



TRANSFORMING THE MIND

The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

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The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

As taught by
Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Translated by Jamyang Woser



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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche has taught the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* many times, in various places and to different audiences. In spite of its condensed form, the *Four Dharmas* are in fact a profound instruction that includes the whole path — from encountering the Dharma to reaching the essence of buddhahood — and, naturally, each time it can be presented in a different way to highlight various aspects of that path. Therefore, every opportunity of listening to and contemplating the *Four Dharmas* could be equally valuable and illuminating. For this reason, we are very happy to have the opportunity to publish this exposition, given some years ago by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, in English.

The text of this commentary is based on the teachings Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave at Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, the Karmaapas' main American center near Woodstock, New York. It is still uncertain when they took place, but according to some records, it may have been September 1989. There is no written re-

cord of those teachings, but the old audio recordings have survived and prove that Rinpoche was teaching at KTD, Chojo Radha was translating simultaneously into English and the Q & A sessions were conducted by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. (Unfortunately the Q & A sessions were too difficult to transcribe and couldn't be included in the manuscript.)

Recently, Thrangu Monastery revised the Tibetan commentary, first published in 2016, as part of a larger project to create a complete set of the collected works of Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. The commentary was also edited in those places where audio recordings were unclear or damaged. Thrangu Rinpoche explained those parts again to fill all the gaps, reviewed the entire text and offered its transmission. Shortly afterwards a Chinese edition was published, translated by Khenpo Lodro Tenzey (available on the [Thrangu Dharmakara website](#)).

Following the format of the Chinese edition, we have also added a short teaching on consciousness and wisdom given by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in Germany in 1988. Although this teaching does not include a complete explanation of the fourth of the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* — how confusion turns into wisdom — it adds significantly to our understanding, and helps us comprehend the various types of consciousness.

We would like to express our gratitude to Jamyang Woser who offered this English translation, based on both the Tibetan and Chinese texts. We would also like to thank Khenpo David Karma Choephel and Jo Gibson for editing it. May it bring benefit to many.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

In the fall of 2019, I was able to receive an audience with Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in Namoh Buddha before I left Nepal. By that time, I have spent a few years studying at his shedra. I have noticed thus far that I was not peculiarly adept at rote memorization, nor was I any good at debate; I was not progressing much in my dharma practice either. As usual, all these concerns and chatter on my mind seemed to vanish upon being in Rinpoche's presence. One becomes at ease in the gentle embrace of his warm smile and effortless compassion. I offered a brief report of what I had been learning, and then requested an oral transmission of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa. Since then, I was subsequently fortunate enough to receive online teachings on it from His Holiness the Karmapa and Khenpo Lhabu, which helped to deepen my understanding of the teaching.

As many of us have probably heard before, encountering the works of Gampopa, the shared lineage holder of the Kagyu school, is akin

to meeting him in person. Nevertheless, these profound and pithy instructions are not as useful to us if we do not receive an explanation from a spiritual teacher. We might also forget or even not know how to arouse the proper motivation while studying and practicing these teachings. All these problems can be remedied through studying Rinpoche's commentary on the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* taught at KTD in the 1980s.

In this teaching, Rinpoche clarifies each Dharma by referring to the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, the lengthiest of Gampopa's three works. He first points out that for our mind to turn toward and subsequently become the dharma, we need to know why we need the dharma and what its benefits are. The text then clearly establishes the goal of a practitioner and what we need to do in order to realize it. Through engaging and practical examples, Rinpoche reminds us that the various kinds of laziness and attachment we have are not actually worthy of our indulgence.

Perhaps one of the reasons why we memorize anything is because of its importance. To be able to recall a few lines of dharma while knowing its meaning allows us to occasionally rest our mind on something so sublime and beneficial whilst going about our everyday lives. This teaching is a guide that reminds us to ask ourselves, has my mind turned toward the dharma today? Is the dharma I am trying to practice going along the right path?

This is a detailed manual that we can refer to in times of doubt and contains an instruction concise enough for the ever-forgetful to remember. As Rinpoche explains when describing a spiritual teacher, “With such a teacher at our side, none of our practice and efforts would go to waste. This is because we are able to clearly understand what is to be adopted and abandoned; we will know precisely each step of the practice.” I hope that as we read and ponder each word, we will grow more confident in knowing what is and is not in accord with the dharma, and find great comfort in the infinite compassion of Lord Gampopa and Thrangu Rinpoche.

The translation and publishing of this book would not have been possible through my own efforts alone. Without Khenpo Tengye's guidance in interpreting the Tibetan text and Rinpoche's intention, the process of translation would not have been this smooth. His fountain of experience and patience has benefitted many, including a dull-minded and lazy student like me. I must also offer my utmost gratitude to Khenpo David Karma Choephel, who spent much time and effort proofreading the English translation; his expertise and experience helped resolve inconsistencies in terms and correct areas of misconception. Both khenpos have spent numerous years serving by the side of Thrangu Rinpoche, resulting in an acute familiarity with Rinpoche's style of teaching and mannerisms. Through their detailed explanations of the text, many of my preconceived notions and erroneous thinking were vanquished,

paving the way for this translation. I would like to acknowledge the immense help Ani Jangchub has provided along the way; she thoughtfully arranged many classes that benefitted other translators and myself, helping us to better translate Rinpoche's ocean of teachings. I sincerely thank all the members of Thrangu Dharma-kara for their guidance and company. Many thanks to Jo Gibson for her patience and attention to detail; she helped to smooth out the rough edges and provided me with nuggets of grammatical wisdom. In addition, I would also like to thank Beata Stępień for helping with all aspects of publishing.

Now, in the winter of 2022, I hope to travel back to Nepal and offer this translation to Thrangu Rinpoche on his 91st birthday; I pray for his good health and that he may constantly turn the wheel of dharma.

Any mistranslation or erroneous content found in this book is solely mine, and I ask for your forgiveness in advance. I genuinely hope that this teaching will go on to reach and benefit many readers, and that all our minds can eventually become one with the Dharma.

Jamyang Woser
22 October, 2022

TRANSFORMING THE MIND

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

THE FOUR DHARMAS OF GAMPOPA

Introduction

The Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism can be divided into four main schools and eight additional lineages. Gampopa, who is comparable to the eye of all the Kagyu teachings, is the common teacher among these lineages.¹ A distinctive feature of the Kagyu teachings, particularly within the sublime oral instructions of the Karma Kagyu, is the practice of samadhi. The lineage of samadhi practice is closely related to Gampopa. How did this come about?

When the perfect Buddha came to this world and turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught the *King of Samādhis Sūtra* (*Samādhirājasūtra*). The bodhisattva Chandraprabha, one of Gampopa's previous rebirths, was present at the time of the teaching. The Buddha asked his disciples, "Who among you is able to spread this teaching in the future, during the degenerate age?" Chandraprabha arose and

1 See *Karmapa: 900 years*, third edition on dharmaebooks.org

vowed, “In the future, I will be the one who will spread the teachings of the *King of Samādhis Sūtra*”.² While making his commitment, the other five hundred disciples present also pledged to assist him with the spread of the teachings in the future. Then, the Buddha told Chandraprabha, “You will be reborn as a bhikkhu named³

2 From the *Samādhirājasūtra*:

- 18.36 “Who among you has the fortitude
To teach this sūtra
In the dreadful future time
When the Dharma is ruined?”
- 18.37 The young man stood up, weeping,
And at that time spoke to the Jina.
This heart-born son of the Buddha
Roared thus this lion’s roar:
- 18.38 “In the dreadful time in future
When the Buddha has passed away,
Without concern for my life or body
I will spread this sūtra widely. (35)
- 18.43 Eight hundred dharmabhāṇakas
Who were present stood up and said,
“In future times we also
Will be holders of this sūtra.”

3 Most Kagyupas hold that the Chandraprabha in *Samādhirājasūtra* is a previous incarnation of Gampopa. The prophecy regarding Gampopa’s future incarnation is actually found in *The Great Compassion Sutra* which details the appearance of a bhikku named *Tsoche* in the future.

The Tibetan word *tsoche* means doctor. According to the *Great Compassion*

Tsoche and shall impart the *King of Samādhis Sūtra* teachings on the banks of the Lohit river⁴ in the north. Just as the Buddha's teachings shall remain for as long as the sky abides, the sublime practice of samadhi will flourish without diminishing." From this, we can clearly see the extraordinary relationship between Gampopa and the *King of Samādhis Sūtra*.

Due to these circumstances from his past life, Gampopa was born with the innate qualities of sublime samadhi. As for his acquired qualities, they came from his keen diligence. He was born at a time when Buddhism, particularly the Kadampa teachings transmitted by the great Atisha, was flourishing in Tibet; Atisha was like the sun of the Buddha's teachings in the Land of Snow. Gampopa was extremely diligent in his studies. He practiced all the Kadampa pith instructions given to him and his samadhi practice deepened and stabilized.

Nevertheless, Gampopa did not remain complacent due to these qualities. He always aspired to develop deeper realization in his

Sutra: «Ananda, after my passing, there will be a bhikkhu named Jivaka who will appear in Uttarapatha.» Jivaka here means doctor, and Gampopa himself was a doctor before he became ordained. Thus, this is a support for the prophecy concerning Gampopa.

4 The Lohit river flows into India from China. It is formed in the Zayul County through the merging of two rivers, Gangri Karpo and Zayul Chu, and is known as the Lohit after entering India.

meditation. Once, he had heard that the great yogi Milarepa was residing in the area of Gundrong, and spontaneously aroused great faith in him. He urgently desired to learn meditation at the feet of the great yogi. Eventually, he met and received the pith instructions from Milarepa, and progressed tremendously in his practice. Subsequently, in regards to the benefits of following Milarepa's teachings, Gampopa described, "My breath has transcended the in-hale and exhale; my realization is as vast as the expanse of the sky."

Prior to their parting, Milarepa instructed, "Head for the Gonpodar mountains in the south, where you will be able to benefit countless sentient beings." Following the instructions, Gampopa arrived at the mountains of Gonpodar. He thought to himself, "Now that I have reached the place instructed by my guru, I shall devote my time to practice and stay here for a thirteen-year retreat." At that very moment, a dakini appeared in front of him and said, "Instead of staying in retreat for thirteen years, it would be more beneficial if you could teach the dharma for thirteen years."⁵ Gampopa wondered, "Where are the sentient beings whom I am supposed to help?" Soon after, students seeking his teachings gradually appeared. Under Gampopa's guidance, each of them became adept meditators and attained supreme accomplishments; there

5 Twelve years according to Gampopa's liberation story written by Sonam Lhundrup.

were eight hundred accomplished disciples at that time, according to records.

Gampopa's style of instructions combines the two great streams of Kadampa and Mahamudra teachings into one called *ka chak*, coming to mean the confluence of the Kadampa and Mahamudra. *Ka* refers to the oral instructions on mind training transmitted by Atisha's Kadampa tradition; *chak* refers to the pith instructions of the Mahamudra lineage passed down by Milarepa. To beginners, Gampopa first taught the Kadampa instructions. As they advanced in their practice, they were gradually introduced to the Mahamudra teachings as taught by Milarepa.

According to Gampopa's liberation story, when his activities of benefiting sentient beings were close to completion, before passing away, he told his students, "In the future, it is likely that some of the students of my students might feel unfortunate that they were unable to meet me and receive the pith instructions in person; they might become sad and upset. However, they don't have to feel that way because encountering the three texts I have composed — the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, *The Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*, and the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* — is equal to meeting me in person." For those with more time and great enthusiasm, they can read the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*; those who prefer shorter texts can study *The Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*; those who like

even more concise teachings and are intent on practicing samadhi can rely on the *Four Dharmas*. Gampopa stated that reading these texts attentively and putting them into practice is akin to meeting him in person. This is a crucial reminder, from which we can witness the compassion he showed to his students.

Buddhism emphasizes giving teachings in accordance with the different aptitudes and faculties of each student; as such, the three texts of Gampopa are intended for students with various faculties. Students with greater faculties are more intelligent; they do not need extensive explanations, and require only a concise and brief teaching in order to understand the pith instructions. To them, Gampopa taught the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa*, the most concise of the pith instructions. Those of middling intelligence and faculties are unable to comprehend such succinct teachings, and thus he taught them the slightly longer *Precious Garland of the Supreme Path*. For those of lesser faculties and intelligence, they need longer and more detailed explanations to clearly understand the teachings, which in turn helps them to meditate properly. Thus, Gampopa taught them the comprehensive *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

The *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* is a teaching Gampopa taught to students with superior faculties and intelligence.

The First Dharma:

MAY MY MIND BECOME THE DHARMA

The first of the four dharma states “May my mind become the dharma.” This means that compared to our body and speech, having our mind enter the dharma is more important. For example, many people might make changes to their clothing and hairstyles after having started practicing the dharma. In terms of their actions of speech, they might start focusing on making supplications and reciting prayers. However, nothing is more essential than having our mind become the dharma.

What causes our mind to become the dharma? The teachings of the Buddha are solely concerned with the way that things actually are. For example, he taught the Four Noble Truths,⁶ the two truths⁷ and so forth, and our mind is drawn toward these teachings on the

6 The truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering

7 Conventional truth and ultimate truth

truths. Once we develop a deeper understanding of them, we will be able to clearly know why we need to practice and what the benefits of practice are. This is when our mind will follow the dharma.

However, even though we have developed some understanding of the truths, there is a major obstacle preventing our mind from becoming the dharma, and that is laziness. According to the teachings, there are three types of laziness: the laziness of self-deprecation, the laziness of sloth, and the laziness of attachment to nonvirtues. In order for our mind to become the dharma, we need to overcome these obstacles. First of all, we need to clearly understand what laziness is. What are the three types of laziness? Do we have them? What are the methods for abandoning them? Finally, we need to work persistently at overcoming these problems. In the following section, we will discuss the three types of laziness.

THE LAZINESS OF SELF-DEPRECATATION

The first type of laziness stems from a lack of self-confidence and a self-deprecating attitude. We might think, “I am incapable of practicing meditation or the dharma. I am unable to be diligent; I am lousy and weak.” We might believe that perhaps only certain kinds of people are able to practice and attain enlightenment like the Buddha. We think that great masters like Milarepa and Gampopa, for example, are able to attain enlightenment and generate the re-

alization of Mahamudra, but ordinary beings like us will never be able to do so.

What impact does this have on us? When we believe that we are incapable of practicing the dharma or attaining the ultimate result even if we tried, it will make us question whether there is any benefit in dharma practice. This disenchantment prevents our mind from turning toward the dharma, and eventually causes us to give up studying it.

Actually, we do not need to harbor these doubts. There is no reason to feel disheartened or look down on ourselves. Why is that so? According to *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa stated:

The cause is buddha nature.

This means that all sentient beings, no matter who they are, can attain buddhahood. We are all able to become liberated and enlightened in the future. This is because we are endowed with the cause for enlightenment — buddha nature (Skt: tathāgatagarbha). For example, no matter if we are male or female, rich or poor, old or young, knowledgeable or not, because we have buddha nature, it is certain that we are able to attain buddhahood. Since we are equipped with a certain cause, there is no reason to not achieve its result if we exert ourselves earnestly.

Some of us might harbor the doubt that ordinary beings like us have an inferior-quality buddha nature compared to that of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We do not have to worry about this at all. Not only are all beings endowed with buddha nature, but the quality of it is also exactly the same. Our buddha nature is the same as what the buddhas have. For example, if there are one hundred sentient beings, the potential and quality of their individual buddha nature is precisely the same. Thus, we need to be confident in ourselves and strive toward attaining buddhahood. We would be real fools if we did not do so.

There might also be people who question, “If all of us have the same buddha nature, what is the reason that we have not attained enlightenment?” The answer is because we have been unaware that we have buddha nature. There is a story in the scriptures about a beggar and a piece of gold, which illustrates that the purpose of dharma and practice is to help unveil our innate potential. Once upon a time, there was a large piece of gold that got buried as garbage underground for many thousands of years. Did the quality of gold change? No it did not, for one feature of gold is that it does not deteriorate. Regardless of whether it lay under the heap of garbage for a year, a hundred years, or a thousand years, the nature of that piece of gold remains the same. One day, a beggar came and built a shabby house on the spot where the gold was buried, and

led an impoverished livelihood. In actuality, he could have become a millionaire when he chose to move there, but he was simply unaware of the large piece of gold buried beneath his house. One day, a clairvoyant person came across his residence and realized there was a piece of gold buried beneath the ground. He thought to himself, “This man really does not have to suffer like this,” and told the beggar, “Dig beneath your house and you will find a large piece of gold. Once you acquire it, you will be completely free from poverty.” The beggar followed the instructions and found the gold that was buried.

Actually, for the piece of gold itself, there is no difference if it was buried underground or not. But it could only benefit the beggar and eliminate his poverty when it got uncovered. Therefore, it is crucial that we treasure our buddha nature, which is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. We must practice diligently in order to bring forth its benefits and potential.

THE LAZINESS OF SLOTH

The second type of laziness is due to an apathetic and indifferent attitude, which makes us lethargic and uninclined to do anything, whether virtuous or nonvirtuous. In short, we are unenthusiastic toward anything. What should we do when this happens? In order

to abandon this laziness, we need to meditate on the precious human birth. According to the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*:

The basis is the jewel-like human life.

The human birth that we have obtained currently is incredibly meaningful. For example, animals like cats and dogs cannot help but remain idle and indolent. Even though they possess buddha nature, they have neither the ability nor the intelligence to practice the dharma. They are unable to do much apart from running and scrambling around aimlessly. However, we humans are different. The scriptures describe the various conditions which enable one to practice the dharma that leads to enlightenment. These include the eight leasures and resources, which we currently possess. If we align ourselves with the sluggish conduct of animals instead of seizing and utilizing this opportunity, it would be a complete waste of our human birth. We absolutely need to arouse diligence within ourselves.

In regards to the precious human birth, the bodhisattva Shantideva gave an analogy:

Free yourself with the human boat
From the great river of suffering.

Such a boat is hard to get again.
Now is no time for sleep, you fool.⁸

We are on the bank of a deep and raging river and we need to cross it, and we cannot do so unless we travel by boat. If the boat comes only once a day and leaves at eleven o'clock, we need to be on the lookout when departure time nears. If we are inattentive and happen to doze off at eleven o'clock, the boat will be gone and we will awake to realize that we have been left behind. Similarly, now that we have obtained the precious human birth so incredibly rare and difficult to obtain, it is imperative that we remain alert and vigilant. We must practice well and use it to free us from the great river of suffering. If we are unable to be attentive right now, it would be akin to falling asleep while our boat departs.

No matter if we have obtained a body that is attractive or unpleasant, if we are rich or poor, talented or not, male or female — we have obtained a precious human birth. Once we clearly understand how extraordinary this human birth is, we need to abandon the laziness of sloth and our mind will turn toward the dharma.

8 *Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated with commentary by Khenpo David Karma Choephel, Shambhala Publications, 2022

THE LAZINESS OF ATTACHMENT TO NONVIRTUES

The third type of laziness is an attachment to bad habits and non-virtues. Generally, in a worldly context, if someone devotes themselves wholly in pursuit of an activity of any kind, we deem them to be diligent. But this is not necessarily the case if we view it from a dharmic perspective. Someone who indulges enthusiastically in unwholesome deeds, such as actions harmful to both self and others, is actually considered a lazy person. What is the definition of diligence, according to Buddhism? As Shantideva stated, “Diligence is a zest for virtue,” meaning having great enthusiasm for practicing the dharma and engaging fervently in activities that benefit both ourselves and others. When we are able to give up nonvirtuous actions and develop a liking for engaging in virtuous ones, our mind has turned toward the dharma.

However, the current problem is that we are often unable to differentiate between virtues and nonvirtues. If we cannot do so, how can we determine if we are being diligent or lazy? Since we are unaware of our own situation, how can we say that our mind has turned toward the dharma? This problem needs to be resolved. According to the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*,

The condition is the spiritual teacher.

Gampopa explained that the solution is to rely on a spiritual teacher. Also known as a virtuous friend, this is someone who behaves in accord with the dharma; they encourage us to practice the sublime dharma. This is why we call this friend a spiritual teacher. Even though we possess buddha nature, and have obtained a precious human birth, we do not have any experience in dharma practice and meditation. The value of a spiritual teacher lies with their extensive experience; they clearly understand what should be adopted, and what kind of instructions to give us.

For a beginner just starting to practice the dharma, the first few steps are always confusing. For example, if we were traveling to a completely unfamiliar place without a map, and there were no signs along the road, we would not know where we were heading. We could only rely on pure luck or try out all the different paths. Perhaps we might encounter someone who gave us directions, only to find out we had been on the wrong path all along, and we would have to return to the start. This is not only exhausting and time consuming, but might also never lead us to our destination. What do we require at this time? We need an experienced guide. If we followed their footsteps, we would not have to worry about getting lost or wasting time. We would be able to arrive quickly and easily at our destination.

Likewise, while practicing the dharma, we need an experienced and diligent spiritual teacher to show us the right path. With such a teacher at our side, none of our practice and efforts would go to waste. This is because we are able to clearly understand what is to be adopted and abandoned; we will know precisely each step of the practice. Therefore, relying on a spiritual teacher is extremely important.

In the above, we have examined briefly the three types of laziness, and the three methods to eliminate them. The three essential points are: Believing that we are endowed with buddha nature, treasuring the precious human birth we have obtained, and relying on the spiritual teacher. If we are able to practice these three well, our mind will turn toward the dharma.

The Second Dharma:

MAY THE DHARMA BECOME THE PATH

We need to be clear about our goal when we begin to study the dharma. Doing so ensures that all the practice that follows will bring forth the benefits of liberation and buddhahood. This is the essence of the second of the four dharmas — May the dharma become the path.

There are many beginning practitioners who feel that the dharma teachings make sense, so they generate interest and devotion toward it. However, they tend to make a mistake here: A clear goal is not established. Why do we need one? Is it not enough to simply like the dharma? First, we must understand that dharma practice needs to be directed toward attaining buddhahood and liberation from samsara. Buddhahood and liberation are our goal, and the dharma is the means to achieve it. Without this goal in mind, even the most sublime of the dharma cannot help us to become liberated.

Many of us might think, “I will practice the dharma, but I don’t really want to attain buddhahood or to leave samsara.” How does this attitude arise? The main reason is due to an unclear notion of what buddhahood is. We have the illusion that liberation and buddhahood are completely disconnected from our current reality; that it means to depart from this world and arrive at an unknown realm elsewhere. This is a great misconception.

In regards to liberation and buddhahood, the Buddhist perspective holds that all suffering originates from the afflictions and ignorance in our mind. Apart from eliminating these through dharma practice, there is no other way to attain liberation. Focusing on this kind of inner practice ultimately leads to the perfection of the qualities of abandoning and realization. When we are able to abandon ignorance and afflictions, while fully realizing our innate qualities and wisdom, this is known as buddhahood. The term *buddha* is translated as *sang gye* in Tibetan. It is comprised of two syllables that describe the two qualities of a buddha — *sang* refers to abandoning and purity, whereas *gye* means realization and perfection.

When we establish the correct views regarding liberation and buddhahood, our goal for studying and practicing the dharma will become clearer. With a precise purpose, practice becomes more efficient. For example, if we need to arrive at a particular place, then we have to follow the road that will lead us there. If we merely

roam and wander around for a few hours, it amounts to nothing more than physical exercise and does not get us to where we need to be. Likewise, many practitioners nowadays might spend time in one place to do some good deeds, and then head somewhere else to conduct a bit of dharma practice. Although this is a good thing, without a clear purpose, the actual potential of these virtues and practices is unable to be developed; they do not help us to become liberated and enlightened, and this is rather unfortunate.

Therefore, at this stage of the dharma progressing on the path, first, we must clearly and firmly establish our goal for studying the dharma. Then, we put it into action and begin our practice. During this process, there are certain situations that might distract us and interrupt our practice. The single root cause of these obstacles is our attachment.

There are three types of attachments. The first is the attachment to this life, which is to cling strongly to things like fame and fortune of this lifetime. The second is the attachment to samsara. Some people might be indifferent to worldly rewards, but they have yet to understand that the nature of samsara is suffering. As a result, they are still attached to the various pleasures found in samsara. The third is the attachment to the joy of personal liberation. Although they are no longer attached to this life, and simultaneously understand samsara to be suffering, nevertheless, they continue to

cling to the joy of personal liberation. These three types of attachment obstruct the dharma from progressing on the path.

Why do we develop attachment to this life, to samsara, and so forth? The reason is that we have not seen the truth clearly. If we understood the truth, we would not be tempted and give rise to attachment. What is the truth then? It is the fact that this life is impermanent, samsara is full of faults and suffering, and personal liberation is not the ultimate goal.

Actual liberation should require having the compassionate mind that seeks to benefit others. That is the ultimate nirvana. When we can settle down and reflect deeply on these facts over and over again, our attachments will decrease. When attachment and clinging diminish, dharma progresses on the path. Following is the explanation of the various types of attachment.

MEDITATION ON IMPERMANENCE — ELIMINATING ATTACHMENT TO THIS LIFE

Generally, we develop attachment to particular things in this life and are unable to let go of them. This is perfectly natural. But for someone seeking to advance on the path, we need to be particularly aware of these situations. We need to prevent our attachments from becoming obstacles to our practice. How do we strengthen

ourselves to effectively avoid caving in to temptation? The way is through recognizing impermanence. When we are able to understand that everything in this life is not as unchanging or stable as we imagine, the strength of attachment starts to dissipate. In other words, phenomena themselves are not the problem; our clinging is the issue.

When it comes to meditations on impermanence, selflessness, emptiness, and so forth, people often misinterpret them as pessimistic and escapist. They believe these make a person more feeble and timid. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The more profoundly one understands impermanence, the more one becomes courageous and diligent. Why is this so? Because impermanence is not an abstract concept; it is a fact of life. Regardless of whether you accept it or not, no matter whether you meditate on it or not, the nature of all phenomena, without exception, is that they undergo change. If we do not understand impermanence, we would always be suffering due to our attachments. The benefit of recognizing impermanence is that we can remain unfazed by change and adapt to any circumstance.

How do we go about understanding impermanence? There are two kinds: the impermanence of the external world and the impermanence of its inhabitants. We can start with the first by observing the cycles in nature, such as the alternations of the four seasons

and the change between day and night. Perhaps some people might really enjoy the sunlight and warmth of summertime. Nevertheless, it does not matter how fond we are of it; summer turns into autumn, and subsequently into winter. Likewise, some might be delighted by the brightness and clarity daytime brings, but night eventually falls. This is the impermanence of the external world, which we cannot change or control.

Next, we can observe the impermanence of the inhabitants within this world. As we grow older, many of us might be nostalgic about how carefree and blissful we were during our childhood and youth. But no matter how much we reminisce about the past, aging, sickness, and death ultimately arrive. We need to learn to accept impermanence to be the essence of life. At the same time, we must clearly understand dharma practice to be the most important matter in this life. Only through our practice can we be freed from the suffering of samsara.

There are great benefits that arise from understanding impermanence. The Buddha spoke of it as the condition that initially encourages us toward the dharma. Reflecting on impermanence helps us to become less attached to this life. When desires are lessened, life becomes simpler and we are more grateful for what we have. We are able to devote more time to studying the dharma and clearing up what we did not understand before.

The second benefit is that impermanence acts like a whip. Many people encounter this situation: After having begun studying and practicing the dharma for a while, we start wondering to ourselves, “I like the dharma and want to practice it, but I am not so sure if I can do it.” We might find ourselves turning lazy and procrastinating; our practice has become irregular and rather unstable. What should we do at this point? We need to reflect on impermanence and try to motivate ourselves to continue practicing with diligence. This is why the Buddha stated, “Impermanence is the whip that drives us to diligence.”

The third benefit of meditating on impermanence is that it helps us along our practice, all the way until we attain the ultimate result. According to the Buddha, “In the end, impermanence is the friend who leads us to the final fruition.”

In order to help us abandon attachment to this life, it is best if all of us can reflect on and remember impermanence at all times.

MEDITATION ON THE FAULTS OF SAMSAHA — ELIMINATING ATTACHMENT TO SAMSAHA

The second type of attachment is the attachment toward samsara. This is an obstacle to our practice, and it also hinders us from attaining buddhahood. Why do we develop an attachment to

samsara? The main reason is not understanding the actual way that things are. We mistake the nature of samsara to be enjoyable and delightful. In order to uncover the real nature of it, we need to reflect on its faults and the law of cause and effect.

First, we reflect on the faults of samsara. Out of the beings of the six realms, the lives of humans are saturated with moments of happiness and misery. However, we only ponder on the root of suffering when we experience times of sorrow, not when things are going well. We are often mistaken in our direction when we do examine the source of suffering, pinning our suffering on various external conditions out of habit, unaware that we should be seeking answers from within.

For example, we often regard our suffering to originate from our work or family. We might think, “If my career was not failing, I would not be in so much pain,” or “I would not be suffering if I had a better family.” In actuality, these kinds of suffering are only temporary and superficial. What is the actual suffering? It is samsara itself, which by its very nature is suffering, brimming with obstacles and challenges.

Since we have mistaken the superficial experiences of suffering to be the root of the problem itself, we attempt our best efforts at eliminating these experiences of suffering. For example, we might

think that our own sons, daughters, or family members are the reasons for our misery, and that we might become much happier if we run away from home. So we run away. Nevertheless, the problem remains unresolved. By taking the wrong approach, we create even more suffering for ourselves and others.

Removing these temporary conditions of suffering does not remedy our problems, as they continue to return. The only means to eliminate suffering is to first understand the nature of samsara is that it is filled with faults, problems, and suffering. Next, we must know that all these faults originate from the ignorance and afflictions within our mind. Thus, it is essential to eliminate our inner afflictions and ignorance, allowing our innate wisdom and qualities to arise. Understanding the faults of samsara is the first way for us to abandon attachment to samsara, and to allow the dharma to progress along the path.

The second way to eliminate attachment to samsara is to reflect on karma, or the law of cause and effect. Karma is the force that drives samsara; our happiness and suffering are dependent on our karma. Many people might feel a bit of pressure upon hearing the word karma, as they regard it as something extremely difficult to alter. However, it is actually quite the opposite. The Buddha taught that karma is the best method whereby we can free ourselves from suffering and obtain happiness. This is because the current happiness

we experience is the result of our virtuous actions from the past; the suffering we now face stems from our past misdeeds. In other words, the happiness and suffering we encounter in life lie completely in our hands.

In regards to karma, there is an important concept we must understand. Gods, asuras, and demons or external factors like people, objects, and situations — none of these are the causes of our suffering. All suffering originates from our nonvirtuous thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore, who decides the outcome? Who controls our happiness and suffering? We do. The best way to prevent suffering is to abstain from sowing the seeds of suffering, and to strive toward abandoning nonvirtues. At the same time, in order to obtain the result of happiness, we must endeavor to accumulate good deeds — the seeds of happiness.

By developing a clear understanding of the faults of samsara and the workings of karma, our mind will turn toward the dharma once again, and in particular, the dharma will progress along the path.

MEDITATION ON LOVING-KINDNESS AND COMPASSION — ELIMINATING ATTACHMENT TO THE JOY OF PERSONAL LIBERATION

The last type of attachment is wishing for liberation and freedom from samsara only for ourselves. This attachment originates from ignorance and delusion, and it prevents us from attaining perfect buddhahood. We need to remedy this by meditating on loving-kindness and compassion.

When we meditate on loving-kindness and compassion, first, we need to consider this — Is it alright if only I understand the importance and benefits of practice? Is it fine if only I know how to practice? The answer is a definite *no*. The deeper we advance in our practice, the heavier our responsibilities become in terms of helping sentient beings. We need to teach the dharma to those who have yet to understand; help people to begin their dharma practice; guide those who do not know how to be free from suffering and obtain happiness. This is the basic principle of loving-kindness and compassion.

Someone with loving-kindness and compassion will be a wise and well-mannered person. On the contrary, someone without loving-kindness and compassion will turn out to be a selfish fool. My Western friends once mentioned to me that people in the past used

to have a deeper sense of morality. For example, when people were escaping from war, they allowed women and children to leave first by boat or plane. They only thought about their own safety at the very end. In the same vein, we need to first help those who are ignorant about practice and the means to eliminate suffering and obtain happiness.

To meditate on loving-kindness is to reflect on the wish for all sentient beings to be endowed with happiness, and to meditate on compassion is to reflect on the wish for all to be free from suffering. How do we go about practicing this meditation? We usually start with the meditation on the equality of all sentient beings. All sentient beings, even a little insect, have the exact same wish — to be free from suffering and experience happiness.

It is certainly not the case that only humans desire happiness, whereas other types of beings wish to suffer. As long as we are sentient beings, we have the same wish to obtain happiness and be free from suffering. The happiness we seek is happiness in its entirety; we do not hope for only certain kinds of happiness but turn down others. Similarly, our wish to be free from suffering is one that encompasses all types of suffering. We do not seek to be relieved from only specific types of suffering but remain welcoming of others. Once we develop this level of understanding of the

equality of sentient beings, we will not develop biases when meditating and practicing loving-kindness and compassion.

When we are benefiting others out of loving-kindness and compassion, we need to be endowed with skillful means and wisdom. One must benefit non-Buddhists, beginners, and seasoned practitioners in different ways; they cannot all be treated with the same approach. The Buddha gave an analogy in the sutras: We will get a stomach ache from consuming unripe fruit, so we must wait for it to ripen before eating. Likewise, when we are helping others, we need to check whether or not they are ready. Those whose minds are prepared will quickly develop faith when we teach them the dharma. They will find it helpful, and we ourselves will be delighted in return. For those who are yet ready, we should not force them. Perhaps they require more time. If we are too anxious and quick to teach them the dharma, it might just make them angry. According to the scriptures, the Buddha, who has unparalleled loving-kindness and compassion, teaches only sentient beings who are karmically ripe. To those who are not, the Buddha waits for a suitable opportunity to help them.

The above briefly describes the three obstacles to the dharma progressing on the path, which are the three types of attachment. Their remedies are respectively the meditations on impermanence, the faults of samsara and karma, and loving-kindness and compassion.

The Third Dharma: MAY THE PATH DISPEL CONFUSION

The third of the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* — “May the path dispel confusion” — teaches that by developing our practice, we can eliminate confusion and realize buddhahood.

As mentioned previously, the goal of studying Buddhism is to attain buddhahood. Dharma practice aims to purify and remove the flaws and defilements on our mind; buddhahood is the condition whereby the innate qualities and wisdom are completely developed. We have already previously discussed that buddhahood is neither found in some magical place, nor is it something completely new that we obtain. Now, we are entering the third dharma, which primarily examines the methods to eliminate confusion.

What does the confusion in “May the path eliminate confusion” refer to? It is the various types of confusion in our mind, including the afflictions and ignorance. Ignorance, in particular, is the root

where all afflictions originate; it is the crux of the problem. Blinded by the shadow of ignorance, we are unaware of the true nature of phenomena, and this prevents our innate wisdom from arising. Therefore, the path here refers to the means to eradicate ignorance. What is this method? It is bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta can be divided into relative bodhichitta and ultimate bodhichitta. Of the two, ultimate bodhichitta is the one capable of eliminating afflictions and confusion. What is ultimate bodhichitta? It means to completely realize the true nature of phenomena and our mind, and thus is considered the definitive method to eliminate ignorance. However, from the perspective of the stages of practice, for the beginner, we start by cultivating relative bodhichitta before meditating on ultimate bodhichitta.

To construct a building, establishing a strong foundation is necessary. Likewise, we require stable relative bodhichitta in order to develop ultimate bodhichitta later on. In the same manner, the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* teaches in accord with the stages of practice — we begin with the cultivation of relative bodhichitta and then progress to ultimate bodhichitta. In addition, the practice of ultimate bodhichitta can be divided into three stages: First, we establish a conceptual understanding of the definition of phenomena and mind. Then, we experience it through meditation. Eventually, we realize it in its entirety.

THE REFUGE VOW AND PRECEPTS

Next, we will examine what relative bodhichitta is and how to cultivate it. But prior to this, we need to understand what going for refuge is. Going for refuge is the most important foundation of all Buddhist practices; no practice is divorced from it. It is an essential requisite, particularly during the practice of relative bodhichitta. What is going for refuge? It is to accept the Buddha as our teacher, the Dharma as our path, and the Sangha as our companion, and to rely on the Three Jewels — the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Usually, we learn about the topics related to refuge when we first encounter the dharma. We learn about the refuge vows and precepts, or what we can and cannot do after having gone for refuge. Now, in accord with the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa*, we will again examine the refuge vows and precepts.

What to Abandon After Going for Refuge

In regards to the precepts of the refuge vow, once we have gone for refuge to the Buddha, we must consider him as our guide, our teacher who leads us in our dharma practice. We must follow him undividedly without seeking refuge from elsewhere. This is the first precept to keep after having gone for refuge to the Buddha.

I would like to explain here why we cannot seek out other sources of refuge. Regardless of whether we are studying Buddhism or secular knowledge, if we are uncommitted to one discipline, instead studying a bit here and there, we would be unable to learn anything in the end. From the perspective of the dharma, any opportunity to hear and learn a little about it is beneficial; anyone can reap rewards from this. But for a practitioner with enlightenment as their goal, it is certainly insufficient to merely skim the surface. Developing a thorough understanding requires perseverance and total commitment.

For example, if we want to travel to India, there is a range of flight options we can select from. Apart from non-stop direct flights, there are also connecting flights that offer different places to stop over in. Amidst the number of options, all we have to do is decide on one and purchase a single ticket. Buying multiple tickets serves no purpose whatsoever. Going for refuge to the Buddha is similar. Once we decide on the Buddha as our teacher, this itself is sufficient; we do not need to rely on any other teacher.

What do we need to observe after going for refuge in the Dharma? The essence of dharma practice is to benefit others, and the opposite of this would be harming others. Thus, having gone for refuge in the Dharma, we must abandon inflicting harm upon other sentient beings. Some people might have doubts about this — What

about the accidental, inadvertent harm we cause to others in daily situations? From the Buddhist perspective, this unintentional harm does not go against the refuge vow. What we need to pay attention to is our motivation. If we caused harm intentionally, out of a nonvirtuous motivation, this would be in conflict with the refuge vow.

Finally, the Sangha refers to those with whom we share the common goal of dharma practice; they behave in accord with the dharma and are our companions. Why do we need to rely on such friends along our path of practice? Whether our practice improves or not primarily depends on our perseverance and commitment, but having virtuous friends like Sangha members can often provide immense assistance. After having taken refuge in the Sangha, we must refrain from associating with the nonvirtuous. This should not be too difficult to understand, so we will not go into detail here.

What to Adopt After Going for Refuge

In terms of the three precepts we need to abide by after going for refuge, we need to be respectful toward the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Why do we need to cultivate respect? If we consider carefully, apart from the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, who else is able to help us attain enlightenment? No one. Having understood that the Three Jewels, unlike mundane objects, are ex-

tremely precious and sublime, we need to develop devotion and respect within us.

After developing this understanding of the Three Jewels, not only will we regard Buddha Shakyamuni with admiration, but we will also respect the various images of the Buddha we can currently see. These representations of the Buddha become objects of our devotion. When we read the words in dharma texts, we are able to understand and realize the meaning of the sublime Dharma; thus the volumes of the teachings are also an object of devotion. Likewise, not only do we revere the noble bodhisattvas of the Sangha, but we also respect the Sangha members whom we are able to encounter at the present, along with the robes and pieces of clothing that represent the Sangha. Therefore, we need to cultivate respect and devotion by genuinely regarding these three objects to be the Three Jewels.

Many might have doubts as to why we should cultivate respect toward dharma texts. Why should we be careful not to step over texts or sit on top of them? Are they not simply pieces of paper? Is this concept perhaps not too old-fashioned? The reason why dharma texts and representations of the Buddha are particularly sacred and sublime is due to the inherent virtuous qualities in them. Unlike mundane, everyday objects, when we see an image of a buddha, we naturally develop faith and devotion within us. Based on this

devotion, we desire to study the dharma and develop the wisdom and compassion that the Buddha has. Therefore, the representations of the Buddha are not mere ordinary statues. Likewise, dharma texts are unlike any other pieces of writing; they have the ability to help us cultivate virtuous qualities and abandon faults. We must not view these precious representations and texts as ordinary but treasure them with respect and reverence.

CULTIVATION OF BODHICHITTA

There are many precepts and disciplines to observe concerning going for refuge, but these six mentioned above are the main ones we need to abide by. Once we acquire this foundation for generating bodhichitta, we can proceed with the cultivation of bodhichitta. What is bodhichitta? It essentially begins with compassion, the wish to protect sentient beings from suffering. If we have this kind of compassion, the innate qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas will gradually arise within us. With the development of compassion and the power of merit, our ability to benefit sentient beings will increase and strengthen.

Bodhichitta: The Union of Compassion and Wisdom

Compassion is widely regarded by almost all religions in the world to be extremely important. But this does not mean that each of the different kinds of compassion is valid or correct. For example, compassion without wisdom not only prevents us from helping others, it might even bring trouble and harm to both self and others. Therefore, the compassion that Buddhism describes is one that is equipped with the wisdom that realizes the nature of all phenomena. This compassion endowed with wisdom is called bodhichitta.

In general, there is no human or sentient being without compassion; it is present in all beings. Nevertheless, our compassion is often tainted with bias. For example, some of us are only affectionate to our family or those we like, but unfriendly to strangers or those we are not fond of. Similarly, some of us are particularly kind toward human beings but not animals, while others do the opposite. There are also some who are loving toward fellow citizens but not foreigners. When we show compassion selectively, we might often end up causing harm to others in the process.

Therefore, the Buddha taught that we need to cultivate impartial, great compassion that is endowed with wisdom. As mentioned previously, every single sentient being is equal because, just like us, they wish to obtain happiness and be free from suffering. There

is no reason to think solely of ourselves, ignoring and abandoning others to their own devices. We should do as much as we can to free others from suffering and help them obtain happiness. We need to cultivate compassion and simultaneously develop the wisdom that realizes the nature of phenomena, genuinely cultivating bodhichitta — the union of compassion and wisdom.

Some people might think that it is wonderful that Buddhism emphasizes the practice of compassion and bodhichitta, but when compared to meditating on them in one's own shrine room, is it not more beneficial to go out there and do some charitable activity and actually help others? Followers of Christianity and other religions, for example, engage in an array of charitable activities like building schools and hospitals. In contrast, for the Buddhists who perpetually speak about practicing loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta, it seems as if they do not take any actual action.

Charitable activities, without a doubt, benefit many people, but I believe the practice of bodhichitta that Buddhism emphasizes is much more important. Why is this so? Charitable deeds can be performed at any time; however, we are not always readily equipped with loving-kindness and compassion. Charity done without actually arousing genuine loving-kindness and compassion becomes something forced and uncomfortable. Some people might even develop regret afterwards, which is not a good thing.

For example, if I encounter a homeless person on my travels, I might feel sympathy and instantly arouse compassion for them, so I end up giving away all the money that I have in my wallet. When evening arrives and I start feeling hungry, I happen to pass by a restaurant that looks inviting. Just as I walk in to eat, it suddenly dawns on me that I am absolutely penniless. At that moment, I might really regret giving my money away to the homeless. I might think, “Oh, I really should not have done that,” and even deride myself for being that impulsive. This example demonstrates that if we do not develop enough loving-kindness and compassion within, we become susceptible to regretting the virtues we have done. Please keep this in mind: Before helping others, we need to work on cultivating our bodhichitta; once we develop a strong motivation, we will naturally be able to benefit them.

OBSERVING THE BODHICHTTA VOWS

In general, receiving the bodhisattva vows helps us to become equipped with a bodhisattva’s aspiration, known as aspirational bodhichitta, and aids us in carrying out the deeds of a bodhisattva, known as engaged bodhichitta. A vow primarily refers to a commitment and oath, and making it before enlightened beings helps us to stabilize our determination to practice. Therefore, we receive the aspirational and engaged bodhichitta vows respective-

ly, in front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, our gurus, or at holy sites and before blessed artifacts. Usually we begin with receiving the aspirational bodhichitta vow and practice until our aspiration to benefit sentient beings has become stable. After this, we then proceed to receive the engaged bodhichitta vow.

Nonetheless, becoming a bodhisattva is not easy. The beginner's mind, in particular, is unstable; one careless moment results in the arising of selfish thoughts and intentions to harm others. This moment of completely forgetting the original commitment to benefit others is what is known as a downfall. If we do incur a downfall of the bodhisattva vow, we can purify ourselves through confession and receive the vow once again. This allowance and flexibility is mainly due to the fact that the bodhisattva vow is one that concerns the mind. As beginners do not have a stable mind, it is naturally easy for them to incur downfalls. Thus, they are permitted to take it again.

To explain this in detail, according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, vows can be divided into three kinds — the pratimoksha vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the Vajrayana vows. Essentially speaking, pratimoksha vows like the shramanera⁹ and bhikshu¹⁰ vows are

9 Tibetan: ge tsul

10 Tibetan: ge long

concerned with the discipline of the body and speech, which we cannot receive again upon breaking them. The Vajrayana vows are even stricter and are also received only once. As mentioned previously, the bodhisattva vows are vows of the mind. However, we do not really have much control over our mind. Perhaps all of us have experienced this: One moment we have a good thought, but the very next moment a bad thought arises. To take the bodhisattva vows again and again is to train our mind repeatedly, and to constantly remind ourselves the importance of loving-kindness, compassion, and benefiting others. Gradually, we will be able to genuinely form the habit of benefiting others.

THE PRACTICE OF THE SIX TRANSCENDENCES

After we commit to the cultivation of bodhichitta, that is having received the bodhichitta vows, we should continue to practice and strengthen the habit of benefiting others. The six transcendences¹¹ are six important practices among the many ways to foster this virtuous habit.

The six transcendences are: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and prajna. “Transcendent” refers to crossing over to the other side, meaning that it is equipped with

11 Sanskrit: pāramitā

the prajna of realizing emptiness that enables us to traverse the ocean of samsara.¹²

For example, while practicing the transcendence of generosity, we must avoid giving without careful thought or while being attached; we need to be equipped with the prajna that realizes the nature of all phenomena. The merit of generosity is not dependent on the size or monetary value of what we give, but depends instead on whether we have the pure motivation of benefiting others. If there is no attachment, or the wish to obtain fame and status; if it is not stained by the afflictions of desire, anger, and ignorance, then merely giving even a kernel of grain to a tiny bird brings forth inconceivable merit.

The key to practicing the six transcendences lies in having pure motivation. Needless to say, we should not use this as an excuse to skimp or cut corners. We should be trying our best when we practice generosity, discipline, patience, and so forth. What do we mean by doing our best? That depends on each individual's situation. While we are making our commitment at the beginning of our practice, we should consider carefully how much we are capable of accomplishing. We should not make a huge promise at the start, but instead work our way up gradually from the small things.

12 The Sanskrit term *pāramitā* literally means “that which has gone beyond”

For example, while beginning to practice patience, we would not be able to practice at the level described in the scriptures. We would not be able to practice the patience of enduring suffering, the patience of disregarding harm, and the patience of certainty in the dharma. Nevertheless, we can set achievable goals for ourselves. In daily situations, once we are aware of anger rising, we can remind ourselves with phrases like “Don’t be angry, I should be loving and compassionate instead.” Even if we are only able to detect anger once a day, it would be a good attempt at the practice of patience. We must not underestimate this; it is actually extremely significant. If we are able to achieve this bit of practice, we can gradually adjust the goal and scale of our practice.

Diligence, the fourth transcendence, can be divided into two kinds: devoted diligence and continuous diligence. Devoted diligence arises out of temporary passion and joy. Even though this sort of diligence has a short duration, it is still rather remarkable and precious. However, in terms of dharma practice, it is not compulsory to have intense fervor at the beginning, whereas maintaining an enduring perseverance is absolutely vital. The duration of diligence should last not only a day or two, or even a year or ten years; it must not cease until we reach the goal we have set for ourselves. This is what is meant by continuous diligence. It is this sort of diligence that can actually help bring our practice into fruition, and thus is more significant for us.

The fifth transcendence is meditative concentration. This mainly refers to shamatha¹³ meditation, which helps to settle the mind. In order to settle the mind, there are two important mental states practitioners must be equipped with. What are they? Mindfulness and awareness. In the chapter *Guarding Awareness* from *Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva said:

I join my palms in prayer and urge
All those who wish to guard their minds:
With all your efforts, please protect
Your mindfulness and your awareness. (23)¹⁴

Shantideva folded his palms together and sincerely requested meditators to guard their mindfulness and awareness carefully. The reason for joining his palms illustrates the importance of these two. Mindfulness refers to always remembering to guard our mind; awareness is clearly knowing the current state of our mind. In actuality, the differences between these two are not significant; they only differ slightly in some details.

Afflictions can be rather clever, like robbers and thieves who tend to burglarize a house when the owners are not paying attention.

¹³ Tibetan: shine

¹⁴ *Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva*, p 36 translated with commentary by Khenpo David Karma Choepel, Shambhala Publications, 2022

If the owners are cautious enough, or if they hire security guards, the thieves will not be daring enough to approach. Likewise, if we are able to perpetually maintain mindfulness and awareness, afflictions will not be able to wreak any havoc. On the contrary, without mindfulness and awareness, our mind will be seized by the afflictions in an instant. What ensues are endless problems and suffering.

In general, shamatha meditation helps our mind to settle down; mindfulness protects and maintains this calm; awareness constantly observes to make sure our mindfulness is still intact. This is similar to the banks in India. In order to prevent theft or robbery, banks station one or two armed guards at the door for security. However, the banks worry that the guards themselves might commit robbery, so they chain their guns tightly to the gates of the bank. This way, the guards would only be able to use the guns to protect the bank. Likewise, mindfulness is extremely important to our meditation. We would run into quite a bit of trouble if we lost our mindfulness, so we need to prevent it from escaping us by locking it down with awareness.

When do we practice meditation? Meditation can be generally divided into meditation and post-meditation. Post-meditation refers to the practice during our daily activities. This means that at any time throughout our day, we should try to maintain mindfulness and awareness. We should make this a habit, particular-

ly when we are working, eating, walking, and speaking. If we are able to maintain mindfulness and awareness in our daily life, it becomes easier for us to settle our mind when we return to meditation. Likewise, the more developed our practice of meditation is, the more helpful it is at maintaining the tranquility within our day-to-day living. Meditation and post-meditation complement and support each other.

The sixth transcendence is prajna. The Buddha mentioned there are three kinds of prajna: the prajna of listening, the prajna of contemplation, and the prajna of meditation. First, by listening to and studying the teachings from the sutras and treatises and the pith instructions of lineage masters, we generate the prajna of listening. Next, instead of simply having listened to them, we analyze and examine carefully the meaning of the teachings, cultivating the prajna of contemplation. Finally, through personal practice, we actually experience the meaning in these teachings, thereby generating the prajna of meditation. By being equipped with these three prajnas, our ignorance and afflictions will gradually decrease, and we can eventually attain enlightenment.

The above is a brief explanation of the six transcendences: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and prajna. After having taken up the bodhisattva vows, we need to practice them with diligence.

The Fourth Dharma:

MAY CONFUSION ARISE AS WISDOM

Before explaining the last Dharma, I would like to remind everyone of the sublimity and excellence of the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa*. As mentioned previously, the master Gampopa is the common, shared lineage master of the Kagyu school. The Kagyu school has always been a lineage rich with oral pith instructions, and the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* is the essence of these instructions. Therefore, I hope that you are equipped with a good intention and pure motivation when you are reading and studying this teaching. Next, we will continue with the fourth Dharma — May confusion arise as wisdom.

First, we need to understand what this “confusion” is. It refers to this samsara that we are currently experiencing.

Samsara consists of two parts: The external apprehended objects, which are essentially the different appearances that our mind ap-

prehends, and the internal apprehending mind. Between the appearances and the mind, the mind is the root cause, because the various appearances of samsara are produced by our grasping and confused mind.

What is our mind grasping? How does the confusion come about? Before we explain the Buddhist perspective, first, we should understand the view prevalent in India before the Buddha appeared.

Since ancient times, Indian practitioners developed numerous philosophies based on their personal meditation experiences. Many of the texts they wrote have been preserved. One of their shared beliefs is the existence of mind, which they refer to as *atman*, the *self*. This self, or the “I”, travels between the sense organs. When it is in the eyes, we are able to see things; when it goes to the ears, we can hear things, and so forth. As a result, even though there is but a singular self, it seems as if there are many of them present.

For example, if we lock a monkey inside a house with six windows, since monkeys are rather playful and enjoy jumping around, it will sometimes peek outside from the eastern window; other times, it will climb to and look out from the southern or the northern window. If someone unknowingly looked in from the outside, it would seem to them that there was a monkey at each window. They would assume there to be five or six different monkeys inside the house

when in truth, there was only one monkey. Likewise, at that time in India, the mainstream belief was that there is a single, independent self.

However, later the Buddha discovered that sentient beings are actually composed of the *five aggregates*¹⁵ — form, feeling, conception, formation, and consciousness. There is no such thing as a singular self that truly exists. Moreover, Buddha also said that a singular, independent mind does not actually exist. The mind is also composite and thus referred to as the aggregate of consciousness. Therefore, how many minds do we actually have? Based on the differences in function, the Buddha taught the mind in terms of both six and eight consciousnesses.

CONSCIOUSNESS

The Five Consciousnesses — Five Sense Consciousnesses/
Non-Conceptual Consciousnesses

Regardless of whether we look at the mind as being composed of six or eight consciousnesses, the first five consciousnesses are common to both. The function of the eye consciousness is to see form. Apart from this, it is unable to carry out other sense functions

15 Sanskrit: skandha

like hearing sound or detecting smell. The function of the ear consciousness is to hear sound, while the nose consciousness detects smell, the tongue consciousness experiences taste, and the body consciousness feels sensation. These are referred to as the five sense consciousnesses, which are directed outward. They are able to experience the corresponding external objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and sensation. Apart from purely experiencing their specific objects, they do not carry out any conceptual judgment or discernment, and are thus called non-conceptual consciousnesses.

The Sixth Consciousness — Mental Consciousness/ Conceptual Consciousness

What is conducting the conceptualization and discernment? It is the sixth mental consciousness, which is thus referred to as a “conceptual consciousness”. The mental consciousness is unable to directly experience any external object; it cannot see form, hear sound, or experience smell, taste, or sensation. Based on the experiences from the five sense consciousnesses, it makes all sorts of indirect, abstract discernments. For example, when the eye consciousness sees something, the mental consciousness will decide whether the thing is good or bad, or determine if it is large or small; it creates a plethora of conceptual thoughts, and can also remember past events and plan for the future.

The above is the explanation of the five consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness. Understanding their different functions is highly beneficial for our practice, especially in eliminating many misconceptions.

For example, while doing the Vajrayana practice of deity meditation, many people anticipate their visualizations to be very clear, as if they were meeting the deity in person. However, they often end up disappointed. Why? They are unable to visualize clearly. Some even end up feeling discouraged, thinking that they probably lack merit or that they were doing something wrong. If we are able to properly understand the individual functions of each consciousness, we can realize that these expectations are unrealistic. This is because we do not utilize our eyes during visualization, but our mental consciousness. What is the object of the mental consciousness like? It is abstract and indistinct. As a result, the deity we visualize is not as clear and well-defined as the object of our eye consciousness.

Another characteristic peculiar to all of the six consciousnesses is that they are unstable. For example, the eye consciousness arises and sees things only when our eyes are open; the ear consciousness arises when sound is being heard; the mental consciousness arises when there is a thought, but does not appear when there is none.

The six consciousnesses are thus called “unstable consciousnesses” as they have the quality of arising and subsiding contextually.

Generally, the first six consciousnesses are a little easier to recognize, so they are also known as “coarse consciousnesses”. In comparison, the seventh consciousness — the afflicted consciousness, and the eighth consciousness — the ground consciousness,¹⁶ are extremely subtle and difficult to observe. Thus, they are known as “subtle consciousnesses”.

The Seventh Consciousness — Afflicted Consciousness

The seventh consciousness is called the afflicted consciousness, and its nature is ego-clinging. Generally, ego-clinging can be divided into two types. One is coarser; it is the notion of “I” or “me” that we usually have and is a function of the sixth consciousness. The other type of ego-clinging is subtler and is with us at all times. Regardless of whether the coarse ego-clinging is present or not, whether it is day or night, whether we are awake or asleep, or whether we are deep in thought or without much thought — the subtle ego-clinging is constantly present with us. This is known as the afflicted consciousness.

¹⁶ Sanskrit: ālaya-vijñāna

The Eighth Consciousness — Ground Consciousness

Apart from the seventh consciousness, there is an eighth one called the ground consciousness. This is a continuous and stable consciousness that is clear and knowing; it means that our mind is vivid and constantly endowed with clarity and awareness, unlike the dullness of a rock. Even when the eye consciousness is not functioning or the mental consciousness has not given rise to any thoughts, the clear and knowing quality continues to be present. This is the eighth consciousness.

The eighth consciousness is the root of all consciousnesses. Unlike the first six consciousnesses which frequently arise and subside, the seventh and the eighth are stable and continuous, so they are also called “stable consciousnesses”. However, this does not imply that they are permanent, since all consciousnesses are impermanent. They are called that because their continuity is more stable in comparison with the first six consciousnesses.

PRIMARY MIND AND MENTAL FACTORS

Another way of categorization separates our mind into the primary mind and mental factors. The primary mind refers to the eight consciousnesses, and its nature is mere clarity, without further attributes. Mental factors refer to individual mental states

and events, for example, feelings of happiness and suffering, or virtuous thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, wisdom, samadhi and so forth. At times, afflicted thoughts such as desire or anger arise; our mental state changes continuously. It is posited that there are fifty-one mental factors.

Many people might think that meditation is a practice concerned with the first five consciousnesses, but this is not actually true. Our eye consciousness merely sees objects, and our ear consciousness just hears sounds — they do not create much trouble just by themselves. Thus, the first five consciousnesses are not what we seek to work with during meditation. Likewise, we do not meditate with the seventh or eighth consciousnesses, which are extremely subtle and difficult for beginners to observe. As a result, meditation primarily works with our sixth consciousness, on our afflictions and delusions which are relatively easier to recognize. In addition, they are the source of all our problems and suffering. Therefore, the focus of meditation for beginners is to work with the various afflictions that arise from the sixth consciousness, along with the different mental factors.

Some of you might have a doubt here: We previously mentioned that the first five consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness are unstable. They arise and cease from moment to moment; once a thought subsides, it does not return. If this is the case, how

are we able to practice with the sixth consciousness? How does meditation through the mental consciousness help transform confusion into wisdom? It is true that thoughts are similar to the wind that comes and goes; it is as if they leave no trace behind. Buddhism, however, asserts that no matter if we give rise to a virtuous or nonvirtuous thought, a habitual imprint is left on the eighth consciousness. Thus, meditating on the mental consciousness refers to cultivating virtuous thoughts, correct views, and so forth using our mental consciousness. This enables us to continuously create virtuous imprints on the eighth consciousness, gradually transforming the impure into purity, turning confusion into wisdom.

In brief, both the primary mind and mental factors, or the eight consciousnesses and various mental states, belong to a mind that is confused. By meditating with the sixth mental consciousness and habituating ourselves toward virtue, supported by the accumulations from practicing the six transcendences like generosity and discipline, mentioned earlier in the third Dharma “May the path clarify confusion”, our practice of meditative concentration can become more stable and sustained.

In addition, the six transcendences can be further divided into ten transcendences. The transcendence of prajna can be split into four aspects: the transcendence of skillful means, the transcendence of aspiration, the transcendence of strength and the transcendence

of primordial wisdom. There are thus ten transcendences in total, also known as the ten paramitas. Through the practice of the six or ten transcendences, particularly due to the influence of the practice of meditative concentration, we can gradually penetrate the nature of confusion, allowing our innate wisdom to manifest.

THE FIVE STAGES OF PRACTICE — THE FIVE PATHS

In general, dharma practice can be divided into five stages, known as the five paths. The first stage is the path of accumulation, which refers to the period of listening and study. Before we start practicing the dharma, we need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge. For example, we need to know what dharma practice is. How do we practice? What is the reason and goal of meditation? Next, we enter the second stage — the path of joining. Practice, at this point, is still on the conceptual and contemplative level, because we are not yet endowed with the ability to directly experience the nature of mind and the dharma nature. Usually, we refer to these two stages collectively as the path of devotion. At this juncture, we are brimming with curiosity and interest toward uncovering the meaning of the nature of mind and dharma nature, so we study and contemplate continuously, and also attempt various types of meditation to help us understand, believe, and accept the dharma. This is why it is referred to as the path of devotion.

With this intense desire and diligence, our meditation experiences become increasingly clearer. Eventually, once we experience the nature of mind and dharma nature directly, we have entered the third stage — the path of seeing. Nevertheless, this is but a momentary glimpse and is not the most ultimate realization. We need to continue practicing in order to further develop and habituate ourselves with this realization, and this process is the fourth stage — the path of meditation. Finally, when we completely realize the nature of mind, we no longer need to conduct any meditation. This is the fifth stage — the path of no more learning.

The process of practice consists of the five paths discussed above. In other words, they are the five stages that help attain buddhahood.

THE INNATELY PERFECT WISDOM — THE FIVE WISDOMS

During the process of practice, our impure and confused eight consciousnesses are purified and transformed to eventually manifest as the five wisdoms. What then is the relationship between the eight consciousnesses and the five wisdoms? First of all, the eighth consciousness transforms into the dharmadhatu wisdom and mirror-like wisdom. How is it transformed? The process is mentioned earlier. As we meditate with the sixth mental consciousness, virtuous habitual imprints are continuously deposited in the eighth

consciousness, the ground consciousness. As a result, impure appearances in the eighth consciousness gradually transform into pure wisdom. The dharmadhatu wisdom arises from correctly realizing the nature of mind and phenomena. However, after realizing the nature of emptiness, does clarity and awareness of the mind disappear too? No, everything still arises. This is called mirror-like wisdom. There are no good or bad thoughts, but one clearly knows the appearances of sentient beings, confusion, and nonconfusion.

This is akin to a mirror which is able to clearly reflect any external object, but these images do not actually exist within the mirror. In short, when consciousness transforms into wisdom, the eighth consciousness manifests as two kinds of wisdom. One is the dharmadhatu wisdom, due to having realized the emptiness aspect of the dharmata. The other is the mirror-like wisdom, due to having realized the clarity aspect of the dharmadhatu. These are the first two of the five wisdoms.

The third wisdom is the wisdom of equality, which is the transformation of the seventh consciousness — the afflicted consciousness. As mentioned previously, the nature of the afflicted consciousness is ego-clinging. Due to this kind of grasping, all our mental factors and mental states are affected and contain this ego-clinging. For example, attachment turns into self-attachment as we cling to ourselves as the most important person. Pride turns into

self-centeredness, whereby we think of ourselves as superior to everyone else. Ignorance becomes the self-delusion that clings to a self. Through practice, the seventh consciousness undergoes transformation and results in the elimination of ego-clinging. Simultaneously, the various subsequent clings like self-centeredness, self-attachment, and self-delusion also disappear. Due to the elimination of ego-clinging, we are able to realize the equality between all sentient beings, and this kind of wisdom is called the wisdom of equality.

The fourth wisdom is the discriminating wisdom, which is the transformation of the sixth mental consciousness. The function of the sixth consciousness enables us to be equipped with certain cognitive and analytical capabilities. At the same time, however, we are under the influence of ignorance and delusion, so these thoughts often lack depth and our judgements are flawed. Through practice, ignorance is completely eliminated; the sixth consciousness transformed into wisdom is capable of perfect and correct cognition, clearly understanding all phenomena exactly as they are, so it is known as the discriminating wisdom.

The fifth is the all-accomplishing wisdom, transformed from the five sense consciousnesses. In daily life, all our actions are experienced and executed through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and other sense consciousnesses. Nevertheless, due to the delusion caused

by ignorance and the afflictions, our five sense consciousnesses are limited in their capacities. For example, we are able to see everything that is inside of a house, but not beyond its walls. Likewise, our sense of hearing is limited to a certain range. When we meditate with the sixth mental consciousness, virtuous imprints are planted in the eighth consciousness. By the strength of this practice, the five sense consciousnesses are transformed into the all-accomplishing wisdom. At this point, our sense consciousnesses are no longer limited; we become equipped with the omniscience of a buddha.

In brief, in the fourth dharma of the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa*, “May confusion arise as wisdom”, the word *confusion* refers to being confused and deluded about the nature of the eight consciousnesses. Through the practice of meditation, the nature of wisdom manifests and the five wisdoms arise. The transcendence of the five wisdoms denotes the realization of perfect buddhahood. As discussed previously, the word *buddha* in Tibetan is *sang gye*. *Sang* means the elimination of all confusion, and *gye* is the manifestation of all virtuous qualities. Thus, when all confusion is purified and the virtues of the five types of wisdom completely manifest, this is referred to as perfect buddhahood, enlightenment, or *samyak-sambodha* in Sanskrit.

QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA'S THREE KAYAS

Is there nothing else to do once we have become a buddha? This is not the case at all. According to the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*:

The activities are benefitting sentient beings without thought.

Having completely developed the five wisdoms, a buddha knows precisely the suffering and needs of all sentient beings, while clearly understanding all the methods to help them. A buddha is perfectly equipped with the qualities and virtues of greatly benefiting others. In other words, after becoming a buddha, their activities and responsibilities are not reduced, but become even greater.

In general, a buddha benefits sentient beings through the three kayas. The first of these is the dharmakaya. The abilities and activities of benefiting sentient beings arise naturally without fabrication, from the primordial wisdom of the buddha. The source of all these activities is called the dharmakaya. Where does the dharmakaya originate? How does it appear? Its basis is the dharmadhatu wisdom of the five wisdoms. In other words, since we have realized the nature of all phenomena, we attain the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya then naturally manifests the virtues and activities of the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya.

Having attained the dharmakaya, as the five wisdoms gradually start to manifest, the sambhogakaya arises from the mirror-like wisdom and the wisdom of equality in order to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. Why is this referred to as a body of perfect and complete enjoyment? From the perspective of the buddha, *perfect* refers to having perfected all the qualities. Sambhogakaya is also known as the body of enjoyment; enjoyment refers to the great joy and delight from benefiting sentient beings. From the perspective of benefiting others, the buddha's enjoyment body possesses the five certainties, primarily directed at benefiting pure beings like the bodhisattvas. This includes, for example, manifesting the sambhogakaya adorned with auspicious marks and characteristics to give the Mahayana teachings. The bodhisattvas are able to attain buddhahood through the five qualities of the sambhogakaya, thus arousing great joy in the buddhas.

The sambhogakaya body, which is extremely exalted, can only be seen by pure beings like the bodhisattvas. Ordinary and impure beings like us are unable to do so. As a result, buddhas manifest the nirmanakaya, which is perceptible to us in order to benefit ordinary beings. Which wisdom does the nirmanakaya arise from? It comes from the discriminating wisdom and the all-accomplishing wisdom. Ordinary, impure beings differ from the bodhisattvas in terms of aptitude, disposition, aspiration, and mentality. Through

the discriminating wisdom, buddhas can understand the disparities between all sentient beings. There are some who are unintelligent, whereas others are very smart; some are conniving, while others are extremely honest; some have strong faith, loving-kindness, and compassion, but some have intense anger and attachment. There are also a variety of ways of thinking and aspirations. Next, buddhas utilize the all-accomplishing wisdom to respond to and benefit all sentient beings. In essence, through the three bodies, the buddhas are able to perfectly accomplish the activities and responsibilities of benefiting others. This is what is meant by “The activities are benefitting sentient beings without thought.”

...

Generally, the *Four Dharmas of Gampopa* does not belong to the instructional type of teachings. This means that it neither mentions the body posture we need to adopt during meditation, nor does it instruct us on how we should visualize or contemplate. However, it contains an extremely important teaching for us. For example, it answers the questions: Why should we practice the dharma? What is meditation concerned with? How many kinds of consciousness are there? If we can resolve these questions at the beginning of our dharma study, our practice becomes more effortless when we receive meditation instructions from teachers in the future. This is

because we are already endowed with a very clear view and understanding. I hope that everyone can study the *Four Dharmas of Gam-popa* well, as I am sure it will be very beneficial toward our practice.

Appendix:

CONSCIOUSNESS AND WISDOM

When listening to the dharma, in order for it to be effective and allow our subsequent contemplation and meditation to come to fruition, first, we need to give rise to the motivation of bodhichitta. This is the aspiration: “I am listening to and practicing the dharma in order to help all sentient beings be freed from suffering and attain happiness.”

ALL PHENOMENA ARE MIND

The topic for our discussion is “Consciousness and Wisdom.” Why do we need to know what consciousness is? It is because our consciousness is the root of all the various delusions and illusory appearances. Different religions and schools of philosophy hold differing views about samsara’s diverse appearances. Some believe they are created by a god, whereas some believe they exist externally. However, Buddhism believes that the root of all these appear-

ances is the mind. Buddhism helps us to understand and confirm that all phenomena originate from the mind.

Nonetheless, this is not easy to understand. For example, if we look at a table, we do not think it comes from the mind; it was made from wood, and the wood came from a tree that was once growing in a forest. In other words, the table before us came from a tree that once existed externally. How could it be created by our inner mind?

But from another perspective, understanding all phenomena to be mind is not that difficult either. If we purchased something that was originally priced at five dollars for three dollars, then we would think we got a good offer. If we paid eight or ten dollars for it, we would think it is expensive. If we spent fifteen or twenty dollars for the same item, then we would consider the price to be rather exorbitant. However, if the actual value of the item is one hundred dollars, and we paid ten dollars for it, then we would think it is extremely cheap. It is evident from this that the notion of expensive and cheap is subjective — all of this is created by the mind.

Another example is the bouquet of flowers before me. If we compare flowers A and B, we would say flower B is bigger and flower A is smaller. Anyone would come to the same conclusion. However, if we brought in a flower C which is bigger than flower B, flower B

becomes smaller now. In actuality, flower B is not inherently large or small; it is our perception that views it to be large or small at times. Thus, we can say that flower B is the appearance of mind. When our mind considers it large, then it is large; if our mind perceives it to be small, then it is small.

We can also examine the concepts of beauty and ugliness. In the Jātaka tales, there is a story about Nanda, the Buddha's brother. Nanda felt that he was unable to practice the dharma because he was too attached to the beauty of his wife, Janapadakalyāṇī. One day, the Buddha asked him, "Do you find Janapadakalyāṇī beautiful?" Nanda replied, "Of course, she is the most beautiful woman in all of India." A few days later, the Buddha led Nanda into a forest and pointed at a monkey in the distance, "Who is better looking, that monkey or your wife?" Nanda exclaimed, "There is no doubt here! My wife is more beautiful than this monkey by a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times!" Again, a few days later, through his miraculous powers, the Buddha brought Nanda to the realms of the gods. The Buddha pointed to one of the celestial maidens and said, "Nanda, who is more beautiful? She or your wife?" Nanda replied, "Ah! Compared to these maidens, my wife looks just like a monkey!" From this, we can understand that the notion of beauty is an illusion constructed by the conceptual mind; it has no inherent reality.

As a result, length, size, attractiveness, and so forth are all illusions created by our mind; they do not inherently exist in external phenomena. However, we might still think, “Oh! Perhaps length, size, and all these are distinctions made by our subjective mind and are not real. But these external objects like tables and chairs do truly exist.” In actuality, these are also manifestations of the mind and do not inherently exist. Take my hand for example: I myself believe this is a real hand, and that it is my hand. You might also think, “Yes, that hand of his definitely exists.” Likewise, this hand has many functions, including writing and picking things up. Without analysis and examination, this hand seems to truly exist.

On closer examination, however, we will find that the hand has no inherent existence. For example, if I ask, “Is it my hand?” (Rinpoche points to his thumb) You would say, “No, that is the thumb. That is not the hand.” (Rinpoche then points respectively at his index, middle finger, and so on.) In the end, you will realize that the hand is something composed of the five fingers, flesh, skin, and many other components. The hand does not exist independently, but is just a concept created by our mind.

You might then say, “Alright, the hand does not exist, but the thumb does.” We can employ the same method of examination. “Is this the thumb?” (Rinpoche points to his thumbnail) You might reply, “No, that is the nail. That is not the thumb.” As we follow this

train of analysis, we will realize that although there are two joints on the thumb, neither of those is the thumb. The thumb does not truly exist, and neither do the rest of our fingers if we continue investigating. Even though our fingers and hands do not have inherent existence, our mind misconstrues them as truly existing. In actuality, all of it is merely the creation of mind.

We can apply this method of analysis to all phenomena, and we will discover that all our projections of phenomena lack a foundation that inherently exists. Some might then ask, “If that is so, how does the mind create or manifest external objects that seem so realistic? How is this possible?” It is possible. For example, when we are asleep, elephants and camels larger than our room can appear in our dreams. Do these animals actually exist? There is not even a house that would be able to fit them. Although they are but illusions in our dreams, the elephant’s ears, trunk, skin, and tail seem extremely lifelike and real. Similarly, none of the things we encounter in daily life has inherent existence; they are all illusory and dreamlike.

The above is the meaning of “all appearances are mind by nature.” The more we contemplate this, the better we are able to understand that everything in samsara is but the mind’s illusion. The various sufferings we experience in samsara are solely due to our clinging to these illusions as real. After developing a conviction in

this and by deepening it through meditation, we can eventually eliminate all suffering.

Some of us might think that our happiness and suffering are contingent upon the gods. If we offend them, we will be punished and made to suffer; if we make offerings and sing praises, we will receive their blessings. This is not what Buddhism believes. Buddhism examines the root of suffering, and discovers it to originate from our mind's delusion of assuming the illusory to be reality. As a result, there are different Buddhist practices that are directed at remedying and pacifying the mind's delusions.

Most people in the modern world continuously seek happiness outside themselves. They think that happiness can be obtained from external phenomena, so they create numerous innovative technologies to achieve this goal. Material things do provide us with temporary comfort, but our experience is that the more things we own, the more we suffer and the emptier we are inside. This is because we have not addressed the root of suffering. Buddhist meditation is founded on an integral understanding — all problems originate from the mind. Only by turning inward to understand our mind can we uproot afflictions and suffering.

For example, if there is a piece of rope lying in front of us, and if we have bad eyesight or if the lighting is poor, we might mistake it for

a snake. We will start panicking fearfully, “What if we get bitten by it? It will be really painful, or we might even die!” But if we look at it carefully, where do the fear and pain come from? Actually, they stem from our delusional mind. At this point, praying to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities, or making supplications and aspirations are not helpful. Neither is grabbing a knife to confront the snake. The only way to eliminate fear is to inspect this object properly and determine that it is not a snake, but simply a piece of rope.

Similarly, we encounter various situations in life and make all kinds of judgments, good and bad. We develop attachment toward the things we like and aversion for those that we dislike, and so forth. The arising of these afflictions creates the multitude of suffering in our lives. We cannot get rid of them by seeking protection in the gods or destroy them by building weapons. The only way out of suffering is to turn inward and clearly understand the actual nature of our mind.

THE EIGHT CONSCIOUSNESSES

Based on the explanation above, we can develop certainty that all phenomena are mind. If so, what is the mind like? Is it inside our body? If it is, is it in our head or in our chest? Or is it somewhere else? If it is not within the body, is it somewhere outside? At the end of such inquiry, you will discover that there is no trace of a so-

called “mind” inside or outside our body. This is why we say the essence of the mind is emptiness.

If the mind is empty, why do so many appearances arise? According to *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom* by the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, appearances are produced by the eight consciousnesses. The eight consciousnesses can be divided into three categories. The first consists of the eighth or ground consciousness. The second is the seventh consciousness, the afflicted consciousness. The third category consists of the first six consciousnesses. Regardless of whether we count them as eight consciousnesses or divide them into three categories, these consciousnesses differ not in essence, but only in their appearances.

The Eighth Consciousness — The Ground Consciousness

The feature of the eighth consciousness is its ability to manifest various different appearances and thoughts. This is why it is called the ground consciousness, meaning that it is the foundation for all consciousnesses to appear. The first six consciousnesses and the seventh consciousness arise from it. Regardless of whether conceptual thoughts appear or not, there is a consciousness that continues without ceasing. That is the ground consciousness.

The Seventh Consciousness — The Afflicted Consciousness

What is the afflicted consciousness, the seventh consciousness, that arises from the ground consciousness? It is the notion of “I” or “me” that is always there, no matter whether ego-clinging arises or not. For example, whatever we are doing, regardless if we are sleeping or working, there is a subtle clinging to a me that thinks, “This is harmful to me” or “this is beneficial to me.” This is the afflicted consciousness.

The Six Consciousnesses

The consciousnesses that arise and develop from the eighth and seventh consciousnesses are called the six consciousnesses. The first five — eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, and body consciousness — are directed outward. The sixth consciousness is directed inward and gives rise to a variety of conceptual thoughts. The term “outward” refers to the fact that the objects manifested by these five consciousnesses are external; for example, the eye consciousness sees form, the ear consciousness hears sound, the nose consciousness smells scent, the tongue consciousness detects taste, and the body consciousness experiences sensation. Nonetheless, these five consciousnesses merely perceive their objects without any grasping. The sixth consciousness is the one that grasps and makes conceptual discriminations

of good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, thus creating all the delusions of samsara.

Due to the conceptual discernment of the sixth consciousness and the clinging to a “me” by the seventh consciousness, different afflictions arise and result in the accumulation of various karma. This is the key to dharma practice, so it is really important to recognize this. In order to eliminate afflictions, we must transform the discernment of the sixth consciousness and the afflictive nature of the seventh consciousness into the five wisdoms through meditation.

TRANSFORMING CONSCIOUSNESS INTO WISDOM

Having explained consciousness, we will now continue with wisdom. The method of gradually transforming the eight consciousnesses into wisdom is the gradual elimination of the obscurations. In general, we say that the Buddha is endowed with skillful means; he progressively taught the Foundation, Mahayana, and Vajrayana vehicles — three methods to eliminate afflictions.

Eliminating Afflictions Through the Foundation Vehicle

All of us want to eliminate afflictions, but simply thinking about this in our mind is not sufficient. We need to get rid of them through various methods. The Foundation vehicle’s approach is to

understand what causes afflictions to arise and what the causes of suffering are. By removing the causes, afflictions and the suffering that results from them can be eliminated. In brief, the Foundation vehicle eliminates afflictions through the cause.

The Buddha held that the cause of all suffering is the accumulation of nonvirtues, which stems from the afflictions of attachment, anger, and ignorance. These three poisons arise due to ego-clinging. Therefore, if ego-clinging is eliminated, the afflictions, unvirtuous karma, and all suffering can be gradually eliminated. This is the method of the Foundation vehicle.

How does ego-clinging come about? For example, we do not get attached to a watch on display in a shop; if it got stolen or became broken, we would not be angry or feel anguish as a result. However, if we bought this watch, we would get angry from even a small scratch on its surface.

This kind of affliction stems from the grasping for what is mine. In actuality, there is no difference in the watch itself, whether it is in the shop or already purchased by us. It is precisely due to affixing the label “mine” on it, out of clinging, that causes afflictions and suffering. When we recognize the fabricated nature of this label, our afflictions are naturally eliminated. Thus, the Foundation vehicle’s main aim is to eliminate ego-clinging.

But merely wanting to get rid of afflictions is not enough; we need to eliminate ego-clinging through analysis. This involves examining and observing the object of ego-clinging — the “me.” Where is this “me”? Is it inside our head? Or is it in our skin, flesh, blood, muscles, or bones? When we analyze it respectively, we will eventually realize that an inherently existent “me” that is singular and permanent throughout the three times of past, present, and future does not actually exist. Thus, ego-clinging is completely erroneous. Once we acquire this sort of understanding and gradually habitualize ourselves to it, we can abandon ego-clinging, and afflictions and suffering in turn naturally subside.

The root of all afflictions is grasping at a “me,” “us,” and “mine.” To remedy this, we observe where “me,” “us,” and “mine” reside. After doing so, we will discover that none of these inherently exists; as a result, afflictions are eliminated and wisdom manifests. This is the means of the Foundation vehicle.

The notion of “me” is merely a fabricated concept. Consider this simple example: You are one among one hundred people. If you point at yourself and ask each person individually “Is this ‘me’?”, all ninety-nine people present would answer, “No, that is not ‘me;’ that is ‘you.’” This also proves that grasping at a “me” is fundamentally wrong.

Eliminating Afflictions Through the Mahayana Vehicle

What is the Mahayana's method of eliminating afflictions? The Mahayana holds that the root cause of afflictions is the grasping at external objects as inherently existent. The reality is that external objects do not inherently exist; their nature is emptiness. As a result, there is no truly existing external object to be grasped at. Eliminating afflictions through realizing the emptiness of external objects is the way of the Mahayana bodhisattva.

When bodhisattvas realize the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, they also recognize that sentient beings continue to suffer due to a lack of this understanding. Bodhisattvas arouse genuine compassion upon seeing sentient beings continue manifesting the appearances of suffering. Due to having two qualities — the compassion of benefiting others and the wisdom of realizing emptiness — a bodhisattva is able to transform consciousness into wisdom. This is the Mahayana bodhisattva's way of practice.

Eliminating Afflictions Through the Vajrayana

From the perspective of the Vajrayana, there is no need to abandon or transform consciousness to allow wisdom to arise. By correctly realizing the nature of mind, wisdom will manifest.

The word wisdom in Tibetan consists of two syllables — *ye shes*. The latter *shes* corresponds to the Sanskrit *jñāna*, meaning knowledge. When translating this word in the past, Tibetan translators added the syllable *ye* before *shes*. *Ye* denotes being primordial, meaning that this kind of knowledge has been present within our mind from the very beginning; it is not a new thing that was created afterwards.

This might raise a doubt in us: If sentient beings have been equipped with this kind of wisdom from the very beginning, why are we still wandering in samsara? Why are we not endowed with the Buddha's qualities? Even though this primordial wisdom has been present from the start, we are temporarily unable to bring it to fruition because we are still at the stage of the seed. Therefore, wisdom is also known as “tathāgatagarbha” or “sugatagarbha,” meaning the seed of the tathāgata; it is also called “buddha nature,” indicating that all sentient beings have the potential to become buddhas.

The notion that all sentient beings have buddha nature is an extremely important concept. To understand this better, we can refer to the *Uttaratantra Shastra* and the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje's *Treatise on Buddha Nature*, both of which contain clear explanations.

What is the obstacle that prevents us from progressing on the path and realizing fruition? It is the laziness of self-deprecation, whereby we think we are not good enough; we feel as though we are nei-

ther diligent nor intelligent enough. For example, we believe that only someone like Shakyamuni is able to become a buddha whereas we cannot. Or somebody similar to Milarepa is able to attain enlightenment in a single lifetime, but it is impossible for us to do so. This way of thinking is a kind of laziness. In actuality, the Buddha, Milarepa, and all of us have the same potential to reach buddhahood — we all have buddha nature. If they can do it, we can certainly attain it too.

The Characteristics of Wisdom

Every single sentient being is able to attain buddhahood. Regardless of whether they are rich or poor, male or female, educated or not, each being is equipped with the wisdom of a buddha. Anyone can become a buddha if they work hard at it. Sometimes, we might feel devastated and weighed down by suffering as a result of the failures we encounter, but we do not really have to feel that way. This is because we have the wisdom of a buddha. With such extraordinary potential, we are able to achieve anything if we work diligently.

What are the characteristics of wisdom? Its essence is emptiness, and its nature is clarity. Calling its essence “emptiness” indicates that wisdom does not have intrinsic and permanent existence. But does that mean it is akin to the vast void of the sky, where there

is nothing at all? That is also incorrect. Emptiness refers not to an empty void or nothingness, but to having a nature of clarity. Clarity here does not refer to brightness, like the rays of the sun, but the natural ability to cognize and allow things to appear or manifest.

However, the clarity aspect of our mind has always been directed outward at the external things we see and hear, and the various positive and negative conceptual thoughts that arise, pursuing these countless conceptualizations. Eventually, we waste our entire life in this pursuit. As a result, we have never turned inward to make observations; we have never experienced what the mind is or its nature.

As we continue to be distracted by external phenomena, our conceptual mind becomes gradually more stubborn. One thought leads to the rising of another, and as a result, afflictions grow increasingly stronger. Attachment and desire bring about suffering, anger brings about suffering, and miserliness also brings about suffering — there is no end to our suffering. In actuality, if only we just turn inward and observe the nature of our mind, afflictions can be quelled and suffering disappears. The mind naturally becomes peaceful.

The essence of the mind is indescribable, meaning we cannot express it through words. It is unlike the piece of cloth before me,

where we can say, “Oh, this is white in color and square-shaped.” Neither can you pinpoint what it is by thinking. The only method is to look at our mind directly; we do not turn outward, but inward to experience the emptiness and clarity of our mind.

Therefore, wisdom is neither a new nor an external thing. By correctly realizing the essence of the mind, consciousness will be transformed into wisdom. In other words, we will be able to correctly realize that the nature of consciousness is wisdom.

Although the nature of mind and wisdom has always been one and the same, once you start practicing, you will discover that this is actually very difficult to realize unless you practice with diligence. Apart from having diligence, in regards to the Kagyu tradition, being equipped with strong faith and devotion is also required for realizing the nature of mind. Oftentimes, the generation stage of deity meditation can also aid practitioners to realize what wisdom is. Thus, it is mentioned in Kagyu meditation manuals that “Devotion is the head of meditation,” “Revulsion is the legs of meditation,” “Non-distraction is the core of meditation,” and so forth. These various methods can help practitioners gradually realize the nature of mind and allow wisdom to manifest.¹⁷

17 Quoted verses come from *The Short Vajradhara Prayer* by Jampel Zangpo of Bengar. See the *The Short Vajradhara Prayer* on dharmaebooks.org

Five Wisdoms

Essentially speaking, there is only one wisdom, but from the level of appearance, wisdom arises as five different kinds. What happens when wisdom is manifested? Does it mean that we become all-knowing? Or has everything become clearer? Understanding the five kinds of wisdom can answer these questions. In brief, the five kinds of wisdom help us to realize the nature of the dharmata and the appearances of phenomena.

Many people harbor doubts about the Buddhist concept of all phenomena being emptiness. They think that when they become a buddha, everything will turn into a void, into nothingness. They hear that the Buddha is omniscient and believe that he knows everything, while thinking that if everything is emptiness, how could it be known? Likewise, if everything can be known, how could it all be emptiness? In order to resolve these doubts, we can explain wisdom from five different aspects, or the five different activities of a buddha.

The first wisdom is the dharmadhātu wisdom. The name indicates the correct realization of the nature of the dharma expanse, realizing that all phenomena are not permanent and stable like we delusionally cling to, but are in fact emptiness. Next is the mirror-like wisdom. Although the nature of all phenomena is emptiness, rela-

tive appearances and the appearances of sentient beings are manifested, just like the colors of white and red that are reflected clearly in a mirror. Nonetheless, the mirror does not have conceptual thoughts like “This is white, and this is red.” Although all phenomena appear in a buddha’s mind, a buddha does not have even the slightest clinging and attachment that sentient beings do.

If this is the case, is a buddha like someone who is drunk and unable to differentiate between red and white? No, a buddha can clearly differentiate between things like red and white, knowing each individual nature and characteristic, and this is referred to as the discriminating wisdom. If a buddha is able to clearly discriminate between all phenomena, do they have afflictions such as attachment and anger, causing them to like and dislike things as sentient beings do? This is also not the case. A buddha has already eliminated the afflicted consciousness, allowing the wisdom of equality to manifest. A buddha does not see objects as desirable or hateful, but views everything as equal. For example, if we see gold in a movie, we do not think of it as being precious and develop attachment to it, or if we see a crumpled piece of paper, we do not generate aversion toward it. This is because we know it is simply just a movie.

If everything is equal, another doubt might arise: Does it mean that the activities of benefiting others, such as teaching the dharma, are

no longer necessary? If sentient beings are equal, there is no particular person we need to help, benefit or teach the dharma to, right? This is incorrect. From their own point of view, buddhas have realized the equality of all phenomena, but sentient beings have not yet done so. In order to help sentient beings realize the wisdom of equality, a buddha needs to benefit others and teach the dharma. These are all activities of benefiting others that are naturally expressed by the buddha. Thus, this is called the all-accomplishing wisdom.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Is Rinpoche teaching in terms of the views of the Mind-Only school?

Generally, there are four Buddhist schools of thought in India — the Great Exposition (Vaibhashika), Sutra (Sautrantika), Mind Only (Chittamatra), and Middle Way (Madhyamika) schools. Since this teaching is mainly concerned with actual meditation, from the perspective of practice, simultaneously utilizing both the views of Mind Only and Middle Way schools is preferred. This is speaking in terms of the Mahayana standpoint. For the Foundation vehicle, practice should be based on both the views of the Great Exposition and Sutra schools. It would be rather foolish to compare the superiority of one school over the other.

For example, initially, based on the views of the Mind Only school which teaches that all phenomena are mind only, we can gain conviction that all appearances are mind by nature; the Middle Way school then teaches the view of the nature of mind being emptiness. From the perspective of practice, the union of Sutrayana and Vajrayana is the best approach, whereby we combine the skillful means of Mahamudra with the views of Mind Only and Middle Way. There is no need to deliberately distinguish “this is the Mind Only view” or “that is the Middle Way view”; uniting Mind Only and Middle Way can help a practitioner’s practice to develop.

There seems to be a big difference between the Mind Only and Middle Way views. What are Rinpoche’s views on this?

Generally, the Middle Way is regarded as a higher tenet system, and Mind Only to be a lower tenet system. However, the Mind Only school is not something created by people later on; it originates from the Buddhist sutras. Neither is the Middle Way a view created by some learned adepts, but it too comes from the sutras. Therefore, both the views of the Mind Only and Middle Way schools are very important and profound. The Mind Only mainly holds that all phenomena are mind, that all appearances are the nature of mind; this concept is extremely profound. If we are able to grasp this subtle layer of meaning, then it will be easier for us to move on to our next step — understanding the nature of mind to be emp-

teness, the Middle Way's view. But if we were to determine which view is more definitive, it would be the Middle Way's, and thus we call it a higher tenet system.

What is the difference between pure and impure consciousnesses?

Generally, the nature of mind is clarity. However, it becomes impure when there is attachment. If the mind is able to not fall into attachment and abides in the correct realization of the nature of mind, then the eight consciousnesses will become pure.

Rigpa is a term used in the Great Perfection (Dzogchen). Is it connected with the topic of this teaching?

There are several meanings of the Tibetan word *rigpa*. Sometimes it refers to the mind, sometimes it refers to prajna. In terms of the Great Perfection, this refers to the correct realization of the nature of the dharmata (nature of reality), so it depends on the context where it is being used. Returning to the subject of the mind, generally, the nature of mind is clarity; however, if our way of recognizing clarity is incorrect, delusions will occur. For example, whether we see a rope for what it is, a rope, or whether we mistake it for a snake, from the ability of recognition, or from the standpoint of the mind's clarity, there is not much difference between the two. However, there is a huge difference in the result in terms of a correct or incorrect perception. The mistaken perception of a snake

would bring fear and suffering, but if we correctly perceived it as a piece of rope, we would not experience any suffering.

Therefore, the key to practice lies in whether we can recognize the root of our mind — primordial awareness. If we recognize it, we can be liberated and freed from suffering, and the inability to do so results in various suffering. The example of the rope and snake is just a simple analogy to clarify certain concepts. Actual practice, however, is not that simple. We have accumulated extremely strong habitual tendencies since time immemorial, so realizing the nature of mind is not something we can accomplish with a few tries.

If the piece of rope was really a snake, what kind of situation would that be?

The analogy of mistaking the rope for a snake primarily teaches us that everything in samsara is illusory, without any inherent existence. Since they are illusory appearances, we can eliminate them and be liberated from samsara. As long as we carefully examine the nature of mind or external phenomena, we will understand what is meant by illusory, and this is the point of the analogy. Of course, if it is an actual snake, we should run away quickly (Rinpoche laughs), or use various methods to get rid of it. If it was simply a misunderstanding, the solution is to observe what the actual situation is.

The afflictive consciousness is the seventh consciousness, but does it belong to the second category when we divide the eight consciousnesses into three categories?

Yes. The seventh consciousness, the afflicted consciousness, is a kind of ego-clinging that is very subtle. It is always present and is associated with all six consciousness. Sometimes there is also ego-clinging in the sixth consciousness, but that is much clearer and stronger than the seventh consciousness.

What is the relationship between the afflicted consciousness and the afflictions?

The afflictions originate from the afflicted consciousness, but afflictions such as attachment, anger, and ignorance currently arising in us are from the sixth consciousness.

Sometimes emotions like anger arise all of a sudden without any reason. Which consciousness do they come from?

These should be from the eighth consciousness, from the negative habitual tendencies there. The eighth consciousness itself is not an affliction, but all of our habitual tendencies are deposited there. The seventh consciousness is just a subtle form of ego-clinging that is not mingled with attachment, anger, and ignorance.

Are afflictions and thoughts the same thing?

The essence of afflictions is conceptualization, so we can say that they are thoughts, and as long as they are thoughts, they are the product of the sixth consciousness.

Do appearances exist externally?

In terms of the view, both the mind and appearances do not have inherent existence; their nature is emptiness. However, when relative appearances arise, they first begin with the mind; then, the appearances gradually arise, turning from subtle to coarse. For example, when we are asleep, various thoughts and ideas first appear in our sleep. As these conceptualizations become gradually clearer, they turn into external appearances — the diverse objects we encounter in dreams. If we examine the way appearances arise, the objects are not inherently real but are produced by subtle mental consciousnesses. Thus, perhaps it is alright to say that mental consciousness is inherently existent, but definitively speaking, the mind itself also has no inherent existence.

Are emptiness and the nature of mind the same thing?

The essence of emptiness, dharmadhātu (dharma expanse), and dharmata are not different from the nature of mind. But emptiness does not have the aspect of clarity, whereas the mind has the

ability to cognize and allow things to manifest, so the mind has this aspect of clarity. However, from the perspective of phenomena and appearances, emptiness and clarity are inseparable. The great yogi Milarepa once said, “All external phenomena and inner appearances are like texts. They are all I need for my practice.” This means that the universe and all the appearances of samsara are the scriptural texts; if we know how to look properly, they all teach us the dharma. They help us turn inward and attain realization, providing great assistance to our practice. If everyone can examine their mind properly and experience the emptiness and clarity of the mind, I believe they can gradually understand it.

Is there a difference between our perception of a table and that of a yogi who has realized the relative and ultimate truths?

In general, both we and the yogi see the same shape and color of the table. But since yogis have realized the quality of the inseparability of clarity and emptiness, they naturally do not have any attachment toward the object. Nevertheless, we ordinary beings would think of the table as an object with inherent existence. If it is an expensive and branded table, we would develop tremendous clinging toward it. A realized yogi would see all of this as being similar to the images in a movie and understand its illusory nature. As a result, they are able to remain at ease upon encountering various situations in life.

If everything is the manifestation of the mind, would there no longer be any appearances? Why are there things still being experienced?

Yes, this is a question that many people have. We usually think that if something is inherently non-existent, then there would be nothing at all. But the mind is really something special; it really is quite marvelous. Although appearances do not have inherent existence, the mind is still able to clearly experience them. For example, an elephant in dreams cannot truly be real. Its trunk, tail, or teeth, and so forth are completely imaginary, but in our dreams we believe it all to be real without a doubt. Even the people in our dreams believe the elephant to be real. In truth, not even a single hair of this elephant exists.

The mind itself is really extraordinary; we can say that it exists, but saying it does not exist is probably fine too. For example, we all think that we have a mind. But when we turn inward to look at it, to try and experience and feel where the mind is, what the mind is, we discover that this so-called mind is nowhere to be found. We are unable to say, “Oh! I have found it. This is the mind. The mind is just like this.” Thus, we say that the mind is emptiness. On the other hand, being unable to find it does not mean that the mind is completely nonexistent either. We give rise to conceptual thoughts; for example, when thoughts of anger arise, we even react physio-

logically — our faces turn bright red, our body trembles, and so forth. At this point, if we observed where that angry thought was, we would not find anything at all; this is the emptiness we refer to.

Does a buddha have only wisdom but not consciousness? Can Rinpoche please further elaborate on the relationship between the ground consciousness and the afflicted consciousness?

Consciousness is called *viññāna* in Sanskrit. It is a type of consciousness with attachment, thus a buddha does not have such consciousness.

The ground consciousness or eighth consciousness is the aspect of clarity, the foundation that manifests all samsaric appearances. The afflicted consciousness, the seventh consciousness, is coarser and contains attachment and ego-clinging. Since both the seventh and eighth consciousnesses are always present, they are called stable consciousnesses. The first six consciousnesses arise and cease from time to time, so they are referred to as unstable consciousnesses.

According to the Mahayana teachings, all that we are actually experiencing, for example the forms that eye consciousness experiences, are manifestations of the mind. Are we able to then say that all sentient beings are experiencing the same dream?

This is not entirely true because all our dreams are different. Everyone dreams, but we have differing dreams since each of us has different imprints. For example, the dreams we have at night are mostly derived from the imprints made during the day. Likewise in this world, although we are all experiencing life, some of us experience poverty while others are rich. From the point of view of the common experience we share, since we are all ordinary sentient beings who have yet to eliminate the afflictions and obscurations, all relative appearances are produced by our afflictions and conceptualizations; we have a similar experience in this way. In brief, it is like a group of people watching the same movie, but each of us has different interpretations.

How does the ego-clinging of the seventh consciousness function in our daily lives? For example, when the sixth mental consciousness follows the first five consciousnesses and gives rise to acquired ego-clinging, is the instinctive ego-clinging of the seventh consciousness also simultaneously functioning?

There are two kinds of ego-clinging — instinctive and acquired. The seventh consciousness has the instinctive ego-clinging which is extremely subtle, such that we cannot detect it ourselves. This kind of ego-clinging is very stable and always present. The ego-clinging of the sixth consciousness is comparatively stronger. However, since the sixth consciousness clings on to many things, this

ego-clinging disappears when other stronger conceptual thoughts arise. Generally, the ego-clinging of the seventh consciousness belongs to the instinctive form of ego-clinging. The ego-clinging of the sixth consciousness consists of both instinctive and acquired ego-clinging. Instinctive ego-clinging refers to the clinging to a “me” that little children have, whereas the intellectually acquired ego-clinging is one that we learn anew from other schools that propose a permanent self.

Can Rinpoche please explain what is the discriminating wisdom?

A buddha has two kinds of wisdom — the wisdom of knowing the nature as it is, and the wisdom of seeing all that exists. The discriminating wisdom belongs to the wisdom of seeing all that exists, which refers to being able to know all phenomena correctly without any confusion. For example, someone who is ignorant might mistake this plant before me to be poisonous, and this is the inability to see. The Buddha once mentioned that the peacock has feathers with an array of colors like blue and yellow, and each color comes in different shapes, but no one is able to understand the reason behind the innumerable patterns and shades of colors on these feathers. However, since the buddhas have developed the discriminating wisdom, they are able to know all the formative causes, karma, and results.

If the concept of “me” is created by our mind’s clinging, how does our mental consciousness experience this fabricated “me”? In other words, what is it like when the “me” is completely eliminated on attaining buddhahood?

As previously mentioned, many people believe there will be absolute nothingness after attaining buddhahood. Some also hold that omniscient buddhahood entails knowing everything and understanding all happiness and suffering, which would then be a rather complicated situation. Both are untrue. Attaining buddhahood refers to the development of the five wisdoms. The all-accomplishing wisdom refers to fulfilling all actions; the wisdom of equality is realizing the equality of all phenomena; the discriminating wisdom is to understand all without confusion. We describe attaining buddhahood as the realization of great bliss, but the bliss meant here is not any worldly pleasure. It certainly does not refer to the euphoria experienced from consuming alcohol or drugs. The great bliss of the buddha is tranquil and peaceful because it is completely free of suffering.

How do we eliminate the obscuration of affliction? Is it a gradual purifying process, or is it completely removed instantaneously?

In general, the obscuration of affliction is gradually purified as we develop a clearer realization of the nature of the dharmata. Since

we are still beginners, our understanding of the nature of the dharmata remains on the intellectual level. With actual practice, our experience of the nature of the dharmata gradually becomes clearer. This is akin to how darkness gradually disappears as we inch closer to the light. As we actually experience what is meant by the clarity aspect of the nature of the dharmata, we naturally become free from the afflictions, just like how the rays of the sun eradicate darkness.

What is the corresponding relationship between the eight consciousnesses and the five wisdoms?

The first five consciousnesses are transformed into the all-accomplishing wisdom; the sixth consciousness is transformed into the discriminating wisdom; the seventh consciousness is transformed into the wisdom of equality. The eighth consciousness has two parts, one is the cause — the ground, the other is the fruit — the ground consciousness. The ground is transformed into the mirror-like wisdom, whereas the ground consciousness is transformed into the dharmadhatu wisdom.

Other than teaching the dharma, does a buddha's compassionate activities of benefiting others include anything else? What I mean is that it is most beneficial to teach others the dharma, but the activities of the buddha should be limitless, right? For example, can they benefit others through medical aid?

When we are thinking about this question, first we need to return to our own selves, that is, to our own happiness and suffering. We need to know that both happiness and suffering are dependent on ourselves. We obtain happiness by relying on the correct path, and incur suffering by depending on the wrong path. Therefore, we are the most important factor here. Even the buddhas cannot change us; we have to change ourselves. The buddhas cannot get rid of the negative actions we have accumulated. Similarly, the buddhas cannot prevent us from attaining the fruit of happiness through our positive deeds. This is a crucial concept central to Buddhism — we ourselves create everything.

We might have a doubt here: If everything is created by ourselves, then what help can the buddhas provide? They help by teaching us the dharma. The Buddha once said, “I have shown you the path to liberation. But liberation depends on you alone.”

If we can obtain happiness and freedom from suffering, and become liberated by relying on an external object, then why doesn't the Buddha bless and help us in an instant, since he has incomparable compassion and ability? The only one capable of rescuing us is ourselves. We can be free from suffering and obtain happiness only through correct practice. A buddha's activities of benefiting others are, without a doubt, innumerable. For example, they can help others by providing medicines and treatments and so forth. A buddha

knows that the root of pain and illness comes from the afflictions of attachment, anger, and ignorance. Once the afflictions are eliminated, pain and illness naturally disappear.

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