper body is similar in size to about four hundred human forms. They undergo all kinds of experiences: happiness, suffering, hatred, afflictions of all kinds. In comparative terms, the asuras have a greater degree of prosperity than we humans do, but the devas enjoy greater comfort and prosperity than the asuras. Through seeing this disparity the asuras suffer, because they are constantly jealous of the devas. They are compelled by intense greed, but despite the fact that the asuras can never obtain the state of the devas' enjoyment, the asuras are subject to counterattack by the devas and are constantly involved in aggression, fighting, and conflict.

STUDENT: What do buddhas do? Do they ever manifest in any form to guide us, or is it only bodhisattvas who do that?

RINPOCHE: Having achieved perfect awakening, Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in this world; that is to say, he had already fully achieved buddhahood prior to coming to this world, at which point he chose to lead a human life for our benefit in the country known as India. Even when he passed into parinirvana, he said that he would return in whatever forms were most appropriate for sentient beings of future generations — sometimes in the form of written language, sometimes in the form of spiritual teachers, and so on. For that reason, we can regard the majority of incarnate gurus in the Buddhist tradition as being emanations of the Buddha himself. Such emanated teachers embody many of the authentic ways in which the Buddha appears for the welfare of sentient beings.

STUDENT: Are the founders of other religions such as Jesus Christ or Mohammed enlightened as well? If they are, are they at the same level as buddhas? Would they be considered buddhas?

RINPOCHE: I do not know. If I had knowledge of the books that represent those traditions, then I would be in a better position to comment; however I am not learned in the teachings of traditions such as Christianity or Judaism. With at least a literary

understanding of the real import of their respective teachings, it might be feasible to speak of the essential qualities that the founding figures of those traditions may or may not have had. Whether such individuals are equal in their attainments to the Buddha or not, I honestly do not know.

STUDENT: I'm looking for an understanding of how the Buddha's clear light mind relates to one's buddha nature or the mind. Also there's another aspect that I'm interested in: at what time in this lineage does one learn a clear light practice? Where does such a practice fit in?

RINPOCHE: At the level of fruition these things are all realized to be the same. What needs to be done initially is to define or identify the term *clear light*; that is, to grasp what that means in terms of words. From there you implement the special instructions of the guru in your own practical experience, and eventually meditative experiences will emerge in your continuum. Once that point has been reached, it may be feasible to engage in a level of tranquillity meditation like that of Shantideva.

STUDENT: On the path in the Kagyu lineage, when or how does one learn that? For instance, you look at a buddha statue, or you are near a thangka that's been blessed, or you feel a light or

illumination from a teacher — is that the clear light that we're talking about? Is there a practice that is a clear light meditation?

RINPOCHE: To approach this practice properly according to the Kagyu lineage, normally one would first complete the Mahamudra preliminaries and then enter into the traditional three-year retreat. During the course of the three-year retreat, one would receive instruction and guidance in the six dharmas of Naropa. One of those six dharmas is the dharma of clear light, and at that point one would learn this particular form of practice.

For the most part, the current level of our practice is such that we have only just begun to develop some familiarity with tranquillity meditation. Until we have progressed to the point where we are ready to receive direct instruction for such practices from a qualified guru, there will be no possibility of achieving the clear light.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, thank you for the teachings. I was very inspired hearing about the five poisons and I'm really committed to working with them. This is my third day in the monastery and I'm about to go home. I know that as soon as I open the door to my house I will be challenged tremendously with one of the five or even all of them at once. Is there anything I can

do, except my daily practice of course, so I can remind myself not to be affected by those five poisons?

RINPOCHE: At this stage, it is very important for us to recognize faults as being faults. Most people do not recognize what is wrong with the five poisons, but rather conceive of them as being positive qualities. As long as they continue to do so, they will not see the source of the problem and will therefore never relinquish these poisons. When we realize that everything wrong with these poisons is what makes up the causal process of suffering throughout samsara, we will begin to recognize those faults for what they are.

On the basis of that understanding, whatever forms of virtue you can accomplish will serve to protect you and all others from being overpowered by the five poisons. This is why we need to make every effort in virtuous activities, with the intention that we must ultimately achieve the state of buddhahood. The propensity that develops through the continual accumulation of virtue will replace negative propensities, leading in a progression from the present physical body to another physical body, lifetime after lifetime, until the eventual and certain achievement of buddhahood.

In any case, there is no way to purify all of this right away. We have been deeply habituated to the powerful influence of the afflictions since time immemorial, and therefore simply having the intention to relinquish them will not be sufficient to suddenly become free of them. It is just like unfolding a piece of paper: if you fold a piece of paper and make the crease very sharp, when you unfold the paper it is almost impossible to make it perfectly flat and smooth again.

This is not to say, however, that you should be discouraged by this. You should not come to the conclusion that because the afflictions are so powerful and have dominated you for so long, you will probably never be able to relinquish them. All buddhas and bodhisattvas who have preceded us were just like us when they initially entered the path. It was through a very gradual process of continual development in small degrees that they were able to relinquish these afflictions and eventually awaken to perfection. We simply cannot expect to accomplish this right away.

As I have said, if you recite OM MANI PADME HUM just one time and you seal the virtue of that recitation by dedicating it with the wish that all sentient beings must achieve the state of perfect buddhahood, regardless of how much hatred arises thereafter, it will have no capacity to diminish the power of

that virtue. Not only will the dedicated virtue be free from degeneration, but it will continue to increase unceasingly as the days and months pass by. Accomplishing the accumulation of a large number of mantra recitations with that same intention and dedication will result in a correspondingly greater accumulation of virtue over time.

STUDENT: When a negative thought just crops up, if we think about all other beings who have negative thoughts and bring them all into ourself, as we do with tong len, and send them out freedom from any negative thoughts, is that a good way to purify these thoughts?

RINPOCHE: Yes, that will definitely be beneficial. That practice itself is the path of a bodhisattva.

STUDENT: If you contemplate the emptiness of mind, it's not far to go from there to contemplate the emptiness of self. Then what do you do when you feel like you've been duped your whole life? You feel fooled, because from the beginning everything you did was based on this assumption of the true existence of the self. I mean, if there's no self, then there's nothing to get angry about; if there's no self, there's nothing to get jealous of; if there's no self, there's nothing to feel proud about — it just goes on and on.

RINPOCHE: I do not understand very well what you are asking. The abiding nature of all phenomena is emptiness, as you have said. This is a statement, something that the Buddha said. As we have seen elsewhere in the teachings, true sufferings, true origins, true cessation, and the true path are also statements expressed by the Buddha as valid, established truths. At the same time, he also said that there is such a thing as virtue, and virtue leads to positive results; likewise there is such a thing as wrongdoing, and wrongdoing produces negative results — this too is an infallible statement.

In any case, the true nature of reality and the terms or metaphors we might use to refer to it are two different things. When we say “true nature,” we are referring to that which becomes fully revealed only on the complete achievement of buddhahood. At our current level, we are using such terminology from the limited perspective of being bewildered in samsara and experiencing the various kinds of suffering this entails.

There is a great difference between these two levels of meaning. For instance, if you just say that things are not truly existent and then stick your hand into a fire, your hand is definitely going to get burned. For a practitioner who has achieved a high level of genuine accomplishment, it may very well be possible for them to put their hand in the midst of a blazing fire and

suffer no injury. This is only because they have already realized the true nature.

At one point Jetsun Milarepa and Geshe Tsakpuwa were debating with one another over the impregnability of a large mass of solid rock. Geshe Tsakpuwa asked Milarepa, “Is this rock substantially existent or is it not?” Milarepa said that it was not substantial at all. The geshe burst out laughing and said, “Prove to me that this rock is insubstantial.” Milarepa passed freely back and forth and up and down through the mass of rock without any obstruction, as if it were nothing but empty space. Geshe Tsakpuwa then asked him if the sky was substantially existent or not. This time Jetsun Milarepa responded, “The sky is substantial.” The geshe burst out laughing in disbelief again, “How could the sky possibly be substantial? Prove that what you say is true.” Mila then proceeded to walk back and forth in all directions in the midst of the air just as easily as we would walk on the ground. The point being illustrated here is that there is a very real difference between realization and anything less than realization.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, a few months ago while visiting my parents, just as I was leaving they mentioned that they were hearing little footsteps in the walls, and the neighbors upstairs were complaining that they heard little footsteps. They weren't

sure what they were, but I was sure I knew how to end their suffering. I immediately went out and bought some mousetraps, set them for my parents, and left.

A couple of weeks later I saw my parents. They were very happy, and they thanked me for killing the mice. I have been filled with terrible guilt ever since. My question is: is there any way for me to accept the negative karma I placed on them, and is there any way to get rid of my negative karma from that action? Further, is there a way to get rid of the karma from the negative actions that I've caused in this lifetime and, further, the negative karma I've accumulated over many lifetimes?

RINPOCHE: Yes, there are ways to confess and rectify these actions. What kind of Dharma practices are you doing currently?

STUDENT: None at present.

RINPOCHE: Even though you are not involved in any particular practice, the fact that you recognize the wrongdoing you have committed is the most important thing. This is like correctly diagnosing the symptom of an illness.

As to the means of purifying your wrongdoing, this will definitely require some effort on your part. If you are not presently studying

and practicing the Dharma, one option at your disposal is to perform life release for animals. This can be done, for example, by going to a fish market and purchasing live fish that would otherwise be killed and eaten, then freeing them by releasing them in water. Any efforts you make to protect living beings, such as the practice of life release, will be of certain benefit in rectifying your previous act of killing the mice, while at the same time reducing the negative karma involved. If you have the intention of helping smaller, weaker creatures, and you do so whenever you can, this will accomplish the purification of your negative karma.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, the negative karma that I've placed on my parents — is there any way I can relieve them of that?

RINPOCHE: Your parents have no responsibility to confess anything in connection with the act of killing, but on the other hand they are indeed responsible for rejoicing in the killing, and to that end confession would certainly be a good idea.

STUDENT: The remedies you gave for pride, jealousy, apathy, and attachment seem very convincing and reasonable and effective, but the remedy you gave for aversion or anger just does not seem to work for me. I do not believe that all beings were once my mother. Also with respect to putting myself in the other

person's place, usually if someone behaves badly toward me, I never understand why and so I am kind of bewildered. If I did switch places with them, I still would not understand.

RINPOCHE: What you mention in your question is very true. First of all, with regard to the notion of beings having been our mothers, we do not really know this because we cannot directly see or recollect the past or, obviously, future lifetimes. Generally for us the existence of past and future lifetimes is a matter of belief based on our acceptance of the Buddha's teachings, and it is not an object of direct knowledge. Nevertheless we have taken the bodhisattva vow, and while doing so we promised to do everything in our power to benefit all beings and protect them from suffering. At the beginning we cannot be expected to benefit beings by performing great deeds such as those performed by buddhas or even bodhisattvas, but we do have to try our best.

When we take the bodhisattva vow, we essentially commit ourselves to the practice of the six perfections. The perfection that is perhaps of greatest importance is the perfection of patience. Patience is of such great importance partly because it is the greatest virtue. One moment of patience brings about a tremendous accumulation of merit. Conversely, the worst klesha is anger.

As we discussed earlier, without a situation that makes you angry, there is no way you can develop patience. Without enemies you have no opportunity for the practice of patience, because those you regard as your worst enemies — those who abuse you, those who make you angry — are really your greatest help in pursuing the path. This is because they give you the greatest opportunity to cultivate patience, which is in turn the greatest virtue. Thus even though the people who abuse you may have intended to harm you, in fact they achieve the opposite: they actually help you.

Also you have to look at why your enemies do what they do. Those who abuse others, whatever their particular motivation, always do so because they are angry in one way or another. Those who are angry with you developed their anger because of your existence; if you did not exist as an object for their anger, they would not be angry with you. Because of you, they are bringing about for themselves the causes of rebirth in the lower realms. Because of them, you are patient and you are bringing about the causes of higher rebirth and liberation. If you actually think about it, they are helping you much more than they are harming you.

STUDENT: I have a question regarding patience. Often when I am in a situation where someone does something that is difficult, my instinct is just to step back and become completely uninvolved. The more I do that, the more I think that stepping

out of a situation is patience. Is that always the way to go, or are there situations where you have to get into that sticky, difficult place where you try to work things out?

RINPOCHE: If the cultivation of patience as a remedy for anger is very, very strong, there is no need to distance yourself from the situation. Practically speaking it is probably wise to distance yourself because even when we cultivate patience, this patience is somewhat unstable, and if we remain in a situation of abuse there is a risk we will become angry at any moment. You bring up the issue of a calm and reasoned response or intervention. Theoretically it is possible to be of benefit in such a situation by, for example, calmly correcting the other person's misperception. Yet practically speaking, this is usually unsuccessful. Usually it only feeds the other person's anger because they do not trust you and as a result they are unwilling to accept anything you say. In spite of the fact that theoretically this is a valid approach, practically speaking the best thing to do is distance yourself from the situation in a state of equanimity. Especially if you find yourself getting angry, distance yourself until you cool down.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, a while back you referred to an antidote for lust by saying that you should try to visualize the object of your attraction as a rotting corpse. It does not work for me. Is there something stronger?

RINPOCHE: Actually, it is not enough to simply visualize the object of your desire as a rotting corpse. The way this type of desire works is that you not only perceive the object of your desire as attractive, but you also perceive your own body as positive and attractive. You may find it more effective to simultaneously visualize both the object of desire and yourself as rotting, putrefied corpses.

STUDENT: Is there some kind of interlocking effect of anger and lust? Does one feed the other?

RINPOCHE: Most anger is caused by the frustration of desire. When you do not get what you want, you become angry.

STUDENT: In that case would you start with patience?

RINPOCHE: It would help. If you apply the remedy suitable for your predominant mental affliction and you successfully weaken it, this will also weaken the other afflictions because of their association. If you apply a remedy to your predominant mental affliction and struggle with it and find that it doesn't work, and then you try another remedy for another mental affliction that is not your predominant one, the remedy will not work.

Also, these are not instant remedies. It is not the case that meditating on the unpleasant in one session will conquer your tendency to desire. This is a gradual process. The meditation on the unpleasant only becomes effective as a remedy for desire when you achieve clear appearance with the visualizations; at that point the remedy starts to actively and effectively alter your perception of everything. It is not that you are trying in isolation to alter your perception of a given object of your sexual desire. For this to actually work, you have to effectively defeat the misconception of things as being pleasant, pure, or clean, because that is the condition for desire. When someone who is practicing in the shravaka tradition attains clear appearance and some degree of stability in this samadhi, they find themselves unable to tolerate going into any village. This is because they see everyone in the village as disgusting, bloated, pus-leaking, rotting corpses, and every movement seems like the movement of demons and is horrible to them. They see everything as filthy, revolting, and disgusting. They also perceive their own bodies that way.

Arhatship becomes an attainable goal only when one achieves this degree of complete reversal of the false perception that things are clean and desirable.

STUDENT: Is there a valid concept such as taking lust onto the path?

RINPOCHE: There might be, but you would have to be up to that level. In order to be able to do it, you have to grow through all the stages leading to the type of spiritual maturity that enables you to do this. For example, the cultivation of disgust through meditation on the unpleasant as a remedy for desire is a stage. Only if that stage has been cultivated to some extent can you effectively use bodhichitta as a remedy for attachment, and only if that has been greatly stabilized can you actually take attachment on the path through the means of the Vajrayana.

These techniques and approaches indeed exist, but as I mentioned earlier they are like the flight of a bird, which is only possible when you have wings. At this point we are concerned with acquiring the basic nourishment, like the nourishment a baby bird acquires from its mother so its body can develop, and then at some future point the baby bird might start to grow wings. We have not even started growing wings; it is too early to think about flight patterns.

STUDENT: When I arrive in this space to do my practice, I feel tremendous gratitude at the privilege of being here and I return

out of a sense of desire to have that experience as much as possible. What kind of category does this sort of desire fall under?

RINPOCHE: One would have to admit that the desire to practice, in the linguistic or conceptual sense, is in fact a desire, but functionally it is very different. For example, if we use the word drink and say, “I drink water,” “I drink poison,” “I drink medicine,” linguistically the word drink is the same. However the function of drinking medicine and drinking poison are entirely opposite.

The desire to practice is basically a yearning for improvement, a yearning for quality. Ideally it can be motivated by compassion, by an altruistic motivation. In any case, it is fundamentally a yearning for that which is healthy. Most desire is based on the obsessive identification with the supposed needs of the imputed self and the sacrifice, if necessary, of the needs and even the existence of others to satisfy the supposed needs of the imputed self. The sign of poisonous desire is that it always contains seeds of aggression. There is always the tension of being ready to respond aggressively when we do not get what we want, and any desire with that entrenched, obsessive, selfish quality is unhealthy.

STUDENT: I have two fairly simple questions. During a recent conversation there was a question of the difference between emptiness and nothingness. Could you speak about that?

RINPOCHE: Since I was not present for that conversation, I do not want to put words in anyone's mouth, but if we look at the word emptiness, in any language it is literally a negative. In other words, it basically implies nothing. The literal meaning of emptiness is "nothingness."

Nevertheless when emptiness is explained, we say that it does not refer to what it literally sounds like. It does not refer to nothing whatsoever because, while emptiness is the nature of things, it is at the same time the presence of innate wisdom. I assume this is what the people in your conversation were referring to.

STUDENT: The other question is about nonduality. I find that when I sit in meditation, after a while I wonder what it is that notices the thoughts as they arise. Who is the witness? If there is a witness that can watch this phenomenon, it is therefore something, and that seems to indicate a duality. It leaves me feeling very, very confused.

RINPOCHE: Well, they are different. That which recognizes the presence or arising of a thought is the mind. The thought is a

mental event or mental arising, and it is something that happens within the mind. In that sense, we would say it is different from the mind. The sense in which they are the same, however, is that they are made of the same stuff; they have the same nature.

STUDENT: Is it possible to approach the problem of desire not by abandoning sex, but trying to find the true nature of it? Also, is it possible to reduce self-cherishing by cherishing another?

RINPOCHE: To answer your first question, it is indeed possible to overcome the poison of desire by seeing its nature. You need to understand that this chapter goes through the approaches toward the mental afflictions according to each of the three vehicles: first the approach of the common vehicle or Hinayana, then the approach of the uncommon Mahayana, and finally the approach of the great vehicle of the Vajrayana. Each one of these approaches is slightly different, so when you are speaking within the context of one approach there are certain options, and then when you talk about another approach there are others.

There is no need to assume that any given individual has to practice all of these methods. Practice those that are appropriate to you, but be honest about exactly what you are capable of at any given time. It is not sufficient to identify a given approach as being supreme and therefore assume it is the one appropri-

ate for you. Nevertheless it is possible to overcome any mental affliction, including desire, by seeing its nature.

Regarding your second question, literally put and literally understood, yes, the cherishing of others over oneself is a remedy for mental afflictions of all kinds.

STUDENT: I am experiencing some confusion about what reality is, whatever that means. In the teaching you said that the nature of our environment is essentially pure. Does that mean that it is clear light in the way that you were saying that our own minds are clear light?

RINPOCHE: Not only is the nature of our environment pure in its nature, but it is also pure in its form, or manifestation. This is why we can say that all six realms of samsara are states of delusion, because whatever beings in those realms experience does not exist. Things are not the way they seem.

STUDENT: I can understand the teachings about ignorance and how we perceive things emotionally and mentally. If I have kleshas and I walk into a room, I might see it with anger or I might see it with love. It is very differently colored. However at this time I am struggling with what we are collectively doing to the environment of our planet. For example, the ozone layer has

a hole in it. Is that something that actually exists for someone who has no kleshas?

RINPOCHE: The change in perception that you describe is based on a difference in mood or a difference in attitude. This is something that we all experience, of course, but it is a very, very slight change. If you walk into the same room on two different days in two different moods, you may react very differently to what you see, but you still see the same colors and shapes.

When we say that the nature of all things is pure, we mean that even the common perception of colors and shapes experienced by beings in a certain realm of existence is a product of their karmic obscuration. During one's lifetime, because one remains as a product of a certain species or realm, regardless of one's mood one will continue to see things in that certain way, as will most other beings in that realm. When someone's karmic and other obscurations are purified, they see things as being utterly pure, which means they do not even see the same colors, shapes, and substances that we do, or that someone else in a different realm of existence would see.

When someone is free of all obscurations and therefore has no habitual patterns to limit or pollute their perception, they experience their world or realm as utterly pure, wherever they

are. This means that when the Buddha goes into the realm of humans, even though the humans in that realm perceive it as an impure human realm, the Buddha perceives it as a pure realm. If the Buddha goes into a hell realm, even though hell beings perceive that realm as hellish, he perceives it as an utterly pure realm, and so on. This is because he is free of the karmic obstructions and other causes that produce that particular type of impure perception.

Because beings in different realms will see the same thing in six different ways, we say that these perceptions are deluded. If all beings saw a given object in the same way — if all beings saw water as water, for example — then it would be fine to say this was a correct perception. Since most human beings see something pretty much as the same thing, and most hell beings see this same thing as something entirely different, it is reasonable to assert that these are all projections based on delusions.

Therefore this is also true with regard to the degeneration or the appearance of degeneration of the environment. When we think about the issues of environmental degeneration — such as pollution, the hole in the ozone layer, and anything else — we think of it as having arisen through circumstances. In fact, all of these things are produced by fluctuations in the merit of the beings inhabiting that particular realm. When beings living in

the world or in a specific place in the world have greater merit, the environment will flourish and prosper as well. When those beings have passed out of that realm and are replaced by beings with less merit, the environment will naturally degenerate. The fact that we generally ascribe these fluctuations in the environment or in the prosperity of beings to circumstances alone merely indicates that we are unaware of the workings of karma.

STUDENT: I am trying to understand how badly we are damaging our world. From our own perception we are damaging the world in which we live and we are damaging things for each other, but are they being damaged in some other way? Is the clear light really the only reality, and is it therefore true that we are really not damaging our world, or anything for that matter?

RINPOCHE: In the nature of the environment there is nothing that could possibly be changed or damaged, so the appearance of damage, the appearance of change of any kind, is a deluded perception.

STUDENT: Like a dream?

RINPOCHE: Yes, but like a dream from which we are presently unable to awake. We have to be careful with the analogy of the dream, as traditional and common as it is. In a dream, things

do not always function according to appearance. For example, you can dream of fire that does not burn you or dream of water that does not carry you off. Yet make no mistake: in this current dream if you contact fire it will burn you, and if you contact water it will carry you off.

STUDENT: About a year ago, I heard about an experiment that was done with some people meditating by a pond that was very polluted. The pond was being monitored by scientists, and at the end of the experiment the pond was pure; the only intervention was mental. What can you say about that relative to this discussion?

RINPOCHE: It is very hard to discuss such an anecdote definitively without having all of the details. There are accounts of great yogis transforming filth into ambrosia, so from a Buddhist point of view it is not impossible that the intense perception of a large group of people with focused minds could transform something that was previously perceived as dirty or polluted into something perceived as pure. Nevertheless we cannot be certain that this is what took place. I am not learned enough in the methods of scientific research to be able to determine how carefully the study was performed.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, in your transcript on the five buddha families, you said the buddha that embodies the mirrorlike wisdom is Akshobhya, so why does Karma Chakme say that it is Vajrasattva?

RINPOCHE: Actually, Akshobhya and Vajrasattva are brothers, and according to their father's will the property they inherited from him had to be shared, and so they actually take turns. That was a joke! Essentially they are the same in nature. Akshobhya and Vajrasattva are both at different times said to be the principal buddha of the Vajra family.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am just consumed with curiosity about Devadatta. After the Buddha Shakyamuni passed into mahaparinirvana, was not Devadatta totally at loose ends? What did he do after that to entertain himself? Did he find a new target? How long did it take him? Did he ever get enlightened?

RINPOCHE: Actually Devadatta moved from this realm before the Buddha did. During his last attempt to confront and abuse the Buddha, the earth opened up under his feet and he fell into an abyss of flames and lava. As he was falling, he regretted what he had done and screamed out, "Gautama, I am burning!" Because he called on the Buddha for protection at the end of his life (admittedly out of desperation, because he was dying),

then after the last of the thousand buddhas of this realm of this aeon has appeared, and after the last buddha's teaching has disappeared (in other words, after an incalculably long period in the future), Devadatta will get out of hell and be reborn as a rishi named Intelligent, and he will become a pratyekabuddha. Until then, he will remain downstairs.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, have you ever heard of a case where a disciple behaves really badly on purpose so his guru would be forced to do the ngönchö on him? It sounds like the direct intervention is a reward for bad behavior because you get sent to a pure realm when you do not deserve it. Plus you have a highly realized being taking responsibility for your future buddhahood.

RINPOCHE: No, I have not heard of such a case. To behave badly intentionally in order to be liberated by your guru would imply that you have faith in your guru, that you believe he can liberate you. But this disqualifies you as an object for direct intervention.

There is a story about a situation like this. Once when Patrul Rinpoche was teaching in eastern Tibet, an old man from Golok attended his teaching. Patrul Rinpoche was probably teaching traditional texts and this man did not understand what he was teaching, so he kept calling out in the midst of the assembly, "Come on, teach something new!" Patrul Rinpoche just ignored

him and went on with what he was teaching. Finally when Patrul Rinpoche was leaving, the old man from Golok went outside, got on his horse, drew his sword, and raised it into the sky. He said, “Well, you ignored me when I tried to establish a positive connection with you, but it is said that you will liberate me even if I establish a negative connection with you. All right then, that is the way we are going to do it!” He said this while gesturing with his sword, and this got the attention of the monks in the monastery. They asked him to calm down, and they said they would get Patrul Rinpoche to talk to him. That was how he succeeded in getting Patrul Rinpoche’s individual attention.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, I am trying to sort out some of these Secret Mantra methods. When you described one of the steps, you mentioned the great seal or mahamudra as part of desire. It seems to me that mahamudra would eradicate all the kleshas whereas some of the other steps would only eradicate one. By achieving each step to its completeness, would it eradicate all kleshas or is mahamudra different in this regard? Why is this teaching in the section on desire?

RINPOCHE: Mahamudra is indeed the supreme remedy for any mental affliction. Nevertheless, by extension, if any of the methods taught in this section on Secret Mantra are perfected, this will bring about the eradication of all mental afflictions

because all mental afflictions stem from the same root. If this root is cut, all of the branches die.

The reason why mahamudra is presented in the section on taking desire on the path is that it is thought of metaphorically as the mother of all buddhas, and therefore it is the ultimate mudra. Obviously mahamudra practice itself has nothing to do with physical bliss.

STUDENT: Could you say something about tertons, in particular why among all the rinpoches it is Guru Rinpoche who chooses consorts?

RINPOCHE: The main source for the Treasury of Instructions of the Vajrayana is Guru Rinpoche, and those we refer to as the treasure revealers or tertons are the principal individuals whom he empowered and predicted to uphold the teachings of the Vajrayana throughout various periods of time. In his predictions, he stated the time or epoch of the terton's appearance, the name they would bear as a treasure revealer, and so on.

Not all treasure revealers have taken consorts; some have been monastics. However most treasure revealers have consorts, and this is because in order for their activity to flourish, in order for them to perfect the qualities of wisdom they are developing

on the path, and in order for them to complete their discovery and present the teachings they find, not only are the tertons themselves predicted emanations, but their consorts are predicted emanations as well. Thus the consorts of the tertons are not ordinary women or men. They are emanations or, in some cases, individuals who are highly evolved through their own pursuit of the path, so that contact with them brings about the full ripening or fruition of the terton's wisdom and enables them to complete their activity.

In the case of those tertons who have been monastics, without resorting to an external consort they have achieved the equivalent fruition of the path through full control of the channels, winds, and drops within their own body.

STUDENT: With regard to treasure revealing, is there any difference in the activity of those who have chosen consorts and those who have not? In other words, do monastics reveal treasure?

RINPOCHE: There does not seem to be a difference. If you look at the biographies of tertons, it does not seem that those who were monastics discovered less treasure than those who were not, or vice versa. The prime factor in their unimpeded ability to discover and establish their terma seems to be the samaya of their disciples. According to the histories, the main obstacle

for some tertons is that their ability can be impeded when one or more of their disciples breaks samaya. It does not seem to matter whether they are monastics or not.

STUDENT: Breaking samaya with a teacher can damage the teacher?

RINPOCHE: Very much so. There are many stories of students breaking samaya that caused the treasures revealed by the tertton to be of little use; the blessings of the treasures were damaged or corrupted by the broken samaya within the lineage. When disciples break samaya with a teacher, the teacher is likely to have a much shorter life because there is less reason for them to remain in this world.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, you said that the remedy for ignorance is recognizing the mind's true nature. Is this beyond the ordinary person's ability? Is it the moment of nonconceptuality when we practice meditation? Is the mind's true nature something that has to be pointed out by one's guru? Do you have to place your awareness in the central channel to realize it? Is it a momentous occasion, or is it just a daily kind of practice?

RINPOCHE: Your question is very insightful, because with all of the different options you brought up, you have actually pointed

out something about the process of understanding and realizing what the mind's nature really is. The first thing you mentioned was when we are engaged in nonconceptual meditation — for example, at the end of a session of ngondro practice or some other practice when we rest without a visualization. The relationship between such practice and the recognition of the mind's nature is that the practice is a way of gradually approaching this recognition; through these practices you are gaining a gradual, progressively greater familiarity with your mind and its nature.

If your mind's nature is successfully pointed out by an eminent and realized teacher, you have gained what is called a “recognition of mind's nature.” *Recognition* really means the decisive resolution that “This is it. This is what the mind's nature is.” In terms of attainment, this recognition is merely understanding; it is not full realization. However it is a trustworthy understanding because it is an understanding of what must be realized. Thus there is a big difference between the recognition that is merely understanding and the full unveiling or revealing of the mind's nature. This is why your question is so significant.

As you indicated, the revealing of the mind's true nature depends on persistence of practice, and most often this involves making use of the winds and so forth in your practice. Usually the recognition is gained through the instruction or pointing

out of the teacher, but the full revealing of the mind's nature depends on continued and methodical practice, such as the practice of chandali.

STUDENT: I am confused about the relationship between ignorance and apathy because the remedy to ignorance is to recognize the mind's true nature, but the remedy to apathy is to decrease your sleep in the early evening and early morning and to contemplate Yama with the six worlds in his belly. It seems they are the same thing, but they have two different remedies.

RINPOCHE: In this context, what is referred to by the term *ignorance* and the term *apathy* is fundamentally the same thing. The concepts are different, so in some contexts they are said to be different things.

You can think of them as basically the same because they both consist of a lack of knowing and therefore a lack of wakefulness in the mind. From the point of view of the term “ignorance” or *marikpa*, this is simply the absence of knowledge or the absence of awareness itself. From the point of view of the term *timuk* or “apathy,” it is the affect of that absence of knowledge, which is literally a lack of caring or lack of knowing.

The relationship between sleep and apathy/bewilderment/ignorance is simply that most sleep is a state of unconsciousness, which makes it the fullest or most intense type of ignorance or bewilderment that we normally experience. Therefore when you attack ignorance or bewilderment, sleep is the first object of attack. However real bewilderment, real apathy, and real ignorance are simply the mind not knowing its own qualities, not directly seeing buddha nature and all its excellence.

STUDENT: Could you recap the antidotes for jealousy?

RINPOCHE: From the point of view of the sutras, the remedy for jealousy is benevolence. Benevolence is simply wanting the best for others. To the extent that you really want the best for others, keep in mind that you have taken the bodhisattva vow and have promised to achieve the best for others, so you will naturally respond with joy when you find that others have achieved the best without you having to do anything. You will feel relieved and delighted. Therefore whenever we experience jealousy, it is simply an indication that we have not trained our minds in benevolence.

STUDENT: I remember hearing other remedies for jealousy, such as seeing everything as equal. Is that true or not? For example, I am a jealous person and see nothing as equal. I have hierarchies

of everything. I am a perfect asura fighting everybody for no reason. I suppose that if I saw myself as a god and everybody else as a god, I would have no reason to be jealous, but practically speaking I cannot do that.

RINPOCHE: If you can actually regard all things as being of the same fundamental nature and therefore equally divine, equally of the nature of the deity, this will eliminate all sense of hierarchy and therefore all jealousy. If you actually believe that this is the nature of things and if you can rest in that confidence, that will help.

Dedication

*I pray that the Lama's life be excellent,
That his supreme life be long,
And that his activity increase and spread,
Bless us that we remain inseparable from the Lama.*

*By this merit may all become omniscient,
From this attainment, after defeating evil faults,
Through the endless storm of birth, old age, sickness, and death,
May we liberate all beings from the suffering in the three worlds.*

Precious Garland: A List of Contents to Prevent Disorder

A Table of Contents for Each of the Fifty-Four Chapters in The Retreat Manual

Chapter 1. The Precious Garland: A List of Contents to Prevent Disorder

Chapter 2. To See It Is to Smile: An Introduction to Mountain Dharma Serving to Guide Ordinary People into Dharma's Gate

Chapter 3. Putting Away the Dice: How to Abandon the Paths of Samsara and Generate Stable Renunciation

Chapter 4. **Gandi** of the Nobles: A Clarification of the Practices of Individuals Immersed in the Various Greater and Lesser Vehicles

Chapter 5. Disk of the Sun: How to Keep the Three Vows Easily, Having Received Them in Sequence

Chapter 6. Protection from All Danger: Instructions on Taking Refuge in Order to Be Protected from All the Dangers of Samsara

Chapter 7. The Main Path to Awakening: Instructions on the Generation of Bodhichitta in Order That All One Does Be Brought to the Path of Awakening

Chapter 8. The Cooling Shade of Compassion: Placing Oneself and Others under the Protection of the Three Jewels Through Meditation

Chapter 9. Dispelling All Obstacles: Visualizations for Practice Sessions Used to Help the Weak, the Sick, and So On

Chapter 10. A River of Amrita: Instructions on the Purification of the Karma, Wrongdoing, and Obscurations Accumulated Throughout All One's Lives

Chapter 11. A Mountain of Merit: Instructions on How to Easily Complete the Accumulation of Merit by Offering the Mandala

Chapter 12. A River of Blessings: Guru Yoga, Practiced in Order to Receive Blessings and Increase Experiences and Realization

Chapter 13. The Traveler's Song: The Result of Long Experience, Recounted So That Beginners Can Recognize the Arising of Experience and Realization

Chapter 14. The Armor of Love and the Breastplate of Compassion: How to Protect from Obstacles Using the Buddhas' Truth

Chapter 15. All Jewels Included: A Brief Explanation of Geomancy, Since One Must Know What Places Are Good for Retreat

Chapter 16. The Good Path to Freedom: Instructions on Retreat, Easily Practiced by the Unintelligent

Chapter 17. The Axe That Cuts Through Self-fixation: Giving Away One's Body in Order to Gather the Accumulations and Bring Sickness and Spirits to the Path

Chapter 18. The Conjunction of Life and Fortune: The Generation of Life and Prosperity in Order to Prolong the Lives of Gurus, Friends, and Patrons

Chapter 19. The Melody of Brahma: The Practice of Kriya and Charya Tantra, for the Youthful Who Want Austerities

Chapter 20. Closing the Door to Lower Migrations: The Practice of Yoga Tantra, for Those Skilled in Ritual and Mudras

Chapter 21. Showing the Path to Freedom: Visualizations for the Southern Gate, in Order to Purify the Obscurations of the Dead

Chapter 22. A Concise Liberation Through Hearing: An Introduction to the Bardo, So That Recognizing It One May Be Liberated

Chapter 23. Shade of the Ashoka Tree: How to Avoid Robbers and Death While in Retreat

Chapter 24. All Connection Has Meaning: How to Burn a Living Inscription in Order to Purify the Obscurations of the Wealthy Faithful

Chapter 25. Hook of Compassion: How to Guide the Dead, So That All the Deceased Connected to One May Reach Pure Realms

Chapter 26. Thunder of Mantra: The Outer Practice of a Yidam According to Maha Yoga, Emphasizing the Generation Stage

Chapter 27. The Hero's Roar: The Inner Practice, for Those Who Assemble Offering Tormas, Accomplishment Substances, and so on

Chapter 28. The Wisdom Dakinis' Song of Yearning: The Secret Practice for Those with Extremely Clear Generation Stage Visualization

Chapter 29. A Multicolored Jewel: A Homa for Those with Few Resources Who Are Diligent in Practice

Chapter 30. The Supreme Blaze of Great Bliss: The Very Secret Practice of the Anu Yoga Tantras

Chapter 31. Boundless Purity: The Just-That practice of the Ati Yoga Tantras

Chapter 32. The Wish-Granting Jewel: The Combined Practice, for Those with Powerful Samadhi Who Dislike Elaboration

Chapter 33. Gold from Jambu River: The Root Words on the Physical Exercises for Establishing Interdependence in the Body

Chapter 34. The Magic Mirror: An Essay on Indications Enabling One to Determine Whether or Not One Has Accomplished the Three Roots

Chapter 35. Showing the Unmistaken Path: Avoiding Deviations, So That One Remains on the Flawless Path to Awakening

Chapter 36. A Rain of Amrita: Instructions on Removing Outer, Inner, and Secret Impediments

Chapter 37. The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: Instructions on Improvement, So That Experience and Realization Increase Like the Waxing Moon

Chapter 38. The Great Peacock That Conquers Poison: Supporting Instructions on Abandoning the Obscuration by the Five Poisonous Kleshas

Chapter 39. The Practices of the Victors' Children: Instructions on Conduct, So That One Behaves in Accord with the Victors' Dictates

Chapter 40. Ocean of Activity: Instructions on Benefiting Beings, So That One Accomplishes Great Benefit for the Teachings and for Beings

Chapter 41. The Fruit of the Wish-Fulfilling Tree: How the Best, the Intermediate, and the Least Practitioners Die

Chapter 42. The Guide on the Quest for Jewels: Choosing a Pure Realm, So That One Knows Where One Is Going

Chapter 43. The Steed Balaha: How to Reach a Pure Realm If One Dies Without Leisure for Meditation

Chapter 44. Letter of Royal Command: Reminding Someone of Their Meditation So They Recognize the Ground Clear Light at Death

Chapter 45. Great Waves of Activity: the Practice of Protectors in General, So That the Buddhas' Teachings Flourish

Chapter 46. Hailstones in a Blizzard; Accomplishing All Activity: The Quick Accomplishment of the Protectors' Activity

Chapter 47. Sumeru of Hala: How to Control Shadow-Spirits, So That No Obstacles Arise for Any Practice

Chapter 48. Like Flies to Rotten Meat: How to Attract the Protectors to Oneself or Others by Using Their Soul-Stones and Support Materials

Chapter 49. Jewels of the Gods: Writings About Tormas, So That All Obstacles Be Dispelled and Whatever One Wishes for Be Accomplished

Chapter 50. The Mother and Protector United, the Special Dharma of Karma Pakshi: the Integration of Textual and Oral Instructions

Chapter 51. The Wealth Practice of the Protector, the Special Dharma of Drogon Rechen: For the Automatic Increase of Prosperity and Position

Chapter 52. The Protector Instructions from Lhodrak: Accomplishing All Activity Through the Channels and Winds

Chapter 53. The Precious Jewel: Instructions on Dedication, So That One's Virtue Is Buried as an Inexhaustible Treasure

Chapter 54. Enumeration of Dharmas, the Upadeshas of the Single Lineage: So That Secret Mantra Not Be Broadcasted, and Retain the Richness of Blessings

A List of Mantras

In general, in the text we use the Sanskrit pronunciation for the mantras. We use the Tibetan pronunciation when there is no Sanskrit, for example, KARMAPA KHYENNO. On three occasions we use both Sanskrit and Tibetan because the sound is quite different and the reader may be most familiar with the Tibetan pronunciation, for example, the Medicine Buddha mantra, the six-syllable mantra, and the Vajra Guru mantra. The following list is alphabetized according to the transliterations.

ॐ

A (*Skt.*)

ॐ

AH (*Skt.*)

ॐ

BAM (*Skt.*)

ह

HA (*Skt.*)

हं

HAM (*Skt.*)

ह्रीं

HRI (*Skt.*)

ह्रूं

HUM (*Skt.*)

HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཀྱེ་མ་ཀྱེ་མ་རྩལ་སྐལ་ལྷན།

KYE MA KYE HÜ, KAL DEN (NAME OF DECEASED) (*Tib.*)

मं

MAM (*Skt.*)

ནམོ་བླ་པོ་ནི་ས་ཏུ་ཡེ།

NAMO BUDDHA BODHISATTVA YE (*Skt.*)

NAMO BUDDHA BODHISATTOYE (*Tib.*)

ནམོ་གུ་རུ་དེ་མ་ཏཱ་གི་ནི་སྐྱེ་སྤྱི།

NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SARVA SIDDHI HUM (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU DEWA DAKINI SARWA SIDDHI HUNG (*Tib.*)

ནམོ་གུ་རུ་དེ་མ་ཏཱ་གི་ནི་སྤྱི་སྤྱི།

NAMO GURU DEVA DAKINI SIDDHI HUM (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU DEWA DAKINI SIDDHI HUNG (*Tib.*)

ནམོ་གུ་རུ་ནྲ་གི་མ་རི་ཕྱི།

NAMO GURU DHAKI MARICHI (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU DHAKI MARITSYE (*Tib.*)

ནམོ་གུ་རུ་མ་རྩུ་གྲོ་པ་ཡེ།

NAMO GURU MANJUGHOSHAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO GURU MANJUGHOKAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་མ་རྒྱ་ཀ་རུ་ཁི་ག་ཡེ།

NAMO MAHAKARUNIKAYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO MAHAKARUNIKAYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་ཤ་ཀྲ་མུ་ནེ་ཡེ།

NAMO SHAKYAMUNEYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO SHAKYAMUNEYE (*Tib.*)

ན་མོ་བཟླ་བུ་ཁི་ཡེ།

NAMO VAJRAPANIYE (*Skt.*)

NAMO BENZAPANIYE (*Tib.*)

ུ

NU (*Skt.*)

ཨྐྱ

OM (*Skt.*)

ཨོཾ་ཧཱུཎྲཱི།

OM AH HUM (*Skt.*)

OM AH HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ཨ་མ་ཐི་ཏེ་ཧཱུཎྲཱི་ཕ་ཎ།

OM AMRITE HUM PHAT (*Skt.*)

OM AMRITE HUNG PHET (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་མ་ནི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུཎྲཱི།

OM MANI PADME HUM (*Skt.*)

OM MANI PEME HUNG (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་མ་ནི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུཎྲཱི་ཧྲིཿ

OM MANI PADME HUM HRI (*Skt.*)

OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་མ་ནི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུཎྲཱི་ཧྲིཿཨ་ར་པ་ཙ་མི་ཏ་ཧྲིཿདུ་ཡ་སྐྱ་དྲ།

OM MANI PADME HUM HRI ARAPACHA MITA HRIDAYA
SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI ARAPATSA MITA HRIDAYA SOHA
(Tib.)

ཨོྃ་མ་རི་ཅཱི་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

OM MARICHI SVAHA (Skt.)

OM MARITSYE SOHA (Tib.)

ཨོྃ་མ་རི་ཅཱི་འོད་ཟེར་ཅན་བདག་ཅག་མི་ནོར་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་སྐྱེ་བས་
ཤིག་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

OM MARITSYE ÖSERCHEN DAKCHAK MI NOR THAMCHE LA
KYOP SHIK SOHA (Tib.)

ཨོྃ་མ་རི་ཅཱི་བད་ཏ་ལི་བ་དུ་ལི་བ་རུ་ལི་བ་ར་ཏ་མུ་ཁེ་སའ་དུལྱེ་བ་
དུལྱེ་ནི་གཞོན་ཁྱེད་དག་ཇག་ཆོམ་རྒྱན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཙུ་མུ་ཁི་བརྒྱ་
བརྒྱ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

OM MARITSYE BEDRATALI BADALI BARALI BARAHAMUKHE
SARWA DUKTRA TRADUKTRANAM NÖCHE DRA JAK
CHOMKÜN THAMCHE TSAKKU MUKHAM BENDHA BENDHA
SOHA (Tib.)

ཨོཾ་པད་མེ་པད་མེ་པདྨ་སྐྱ་མེ་མ་དུ་ཐུ་ཁ་མ་ཉི་གཙལྟོ་སྐྱ་དྲཱི།

OM PADME PADME PADMA SAMBHAVE MAHA SUKHAVATI
GACHCHANTU SVAHA (*Skt.*)

OM PEME PEME PEMA SAMBHAWE MAHA SUKHAWATI
GETSENTU SOHA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་ས་མ་ཡ། ཨུཾ་ས་མ་ཡ། ཧཱུྃ་ས་མ་ཡ། གུ་རུ་ག་བ་ཙྰ་ག་ས་དུ་ས་
མ་ཡ།

OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUM SAMAYA GURU (NAME OF
GURU) GANACHAKRA SATTVA SAMAYA (*Skt.*)

OM SAMAYA AH SAMAYA HUNG SAMAYA GURU (NAME OF
GURU) GANATSATRA SATO SAMAYA (*Tib.*)

ཨོཾ་སྐྱ་བྱ་མ་ཐུ་གྲུ་མེ་སའ་དྲུ་མེ་སྐྱ་བྱ་མ་ཐུ་གྲུ་མེ་ཉི།

OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA
SHUDDHONG HAM (*Skt.*)

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA
SHUDDHO HANG (*Tib.*)

ཨོ་བཱ་ར་མ་ཁ་ཀ་ལ་ཁྱི་ཁྱེ་ར་བེ་ན་ཡ་ཀ་ཧཱི་ཧཱི་ཕ་ཎེ།

OM VAJRA MAHAKALA KSHIM KSHETRA VIGHANAN VINA
YAKA HUM HUM PHAT (*Skt.*)

OM BENZA MAHAKALA CHING CHETRA BIGHANEN BINA
YAKA HUNG HUNG PHET (*Tib.*)

ཨོ་བཱ་ར་ས་ཏཱི།

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM (*Skt.*)

OM BENZASATTO HUNG (*Tib.*)

པཎྜ

PAM (*Skt.*)

ཕ་ཎྜ

PHAT (*Skt.*)

PHET (*Tib.*)

ར

RA (*Skt.*)

𑖦

RAM (*Skt.*)

𑖧

TA (*Skt.*)

𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥 𑖧𑖳𑖱𑖥

TADYATHA HANE HANE ARNO LE MITAYE GURUYE

VAJRASATTVA HUM SVAHA (*Skt.*)

TEYATHA HANE HANE ANO LE MITAYE GURUYE BENZASATTO

HUNG SOHA (*Tib.*)

𑖨

TAM (*Skt.*)

𑖩

YAM (*Skt.*)

Glossary

ABSOLUTE TRUTH (Tib. don dam bden pa) The absolute nature of relative truth, in which all phenomena are beyond arising, dwelling, and ceasing. This absolute truth is emptiness, directly experienced by an arya in even placement. See also **RELATIVE TRUTH**.

ACCUMULATIONS See **TWO ACCUMULATIONS**.

AFFLICTIVE EMOTIONS See **KLESHA**.

AGGREGATES (Skt. skandha) [Tib. phung po] The five phenomenal or psycho-physical constituents that comprise an individual being's continuity of experience. They are: form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness.

ALL-BASIS CONSCIOUSNESS (Skt. alayavijnana) [Tib. kun gzhi rnam par shes pa] Of the eight classes of consciousness, this is the undifferentiated, primordial continuum that underlies the other seven. The all-basis is the repository for all previously accumulated karmic imprints and habitual tendencies.

AMITABHA (Skt.) [Tib. ‘od dpag med] Buddha of Boundless Light. One of the five dhyana buddhas, he presides over the pure realm of Sukhavati (Skt.) [Tib. bde ba can] and is lord of the padma family. Rebirth in his pure realm guarantees complete awakening in one lifetime.

ANIMAL REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. bla na med pa'i rnal 'byor] The highest of the four categories of tantra in the Sarma, or New Translation, school of Tibetan Buddhism. The characteristic feature of anuttara yoga tantra is that the yidam or wisdom deity is not seen as being external to the practitioner. It is seen as the embodiment of the practitioner's own mind, and because the deity is understood as being internal, this is called the “inner level” of tantra. See also **TANTRA**.

APPEARANCE See **APPEARANCE, INCREASE, AND ATTAINMENT**.

APPEARANCE, INCREASE, AND ATTAINMENT (Tib. snang mched thob gsum) In the first phase of the bardo, this threefold shutdown process or subtle dissolution normally occurs when the dying person's outer respiration has stopped

but the inner winds have not yet ceased. This sequence follows the coarse dissolution of the elements and precedes the direct experience of the ground clear light. See also **CLEAR LIGHT, LUCIDITY.**

ARHAT (Skt.) [Tib. dgra bcom pa] “Foe destroyer.” An arhat is one who, having exhausted all defilements and mental afflictions, passes into nirvana.

ASURA REALM See **SIX REALMS.**

ATTAINMENT See **APPEARANCE, INCREASE, AND ATTAINMENT.**

AVADHUTI (Skt.) [Tib. dbu ma, kun ‘dar ma] The central channel of the three main energy channels in the subtle body.

AVALOKITA, AVALOKITESHVARA See **CHENREZIK.**

BARDO (Tib. bar do) “Interval.” Generally this term can refer to any of six different intermediate states of existence: life, dreams, meditation, the moment of death, dharmata or suchness, and approaching rebirth. Most often it refers to the period between death and subsequent rebirth, which is usually considered to last about forty-nine days.

BHIKSHU/BHIKSHUNI (Skt.) [Tib. dge slong/dge slong ma]
A fully ordained Buddhist monk/nun.

BHUMI See **BODHISATTVA LEVELS**.

BLISS (Skt. sukha) [Tib. bde ba] Pleasure, happiness, well-being, peace, comfort.

BLISS-EMPTINESS (Tib. bde stong) Intense pleasure or well-being experienced without attachment, and as being empty in nature.

BODHICHITTA (Skt.) [Tib. byang chub kyi sems] “Mind/heart of awakening.” Sometimes called “buddha nature,” it is the awakened heart and mind inherent in all sentient beings. Relative bodhichitta is the desire to practice, and the actual training in, the six **paramitas** in order to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings; absolute bodhichitta is immediate insight into the emptiness of phenomena. See also **MAHAYANA**.

BODHISATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. byang chub sems dpa'] One who has developed bodhichitta and dedicates his or her existence throughout all rebirths to the attainment of buddhahood in order to liberate other beings who are suffering in samsara.

The bodhisattva ideal is in contrast to the way of arhats and pratyekabuddhas, who attain nirvana solely for their own benefit. See also **BODHICHITTA, MAHAYANA**.

BODHISATTVA LEVELS (Skt. bhumi) [Tib. sa] The series of stages of spiritual development of a bodhisattva on the path to buddhahood. These levels may be enumerated as either ten or thirteen.

BODHISATTVA VOW (Tib. byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa) The essence of the bodhisattva vow is to preserve the mind of bodhichitta, a mind that sincerely wishes to benefit all beings, not merely for the temporary alleviation of their suffering but to bring them all to a state of full and complete awakening. The bodhisattva vow is received from a master who has maintained the vow without breaking it. See also **MAHAYANA**.

BUDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. sangs rgyas] Perfectly awakened and developed one; a being who has relinquished all defilements, obscurations, and afflictions; manifested wisdom and all perfect qualities; and fully realized all objects of knowledge in a state of total omniscience. One of the Three Jewels in which one takes refuge. See also **BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI, THREE JEWELS**.

BUDDHADHARMA (Tib. sangs rgyas kyi chos) Buddhism; the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

BUDDHA FIELD (Tib. zhing khams) A dimension projected and manifested by a buddha or great bodhisattva in which beings may abide and progress toward awakening without ever falling into lower states. Also, any place viewed as the pure manifestation of spontaneously present wisdom is a buddha field.

BUDDHAHOOD (Skt. buddhatva) [Tib. sangs rgyas nyid] The state of perfect awakening or enlightenment that characterizes a buddha and which is the inherent birthright of all beings.

BUDDHA NATURE (Skt. sugatagarbha, tathagatagarbha) [Tib. bde gshegs snying po, de gshegs snying po] The potential to attain awakening, which all beings possess. The essential nature of mind. See also **BODHICHITTA**, **CLEAR LIGHT**.

BUDDHA REALM See **BUDDHA FIELD**.

BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI (Skt.) [Tib. sha kya thub pa] Sage of the Shakyas. The historical buddha of this age was born as Prince Siddhartha Gautama of the Shakya clan in the fifth

century BCE. After attaining awakening at Bodhgaya in India, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the dharma for forty-five years.

CHAKRASAMVARA (Skt.) [Tib. ‘khor lo bde mchog] One of the principal yidams belonging to the anuttara tantra set of the New Translation school, who is associated with practices for mental purification and the transformation of obstacles. His consort is Vajrayogini.

CHAKRAVARTIN (Skt.) [Tib. ‘khor los sgyur ba’i rgyal po] A wheelwielding monarch who propagates the dharma.

CHANDALI See **TUMMO**.

CHANNELS See **CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS**.

CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS (Skt. nadi, prana, and bindu) [Tib. rtsa, rlung, thig le] The subtle channels, energy winds, and drops of the body are brought under control in advanced practices. The channels of the subtle body are the paths through which the winds (prana) flow, and drops of light ride the prana moving along the channels.

CHARYA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. spyod rgyud] The second of the four tantras of the New Translation school of Tibetan Buddhism. It emphasizes external ritual and internal visualization. See also **TANTRA**.

CHENREZIK (Skt. Avalokita) [Tib. spyan ras gzigs] Bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all buddhas. The patron deity of Tibet — His Holiness the Gyalwang Karmapa and His Holiness the Dalai Lama are considered to be emanations of Chenrezik.

CHÖ (Tib. gcod) Also known as “severance.” A meditation practice in which one makes an offering of one’s own body in order to overcome the false belief in and attachment to the self. The practice was widely taught by Machik Lapdrön, who received it from the Indian teacher Padampa Sangye.

CIRCUMAMBULATION (Skt. pradakshina) [Tib. skor ba] The act of moving oneself in a clockwise direction around a sacred person, place, or thing. This practice was taught by the Buddha as a means to accumulate merit and purify wrongdoing, especially that of the body.

CLARITY See **LUCIDITY**.

CLEAR LIGHT (Skt. prabhasvara) [Tib. 'od gsal] Also translated as luminosity, clarity, lucidity. The essential nature of the mind on the subtlest level, which can be considered synonymous with buddha nature. See also **DHARMAKAYA**.

COMMON/UNCOMMON PRELIMINARIES See **NGONDRO**.

COMMON VEHICLE See **HINAYANA**.

COMPASSION (Skt. karuna) [Tib. snying rje] Active concern for the sufferings of all sentient beings and the wish that they should be free from these sufferings. Chenrezik is the embodiment of the compassion of all buddhas. See also **FOUR IMMEASURABLES**, **LOVE/LOVING-KINDNESS**.

COMPLETION STAGE (Skt. sampannakrama) [Tib. rdzogs rim] The second of two Vajrayana or tantric stages of yidam meditation in which the meditator dissolves the previously established visualization and allows the mind to come to rest in its natural state. See also **GENERATION STAGE**.

DAKA (Skt. vira) [Tib. dpa' bo] Male counterpart of the dakini. See also **DAKINI**.

DAKINI (Skt. virini) [Tib. mkha' gro ma] “Sky-walker.”

Female tantric deity who fulfills buddha activities and who protects and serves the Buddhist teachings and practitioners. Dakinis transmit secret teachings to select practitioners when the time is ripe.

DEITY See **YIDAM**.

DEVA REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

DEWACHEN See **SUKHAVATI**.

DHARMA (Skt.) [Tib. chos] The teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha; one of the Three Jewels in which one takes refuge. It is also a term that variously refers to “phenomenon,” “truth,” “doctrine,” “attribute,” etc. See also **THREE JEWELS**.

DHARMACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. chos kyi 'khor lo] “Wheel of dharma.” The cycle of teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni, and by extension, those given by successive lineage holders.

DHARMADHATU (Skt.) [Tib. chos dbyings] The all-encompassing space, without origin or beginning, in which emptiness and interdependent origination are inseparable.

DHARMAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. chos kyi sku] “Dharma body.” The body of truth or reality refers to the noncomposite, nondual, primordially pure essential nature of the awakened mind itself. It is beyond all defilements, afflictions, or conceptual limitations, and is completely clear and unimpeded in its manifestation.

DHARMAPALA (Skt.) [Tib. chos skyong] “Dharma protector.” Fierce and powerful, the dharma protectors vow to guard the dharma and its practitioners. There are two types of dharmapalas: wisdom protectors, who are emanations of buddhas or bodhisattvas; and mundane protectors, who are virtuous samsaric beings.

DHARMATA (Skt.) [Tib. chos nyid] The true nature of reality; the inexpressible and fundamentally perfect purity of all phenomena.

DREAM YOGA (Skt. svapna) [Tib. rmi lam] These advanced yogic meditation practices are one of the six dharmas of Naropa, and are primarily aimed at utilizing the dream state as a means to recognize the illusory nature of all appearances, especially as preparation for the interval experience. See also **SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA**.

DROPS See **CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS**.

DZOKCHEN (Skt. mahasandhi) [Tib. rdzogs chen] Initially taught by and tactile consciousnesses comprise the five sense consciousnesses. The sixth is the mental consciousness; the seventh is the afflicted consciousness; and the eighth, the alaya, is the ground or all-basis consciousness. See also **ALL-BASIS CONSCIOUSNESS**.

EMANATION See **NIRMANAKAYA**.

EMPOWERMENT (Skt. abhisheka) [Tib. dbang bskur] Empowers and authorizes students to engage in a specific Vajrayana practice. It must be conferred by a Vajrayana master who embodies the lineage from which the empowerment comes. See also **INSTRUCTION**, **TRANSMISSION**.

EMPTINESS (Skt. shunyata) [Tib. stong pa nyid] The assertion that all things lack true or inherent existence, which can be demonstrated by their dependence on causes and conditions. Emptiness is the true nature of mind and phenomena, and the direct realization of emptiness is the perfection of prajna, marking the entrance of a bodhisattva into the bodhisattva levels.

EVEN PLACEMENT (Tib. mnyam par bzhag pa) Formal meditation or absorption in samadhi in which the mind is allowed to rest naturally without distraction or activity. See also **POSTMEDITATION**.

FIVE FEMALE BUDDHAS Consorts of the five male buddhas of the buddha, vajra, ratna, padma, and karma families respectively (the exact designations can vary): Dhatvishvari (Vairochana), Mamaki (Akshobhya), Buddhalochana (Ratnasambhava), Pandaravasini (Amitabha), and Samayatara (Amoghasiddhi). See also **FIVE MALE BUDDHAS**.

FIVE MALE BUDDHAS Vairochana of the buddha family, Akshobhya of the vajra family, Ratnasambhava of the ratna family, Amitabha of the padma family, and Amoghasiddhi of the karma family. Each of the five buddhas is identified with a specific type of wisdom that corresponds with a klesha in its fully purified and transformed aspect. See also **FIVE FEMALE BUDDHAS**.

FIVE POISONS See **KLESHA**.

FIVE WISDOMS (Skt. panchajnana) [Tib. ye shes lnga] Five types of fundamentally pure awareness that are ever-present within all sentient beings. Normally obscured by karmic

defilements and bewilderment, the five wisdoms manifest as the five poisons. The five wisdoms are: the wisdom of the expanse of reality, mirrorlike wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the wisdom of discernment, and the wisdom of accomplishment. Each of the five is closely associated with one of the five buddha families.

FORM/FORMLESS REALM (Skt. rupadhatu/arupyadhatu) [Tib. gzugs kyi khams/gzugs med khams] The three world-systems of existence are the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. The form realm is characterized by the absence of gross afflictive emotions, and beings in this realm remain in blissful states of meditative concentration. The formless realm is devoid of location and characterized by the absence of the form aggregate.

FOUR IMMEASURABLES (Tib. tshad med bzhi) Also the “four boundless qualities.” They are: love, compassion, joy, and impartiality.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS See **FOUR TRUTHS OF THE NOBLE ONES**.

FOUR TRUTHS OF THE NOBLE ONES (Tib. ‘phags pa’i bden pa bzhi) The Buddha’s first teaching, given at Sarnath,

India. The four truths of the noble ones are: the truth of suffering, the truth of the causes of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the eightfold path leading to the cessation of suffering.

GAMPOPA (1079-1153 CE) The fifth major Kagyu lineage holder and foremost disciple of Milarepa. Gampopa combined the Kadam teachings of Atisha with the Mahamudra tradition that originated from Tilopa and Naropa.

GANACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. tshogs kyi 'khor lo] “Wheel of gathering.” A ritual feast offering that is part of many sadhanas.

GELUK (Tib. dge lugs) One of the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism and the most recent of the New Translation schools. The Geluk lineage was founded by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419 CE).

GENERATION STAGE (Skt. utpattikrama) [Tib. skyed rim] The first of two stages of Vajrayana meditation in which the meditator establishes and maintains visualizations of a deity and its corresponding mandala. See also **COMPLETION STAGE**.

GOD REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

GREAT LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING IN THE BARDO (Tib. bar do thos grol chen mo) Commonly known in the West as the Tibetan Book of the Dead. A treasure text composed in the eighth century CE by Guru Rinpoche of Uddiyana, and later discovered in the fourteenth century CE by the treasure-revealer Karma Lingpa, it is a compendium of knowledge and instruction pertaining to the interval between death and rebirth. The text describes, and is intended to guide one through, the experiences that the consciousness has after death during the interval between death and the next rebirth.

GREAT PERFECTION See **DZOKCHEN**.

GROUND CLEAR LIGHT See **CLEAR LIGHT**.

GURU (Skt.) [Tib. bla ma] An enlightened master of a particular lineage from whom the student receives direct transmission of the guru's knowledge and experience. In the strictest sense of the word, a fully qualified guru must demonstrate direct realization, compassion, extraordinary learning, morality, and the skill to guide disciples. Such qualified masters are said to be few. See also **ROOT GURU**.

GURU RINPOCHE (Skt. Padmasambhava) [Tib. pad ma 'byung gnas, gu ru rin po che] “Lotus-born” master of Uddiyana, who brought the Vajrayana teachings to Tibet in the eighth century CE. He subdued the negative forces in Tibet, founded the Nyingma tradition, and concealed terma (treasures) that are still being discovered as the need arises for the benefit of future generations.

GURU YOGA (Skt.) [Tib. bla ma'i rnal 'byor] The fourth of the four uncommon preliminary practices of the Vajrayana ngondro — the practice of devotion to the guru culminating in receiving his blessing and becoming inseparable with his mind. See also **NGONDRO**.

HELL REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

HINAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. theg pa dman pa] The vehicle or path in which practitioners contemplate the four truths of the noble ones and the **twelve links of interdependence** with the aim of achieving liberation from the suffering of samsara. This vehicle subsumes the Shravakayana and the Pratyekabuddhayana.

HUMAN REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

HUNDRED-SYLLABLE MANTRA (Tib. yi ge brgya pa)

Usually refers to the long mantra of Vajrasattva, which is known primarily as a mantra of purification. See also **VAJRASATTVA**.

HUNGRY GHOST REALM See **SIX REALMS**.

ILLUSORY BODY (Skt. mayadeha) [Tib. sgyu lus] One of the six dharmas of Naropa, this advanced practice describes the experience of a practitioner who arises in a form resulting from the realization of the inseparability of the three kayas (dharmakaya, nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya). This is predicated on authentic recognition of the illusory and dreamlike nature of all phenomena. See also **SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA**.

INCREASE See **APPEARANCE, INCREASE, AND ATTAINMENT**.

INSTRUCTION (Tib. khrid, ngag) Directions from one individual to another — written, oral, or otherwise — on how to apply a technique in Buddhist practice. Instruction should come from a qualified individual, but more importantly it should be an unbroken lineage transmission. See also **EMPOWERMENT, TRANSMISSION**.

INTERDEPENDENCE/INTERDEPENDENT ORIGATION

(Skt. *pratityasamutpada*) [Tib. *rten 'brel*] The doctrine that nothing exists independently, but only comes into existence in dependence on previous causes and conditions. See also **EMPTINESS**, **TWELVE LINKS OF INTERDEPENDENCE**.

INTERVAL See **BARDO**.

KADAM (Tib. *bka' gdams*) A tradition that emphasizes the gradual path, which was brought to Tibet from India by Atisha at the end of the first millennium.

KAGYU (Tib. *bka' brgyud*) One of the four main lineages of Buddhism in Tibet and one of the three main schools of the New Translation tradition. The Kagyu traces its lineage of teachings and practices back to the mahasiddha Tilopa, who received the teachings directly from Vajradhara. The Kagyu are particularly known for their many great yogis as well as the monastic tradition that began with Gampopa (1079-1153 CE). See also **KARMAPA**.

KALACHAKRA (Skt.) [Tib. *dus kyi 'khor lo*] “Wheel of time.” A deity manifested by Buddha Shakyamuni at the request of the king of Shambhala. Kalachakra is an anuttara yoga tantra,

and receiving the empowerment is thought to guarantee rebirth in Shambhala.

KARMA (Skt.) [Tib. las] “Action.” The universal law of cause and effect, according to which one inevitably experiences the results of one’s own positive and negative actions.

KARMA KAGYU (Tib. ka rma bka’ brgyud) The principal Kagyu sect under the leadership of the Gyalwang Karmapa. It was established in the twelfth century CE by the First Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193 CE), one of Gampopa’s students. See also **KAGYU**, **KARMAPA**.

KARMAPA (Tib. ka rma pa) The Gyalwang Karmapa is the supreme head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. The present Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, is the seventeenth in an unbroken incarnation lineage that began with Dusum Khyenpa. The Gyalwang Karmapas, who embody the activity of buddhahood, were prophesied by both Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Rinpoche. A manifestation of Chenrezik, they are pure examples of wisdom and compassion, and have revealed their realization as scholars, yogins, artists, and poets. See also **KAGYU**, **KARMA KAGYU**.

KLESHA (Skt.) [Tib. nyon mongs, dug] Mental afflictions, or poisons. The three primary kleshas are attachment or desire, aversion or anger, and apathy or bewilderment. Along with pride and jealousy, they are collectively referred to as the five poisons.

KRIYA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. bya ba'i rgyud] "Action tantra." The first of the outer tantras, kriya tantra focuses on cleanliness, purity, and correct behavior. See also **TANTRA**.

LIFE WIND (Tib. srog rlung) The subtle energy or "wind" that keeps the mind biologically seated in the physical body. The life wind abides within the avadhuti or central channel of the body. See also **CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS**.

LOVE/LOVING-KINDNESS (Skt. maitri) [Tib. byams pa] The unconditional wish for all beings to attain happiness. On the bodhisattva path, one trains in loving-kindness and compassion. Many great masters teach that these qualities are the essence of the Buddha's teachings. See also **COMPASSION, FOUR IMMEASURABLES**.

LUCID DREAMING (Tib. rmi lam bzung ba) Lucid dreaming is knowing, while dreaming, that you are dreaming. It is the first step in gaining control over the dream state.

LUCIDITY (Skt. *prabhasvara*) [Tib. *gsal ba* or ‘*od gsal*] In Mountain Dharma, the term lucidity, used interchangeably with the terms clarity and luminosity, refers to the aspect of the mind’s nature that permits appearances in their vivid clarity, the nature of the unimpeded display of appearance, which arises inseparably as emptiness. The genuine realization of lucidity-emptiness is synonymous with mahamudra. See also **CLEAR LIGHT**.

LUMINOSITY See **LUCIDITY**.

MAHAMUDRA (Skt.) [Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*] “Great seal.” A system of meditation practice particularly emphasized in the Kagyu tradition, mahamudra is the direct experience of the empty, luminous, and unlimited nature of mind.

MAHASIDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. *grub thob chen po*] A highly realized master in the Vajrayana tradition. Also refers specifically to any of the eighty-four great and eccentric adepts who lived in India between the eighth and twelfth centuries CE, and who reached great spiritual attainment through the diligent practice of tantra.

MAHAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. *theg pa chen po*] “Greater vehicle.” The teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma

in which shunyata (emptiness) and compassion for all beings are emphasized. The Mahayana has two practice paths: the Sutrayana method of perfecting good qualities and the Vajrayana method of taking the intended outcome of buddhahood as the path. See also **BODHICHITTA**, **BODHISATTVA**, **BODHISATTVA VOW**, **HINAYANA**, **VAJRAYANA**.

MAITREYA (Skt.) [Tib. byams pa] One of the eight principal bodhisattvas and the Buddha of the future, who at present resides in the heavenly realm of Tushita, from which he produces emanations in other realms.

MANDALA (Skt.) [Tib. dkyil 'khor] The celestial abode of a particular deity with its surrounding retinue and characteristic aspects. Also, any symbolic or physical representation of such a mandala. The mandala offering, the third of the four uncommon preliminaries, perfects the accumulation of merit through offering the entire universe to the sources of refuge. See also **NGONDRO**.

MANJUSHRI (Skt.) [Tib. 'jam dpal dbyangs] One of the eight main bodhisattvas, Manjushri is the embodiment of all the buddhas' infinite wisdom. His purpose is to explain the limitless teachings of the Buddha to all sentient beings until

samsara is completely emptied. In his right hand he holds the flaming double-edged sword that cuts through ignorance. In his left hand, on a lotus, he holds the Prajnaparamita text that contains the wisdom that penetrates to the ultimate nature of reality.

MANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. sngags] Sacred sounds representing various energies that symbolize and communicate certain functions or the nature of specific deities. OM MANI PADME HUM (Skt.), the mantra of Chenrezik, is among the most widely practiced. See also **SEED SYLLABLE**.

MANTRAYANA See **VAJRAYANA**.

MARA (Skt.) [Tib. bdud] Anything that obstructs the practice of dharma and seduces practitioners into abandoning their practice in favor of worldly activities. When capitalized, Mara refers to the antagonist who repeatedly appeared to the Buddha, attempting to disrupt his awakening as well as the subsequent activities of his life and teaching career. Mara also refers to certain types of demonic or malevolent entities.

MENTAL AFFLICTIONS See **KLESHA**.

MENTAL BODY (Tib. yid lus) The form of subtle body experienced by an interval being, which is not confined to a gross physical form. See also **BARDO**.

MILAREPA (Tib. mi la ras pa) This famous yogi (1040-1123 CE) is one of the greatest and most celebrated teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite having accumulated heavy negative karma in early adulthood, he became the student of Marpa and attained full awakening in one lifetime. His students include Gampopa and Rechungpa.

MOUNTAIN DHARMA (Tib. ri chos) Refers to serious retreat practice, especially solitary retreat in the mountains. The essential point of mountain Dharma is to abandon all concerns of this life and to undertake solitary retreat with the intent of experiencing the nature of your mind.

MOUNT MERU (Tib. ri rab lhun po) The supreme mountain; the central axis of this universe according to Buddhist cosmology.

NAGARJUNA (Skt.) [Tib. klu sgrub] A leading Buddhist scholar who lived in India in the second century CE. Nagarjuna is renowned for his interpretation of emptiness or shunyata, as well as founding the Madhyamaka

(Middle Way) school and writing many important texts, including the *Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way* (Skt. *Mulamadhyamakakarika*).

NAROPA The great Indian pandita and mahasiddha (956-1050 CE or 1012-1100 CE) who underwent severe austerities under his guru Tilopa and later achieved the state of Vajradhara. His principal disciple was Marpa. See also **SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA**.

NEW TRANSLATION SCHOOL (Tib. *gsar ma*) The New Translation school, which includes the Kagyu, Geluk, and Sakya schools, originates from the period of the second wave of Buddhism's transmission into Tibet. See also **NYINGMA**.

NGONDRO (Tib. *sngon 'gro*) The preliminary practices of Tibetan Buddhism through which the practitioner begins the Vajrayana path. The common preliminaries consist of contemplation of the four thoughts that turn the mind: precious human birth, impermanence, karma, and samsara. The uncommon preliminaries consist of the accumulation of 111,111 repetitions of refuge prayers and prostrations; 111,111 Vajrasattva mantras; 111,111 mandala offerings; and 111,111 guru yoga practices. See also **GURU YOGA, MANDALA, REFUGE, VAJRASATTVA**.

NIRMANAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. sprul pa'i sku] The body of emanation, through which buddhas manifest spontaneously and usually physically in accord with the diverse needs and dispositions of limitless sentient beings.

NIRVANA (Skt.) [Tib. mya ngan las 'das pa] "State beyond suffering." The extinction of the causes of samsara resulting in liberation from cyclic existence. See also **SAMSARA**.

NONCONCEPTUALITY (Tib. mi dmigs, dmigs med) "Thought free." A state divested of all discursive mental activity.

NYINGMA (Tib. rnying ma) The Old Translation school, which represents the Buddhist teachings as they were first translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit and other languages. This school began in the eighth century CE with Guru Rinpoche, who buried terma (hidden treasures) to be discovered at the appropriate time in the future by tertons (treasure revealers). Dzokchen is the highest system of meditation practice in the Nyingma tradition. See also **DZOKCHEN**.

NYUNGNE (Tib. smyung gnas) The fasting and purification practice of Thousand-Armed Chenrezik, great bodhisattva of compassion.

OBSTRUCTOR (Skt. vighna) [Tib. bgegs] Obstructive energy or spirit that is openly confrontational rather than mischievous or manipulative.

OLD TRANSLATION SCHOOL See **NYINGMA**.

OM MANI PADME HUM (Skt.) OM MANI PEME HUNG [Tib.] The well-known mantra of Chenrezik, the great bodhisattva of compassion.

PADMASAMBHAVA See **GURU RINPOCHE**.

PARAMITAS See **SIX PERFECTIONS**.

PHOWA See **TRANSFERENCE/EJECTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS**.

POSTMEDITATION (Tib. rjes thob) In Vajrayana deity practice, when you arise from practice in postmeditation, you regard all visual appearances, including that of your own body, as the presence of the body of the deity; all sound

as his speech or mantra; and all thoughts, whether good or bad as his wisdom. This is the postmeditation practice that is the threefold bearing incorporating the recognition of mind's nature and the recognition of the illusoriness of all phenomena.

PRAJNA (Skt.) [Tib. shes rab] The discernment or knowledge that realizes emptiness through the cultivation of insight; the sixth of the Mahayana perfections.

PRATIMOKSHA (Skt.) [Tib. so sor thar pa] “Individual liberation.” The seven or eight levels of self-liberating precepts that constitute the basic moral commitments of a lay disciple, novice, or fullyordained monastic.

PRATYKABUDDHA (Skt.) [Tib. rang sangs rgyas] A solitary victor. Someone who pursues the pratyekabuddha path and attains arhatship by concentrating on his or her own liberation and contemplating the twelve links of interdependence.

PRELIMINARY PRACTICES See **NGONDRO**.

PRETA (Skt.) [Tib. yi dvags] Of the six classes of beings in samsara, the pretas are ghosts and spirits of various types who

are endlessly tormented by hunger, thirst, and intense misery. See also **SIX REALMS**.

PURE REALM See **BUDDHA FIELD**.

RAGA ASYA (Skt.) [Tib. ka rma chags med] Sanskrit for Karma Chakme.

REFUGE (Tib. skyobs pa) Safety sought from the perils of cyclic existence, which can only be found in those sources that embody the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Taking refuge is also the first part of the uncommon preliminaries. See also **NGONDRO**, **REFUGE VOW**.

REFUGE VOW (Tib. skyabs su 'gro ba'i sdom pa) Formal statement of one's intent to take refuge, usually done in a ceremony accompanied by liturgy. The vow of refuge, like all Buddhist vows, must be received from a qualified preceptor who has himself maintained it without breakage. The vow of refuge marks the beginning of the Buddhist path and remains as a foundation of one's commitment for all other vows. See also **REFUGE**.

RELATIVE TRUTH (Tib. kun rdzob bden pa) "Deceptive truth." The way ordinary beings perceive and experience

interdependent phenomena, which is considered to be true on a conventional level. See also **ABSOLUTE TRUTH**.

ROOT GURU (Tib. rtsa ba'i bla ma) The root of all blessings. According to the anuttara yoga tradition of the Vajrayana, the root guru is the embodiment of all buddhas because the mind of the guru is the dharmakaya, the wisdom of all buddhas. Since the guru is the source of dharma, the speech of the guru is the embodiment of all dharma. Whether the guru manifests as a monastic or as a chakravartin, the body of the guru as the foremost member of the sangha is the embodiment of the entire sangha. The qualities of the guru are what manifest as the yidams and other deities, and the activity of the guru is what manifests as dakinis and dharma protectors. See also **GURU**.

SADHANA (Skt.) [Tib. sgrub thabs] “Means of accomplishment.” A Vajrayana liturgy and method of practice that generally emphasizes the generation stage. The sadhana format usually includes chanting, visualization, and mantra recitation.

SAKYA (Tib. sa skya) One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and also one of the New Translation schools. Headed by His Holiness Sakya Trizin, the lineage is passed

from father to son. The Sakya lineage emphasizes lamdre (path and fruition) teachings and Buddhist logic.

SAMADHI (Skt.) [Tib. ting nge ‘dzin] Meditative absorption. A onepointed focus of mind in which there is nondual experience of the object of meditation and the subject meditating.

SAMAYA (Skt.) [Tib. dam tshig] Sacred word or vow. Vajrayana commitments are made primarily to one’s root guru and to specific practices, but also extend to the sangha.

SAMBHOGAKAYA (Skt.) [Tib. longs spyod rdzogs pa’i sku] The body of complete enjoyment through which buddhas appear perceptible only to bodhisattvas. Refers to the lucid, unimpeded manifestation of the mind’s true nature.

SAMSARA (Skt.) [Tib. ‘khor ba] Cyclic existence in which ordinary beings, trapped in an endless cycle of rebirth in the six realms, experience endless suffering. See also **NIRVANA**.

SANGHA (Skt.) [Tib. dge ‘dun] “Aspirants to virtue.” The community of practitioners and teachers who practice and transmit the Buddha’s teachings. One of the Three Jewels in which one takes refuge. See also **THREE JEWELS**.

SARMA See **NEW TRANSLATION SCHOOL**.

SECRET MANTRA See **VAJRAYANA**.

SEED SYLLABLE (Tib. yig ‘bru, sa bon) A visualized Sanskrit letter or syllable, often associated with a specific mantra or with a buddha family, that serves as an essential element from which arises the visualized form of a deity in the generation stage. See also **MANTRA**.

SEVERANCE See **CHÖ**.

SHAMATHA See **SHINAY**.

SHINAY (Skt. shamatha) [Tib. zhi gnas] “Calm abiding.” Tranquillity meditation in which the meditator uses techniques, such as following the breath, to develop a calm and focused mind.

SHRAMANERA (Skt.) [Tib. dge tshul] A novice monk.

SHRAVAKA (Skt.) [Tib. nyan thos] “Hearers.” Early disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni, the shravakas practiced meditation in reliance on the Buddha’s words, through both listening to teachings and communicating them to others. The fruition of the shravaka path is the state of arhatship.

SIDDHI (Skt.) [Tib. dngos grub] “Accomplishment.” Spiritual power. The eight ordinary siddhis demonstrate mastery of the mundane world; the supreme siddhi is complete awakening.

SINGED OFFERING See **SUR**.

SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA (Tib. na ro chos drug)
Naropa taught Marpa these tantric practices, which form an important part of the Kagyu teachings and a standard practice in the traditional threeyear retreat. They consist of chandali (Tib. gtum mo), illusory body (Tib. sgyu lus), dream (Tib. rmi lam), clear light (Tib. ‘od gsal), interval practice (Tib. bar do), and transference of consciousness (Tib. ‘pho ba).

SIX PERFECTIONS (Skt. satparamita) [Tib. pha rol tu phyin pa drug] Also known as the “six paramitas.” The main practices of the Mahayana paths and stages: generosity, moral discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and prajna or discernment.

SIX REALMS (Tib. khams drug) Six spheres of samsaric existence as depicted in the wheel of existence. The deva or god realm is the highest of the six realms, and in this realm beings are dominated by pride and suffer because they will

eventually fall to lower realms. In the asura or jealous god realm, beings are dominated by jealousy and envy, and suffer as a result of their constant conflict. The human realm is especially characterized by desire and attachment. Although beings in this realm suffer due to their ceaseless struggles, it is the best samsaric rebirth because one has the opportunity to practice dharma. In the animal realm, beings are dominated by ignorance and stupidity, and suffer from constant fear. In the preta or hungry ghost realm, beings are dominated by greed, and suffer terribly from hunger and thirst. The lowest realm is the hell realm, where beings are dominated by hatred and aggression, and suffer inconceivably.

SIX-SYLLABLE MANTRA (Tib. yig drug) The six-syllable mantra of Chenrezik, OM MANI PADME HUM (Skt.), OM MANI PEME HUNG [Tib.].

SUKHAVATI (Skt.) [Tib. bde ba can] The pure realm of Amitabha Buddha, located in the west. See also **AMITABHA**.

SUPERCOGNITION (Skt. abhijna) [Tib. mngon par shes pa] Paranormal faculties or powers of perception that are produced through advanced meditative accomplishment.

SUR (Tib. gsur) Singed offering. Consecrated herbs, barley, and other substances are singed, which particularly benefits beings in the bardo.

SUTRA (Skt.) [Tib. mdo] Discourses of the Buddha. Derived directly from the Buddha and subsequently redacted and canonized by his disciples. One of the three baskets (corpus of literature) comprising the tripitaka, the Buddhist canon.

SUTRAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. mdo'i theg pa] Refers to the causal vehicle of characteristics, in contrast to the resultant vehicle of Secret Mantra. This approach is based on the sutras, with its training being comprised of the causes that lead to the achievement of buddhahood.

TAKING AND SENDING See **TONG LEN**.

TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. rgyud] Textual and practical instructions of the Vajrayana taught by the Buddha while manifesting in sambhogakaya form; bestowed as a powerful means to overcome the obstacles of degenerate times. The tantras do not abandon the other vehicles, but build upon them using skillful means to swiftly bring about awakening. See also **ANUTTARA YOGA TANTRA**, **CHARYA TANTRA**, **KRIYA TANTRA**, **YOGA TANTRA**.

TANTRAYANA See **VAJRAYANA**.

TANTRIKA (Skt.) [Tib. rgyud pa, sngags pa] A practitioner of tantra.

TERMA (Tib. gter ma) “Treasure.” These concealed treasures have included texts, ritual objects, and relics, which were hidden mainly by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal to be discovered at the proper time for the benefit of future students. See also **TERTON**.

TERTON (Tib. gter ston) A revealer of hidden treasures that were concealed primarily by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal. See also **TERMA**.

THANGKA (Tib. thang ka) A Tibetan scroll painting depicting buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities; used as a religious object.

THREE JEWELS (Skt. triratna) [Tib. dkon mchog gsum] “Three rare and supreme ones.” The precious Buddha, the precious Dharma, and the precious Sangha. See also **REFUGE**.

THREE-YEAR RETREAT A traditional retreat curriculum, particularly emphasized within the Kagyu schools, which

spans three years, three months, and three days. During this retreat one receives, learns, and practices the principal yidam and meditation practices of the lineage, such as Vajrayogini and the six dharmas of Naropa. See also **SIX DHARMAS OF NAROPA, VAJRAYOGINI**.

TOKDEN (Tib. rtogs ldan) Realized person. A title of someone who has realization in Vajrayana practice.

TONG LEN (Tib. gtong len) “Sending and taking.” A meditative method in which one coordinates the breath while considering the suffering of others and mentally exchanges it for one’s own happiness; also, any form of meditation that employs a sending-and-taking technique.

TORMA (Tib. gtor ma) “That which is scattered or thrown.” Ritual cake used in tantric ceremonies that derives its name from the practice of its being dispersed to animals after a ceremony. The inner meaning is the discarding of attachment connected with such offerings.

TRANQUILLITY See **SHINAY**.

TRANSFERENCE/EJECTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS (Skt. samkranti) [Tib. ‘pho ba] Also known as “phowa.” The

practice of transferring the consciousness of a recently deceased being to a pure realm such as Sukhavati.

TRANSMISSION (Tib. lung) “Reading transmission,” which in addition to empowerment and instruction, authorizes students to engage in a specific Vajrayana practice. It must be conferred by a Vajrayana master who embodies the lineage from which the practice comes. See also **EMPOWERMENT**, **INSTRUCTION**.

TSONDROU GYAMTSO (Skt. Virya Sagara) [Tib. brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho] The disciple who requested Karma Chakme to teach about mountain Dharma.

TUMMO (Skt. chandali) [Tib. gtum mo] Inner heat yoga. One of the six dharmas of Naropa, made famous by Milarepa. Besides the physical effects of generating heat and bliss, it is a powerful means to bring about realization and complete awakening.

TWELVE LINKS OF INTERDEPENDENCE (Tib. rten ‘brel yan lag bcu gnyis) The twelve successive phases that begin with ignorance and end with old age and death, based on the principle that nothing exists independently, but comes into existence only in dependence on various causes and conditions.

TWO ACCUMULATIONS (Tib. tshogs gnyis) Refers to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Wisdom is the experience and realization that results from the purification of afflictive and cognitive obscurations leading to awakening. Merit is the positive karmic accumulation resulting from virtuous actions.

UPASAKA/UPASIKA (Skt.) [Tib. dge bsnyen/dge bsnyen ma] Ordained lay practitioner of the Dharma.

VAIROCHANA (Skt.) [Tib. rnam par snang mdzad] The principal sambhogakaya buddha and lord of the buddha family. Also the name of a great scholar and translator who lived during the time of King Trisong Deutsen. He was one of the main masters responsible for bringing the Dzokchen teachings to Tibet.

VAJRA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje] “Indestructible,” “adamantine.” The legendary weapon of the god Indra that is said to be absolutely indestructible. The vajra is used in the Vajrayana mainly as a symbol of the mind’s unchanging nature. It also represents stability, power, and the masculine principle of skillful means.

VAJRADHARA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje ‘chang] “Vajra holder.” The dharmakaya buddha of the New Translation school.

VAJRASATTVA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje sems dpa’] Sambhogakaya buddha of purification. Vajrasattva meditation and mantra recitation constitute the second of the four uncommon preliminary practices, which is intended to purify obscurations and wrongdoing. See also **NGONDRO**.

VAJRAVARAHI See **VAJRAYOGINI**.

VAJRAYANA (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje theg pa] “Indestructible vehicle.” The third turning of the wheel of dharma. As part of the Mahayana, it shares the same philosophical base, but differs in practice as it takes the result as the path and has additional teachings based on the tantras, which emphasize deity practice using visualization, mantra, and mudra. Also called “Mantrayana” or “Secret Mantra.”

VAJRAYOGINI (Skt.) [Tib. rdo rje rnal ‘byor ma] The embodiment of wisdom, she is one of the main yidams of the Kagyu lineage and the consort of Chakrasamvara. She represents the transformation of ignorance and desire into emptiness and compassion.

VASE BREATHING (Tib. rlung bum pa can) A specialized technique for manipulating the subtle energy winds, used in certain restricted practices.

VEHICLE See **YANA**.

VIDYADHARA (Skt.) [Tib. rig ‘dzin] “Awareness holder.” A being of high attainment in the Vajrayana.

VINAYA (Skt.) [Tib. ‘dul ba] “Discipline.” One of the three baskets (corpus of literature) that comprise the tripitaka, the Buddhist canon. The vinaya contains the Buddha’s teachings on moral discipline and conduct.

VIRA (Skt.) See **DAKA**.

WINDS See **CHANNELS, WINDS, AND DROPS**.

WISH-FULFILLING JEWEL (Skt. chintamani) [Tib. yid bzhin nor bu] A fabulous jewel that fulfills all wishes; found in the realms of the gods or nagas.

YAMA (Skt.) [Tib. gshin rje] Lord of Death, the personification of impermanence.

YANA (Skt.) [Tib. theg pa] “Vehicle or path” on which the practitioner metaphorically travels on the path to awakening. The three main yanas are the Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Mahayana. The first two of these are collectively known as the “Hinayana” or “common vehicle,” while the Vajrayana falls within the scope of the Mahayana; another popular approach identifies the three main yanas as being the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. See also **HINAYANA**, **MAHAYANA**, **PRATYKABUDDHA**, **SHRAVAKA**, **VAJRAYANA**.

YIDAM (Tib. yi dam) A tantric deity, in male or female form, representing different aspects of buddhahood. Yidams may be peaceful or wrathful and are meditated upon according to the nature of the individual practitioner.

YOGA TANTRA (Skt.) [Tib. rnal ‘byor rgyud] The third of the outer tantras. It emphasizes the view rather than conduct, and emphasizes regarding the deity as the same level as oneself. See also **TANTRA**.

YOGI/YOGINI (Skt.) [Tib. rnal ‘byor pa/rnal ‘byor ma] Tantric practitioners.

Index of Stories Told by Khenpo Rinpoche

Bad Deities Are Dirtier than Demons

Deer-headed Yogini, The

Dorshul Khandro, the Delok

Drukpa Kagyu Lama in Buxador

Foolish Merchant, The

“Gautama, I’m Burning,”

Geshe Tsakpuwa and Milarepa

Kagyu Monlam Festival

King Langdarma

King’s Minister, The

Lama from Tsang with the Black Horse, The

Noise While Meditating

Old Man from Golok, The

Red Hoopoe-headed Yogini, The

Shantideva Teaches the *Bodhicharyavatara*

Third Karmapa and the Nine Magicians, The

Tirthika Wanderer Named Surya, The

Walking Through Walls

Writing on Walls

Young Monk's Suicide, The



About KTD Publications

KTD Publications, a part of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, is a not-for-profit publisher established with the purpose of facilitating the projects and activities manifesting from His Holiness's inspiration and blessings. We are dedicated to “gathering the garlands of the gurus’ precious teachings” and producing fine-quality books.

KTD Publications

Woodstock, New York

www.KTDPublications.org

May All Beings Be Happy!