

Good Questions **Wise** Answers



Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Good Questions Wise Answers

From the Very Venerable
Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Edited by
Acharya Dechen Phuntsok



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Editor's Foreword

The aim of this book is to convey the essence of Buddhism, offering practical wisdom for our daily lives through the words of the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. Rinpoche's inspirational teachings are simple, meaningful, and easy to understand. This book is designed to help us improve our state of mind and discover deep inner peace.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche was one of the few genuinely wise and highly distinguished scholars of our time. He taught in over 25 countries and was especially renowned as a master of mahamudra meditation. His compassionate presence, immense knowledge, and ability to make even complex teachings accessible touched the lives of students worldwide. He was the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu Rinpoches: His Eminence (H.E.) Shamar Rinpoche, H.E. Situ Rinpoche, H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and H.E. Gyaltsab Rinpoche. Due to his vast knowledge of the Dharma, Rinpoche was

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appointed by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama as the personal tutor for His Holiness the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, receiving the honorific title Yongdzin (tutor to His Holiness).

Through these concise teachings, we can benefit from Rinpoche's wisdom while engaging in our daily activities. This book presents some common questions from students and Rinpoche's wise answers, which are simple, meaningful, and accessible to practitioners at all levels. The doubts and questions addressed in this book frequently arise within us all, and the best answers to those questions are from Rinpoche himself, arranged together here in this book. I have collected 181 questions and answers and divided them into 10 categories to make it easier for readers to use in a practical way. These teachings are meant to be contemplated and practiced frequently, ultimately bringing joy through diligence.

I request forgiveness for any mistakes that I may have made while assembling this edition.

I hope that you will experience ultimate happiness and wisdom and fulfil all your wishes.

Acharya Dechen Phuntsok
Namo Buddha, Spetember 22, 2024

Note

Rinpoche was asked these questions at the end of various teaching sessions held in different places and at different times. Some questions and answers are specific to particular sessions and topics. This edition has been excerpted from a vast collection of Rinpoche's teachings, many of which have been previously translated into English by highly skilled translators. Since different translators may have alternative preferences for rendering Tibetan terms into English (e.g., 'sending and receiving' versus 'tonglen', 'intermediate stage' versus 'bardo', 'jnana' versus 'wisdom'), some minor word substitutions have been made in this collection for the sake of consistency while striving to remain faithful to the original meaning.

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Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

As a student new to Buddhism, I have not developed a strong connection to a root guru. How does one practice faith and devotion in that case?

Rinpoche:

Well, the one for whom you feel faith, devotion, and respect no matter which individual, should be your object of refuge. That is whom you visualize [as your root guru].

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 31

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

You mentioned that in Nepal and India there are many holy places where we can prostrate and the merit accumulated from these places is immeasurable. But most of the time we are not able to visit these places.

Rinpoche:

The merit is the same whether we actually are at the place or not. The point of being in such sacred places is that we see this is a very holy place in front of us and this fact is very helpful in engendering faith and devotion in us. But if we visualize prostrating in such a place, the ensuing merit is the same. In other words, we don't have to be at the actual location.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 31

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

If a disciple sees his master as the yidam, what does it mean? For example, some disciples of Marpa saw Marpa as a deity.

Rinpoche:

This kind of experience is what one could call a pure vision. It's a form of experience that is due to exceedingly strong faith and devotion, but it isn't actually seeing the very expression of the true nature of mind. It is something that appears due to one's very strong faith and devotion. For example, if you have much faith and devotion in your guru and in the yidam, then it is possible that you will see the yidam manifesting in the form of the guru or the guru manifesting in the form of the yidam. It actually appears to you very clearly in a vision.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 104

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

Rinpoche at what level does supplication work? We talk about supplicating gurus, teachers of the lineage that have died and dharmapalas. How is that working?

Rinpoche:

Supplication produces blessing, and although the blessing is understood as something that is given to you, something that somehow engulfs you from outside, in fact blessing really isn't given to you at all. When you supplicate you generate faith and devotion. That faith and devotion cause the appearance of what we call blessing.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 78

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

If I understood correctly, our attitude should begin with a sort of impartiality (equanimity) before we try to cultivate compassion and love. I wonder if that would be as applicable in the western world where we tend to be very individualistic, and not really care about anybody else very naturally.

Rinpoche:

It's not that you cannot work with love and compassion from the very beginning. However, as you work with equanimity you can start to pacify your aversions to some people and your obsession with, or attachment to others, which will be very helpful.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 13

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

I'm confused about compassion. You suggested that we should not feel compassion any more, but I feel sad if somebody is poor, like in the pictures that you have there. That is compassion in me, and I do not want to kill that so that I can maybe donate. I don't understand.

Rinpoche:

What you are referring to is bringing suffering to the path. The instruction was not to avoid compassion or to get rid of compassion. It was how to deal with the misery that arises in our mind when we feel compassion but feel frustrated when we can't achieve everything we want. So, it's not the case that you want to get rid of compassion. In fact, you need compassion very much, but you do want to be able to work with compassion without being disturbed by it.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, pp. 59–60

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

What motivation does one have to help another sentient being if the self is non-existent?

Rinpoche:

Although we do not perceive a self in this level of understanding, either in ourselves or in other sentient beings, nonetheless, the experience of suffering occurs. When the experience of suffering is perceived, the compassion of a bodhisattva acts in reference to the experience of suffering, but not in reference to a specific self or specific so-called sentient being. The compassion which is expressed by a bodhisattva relates to experiential suffering.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 32

Question:

What is the responsibility of the individual to the non-sentient matter of this world? If we have the responsibility of compassion to sentient beings, I would think that we have some responsibility toward the non-sentient world too.

Rinpoche:

If we were to take care of the water, the trees, the air, and so on, that would certainly be a good thing to do. However, the buddhadharma does not specifically teach that we must take up that responsibility. The buddhadharma teaches the methods for well-being and the absence of suffering where mind is present. There is certainly no contradiction between bringing happiness to the minds of sentient beings and taking care of the planet, but in the buddhadharma it is not said that we must without fail do that.

From Essential Practice, p. 38

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

If we have compassion for others, we want to free them from pain, but the truth often hurts. What shall we do?

Rinpoche:

Generally speaking, compassion is a method for separating sentient beings from suffering. Nevertheless, compassion needs to be guided by knowledge. Not much benefit will come from dumb compassion. There will not be much benefit for us, and there will not be much benefit for others. Therefore, knowledge is necessary. Knowledge looks for a way in which we can actually be of help. Will there be much benefit or only a little? We need to apply compassion intelligently.

From Essential Practice, p. 64

Faith, Devotion and Compassion

Question:

What about compassion for yourself?

Rinpoche:

It is necessary to feel compassion for ourselves, but for the most part we already feel that. It is probably not necessary to rely much upon a special method for cultivating compassion for ourselves.

From *Essential Practice*, p. 111

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Skandhas

Question:

Is it possible to have direct experience through all five of the senses in the same instant?

Rinpoche:

The five sense consciousnesses, when they are functioning, are all functioning simultaneously. What is not functioning simultaneously is the apprehension of the experience of the sense consciousnesses by the sixth consciousness, which tends to apprehend them only one at a time.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, p. 37*

Question:

I have a question about the instantaneous mind or the immediate mind. Is its presence the cause for the experiences of the five sense consciousnesses? Is the instantaneous mind always present?

Rinpoche:

Yes, because in the case of sensory experience, what the immediate mind does is produce the experiences, bringing them out of the all-basis like a messenger and then also returning the further habit produced by that reoccurrence of experience back into the all-basis. It is like when you go to the bank. The person who brings out or puts in your money for you is like the immediate mind.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, p. 37*

Question:

My question is how do we know when an emotion is negative? Anger seems very obvious, but I think there are more subtle things like fear or other emotions like that.

Rinpoche:

If an emotion is directly harmful to others or indirectly, or implicitly harmful to others, then it is called 'negative.' If it is beneficial either directly or indirectly, then it is called 'positive.'

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 114

Question:

Sometimes it seems that thoughts arise out of physical sensations. But sometimes physical sensations seem to come out of thoughts. How does that happen?

Rinpoche:

It's quite possible that a thought arising within the mental consciousness can generate physical sensations. What is occurring is that an extremely intense thought process or emotional state within the mental consciousness affects the channels and winds within the body, which then in the case of an unpleasant sensation are agitated, and then you feel ill.

*From The Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's
Pointing Out the Dharmakaya, p. 115*

Question:

When I try to settle the mind to look at thoughts, suddenly it seems that underneath there are the emotions. I'm trying to see the thoughts, to see if there's anything there, and the emotions seem to be there underneath. Then I can't get underneath them. Is that how it is?

Rinpoche:

It is very much like that. When a coarse thought arises, a lot of stuff comes along with it. The distinction that's made about this in the *Abhidharma* is between the main mind and the mental factors. When a concept or a thought arises (for example, a virtuous one), then it will bring a lot of virtuous mental arisings with it. And the same is true with a negative thought. There will seem to be other things surrounding or underlying the thought.

*From The Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's
Pointing Out the Dharmakaya, p. 115*

Question:

How would you define consciousness from a Buddhist perspective?

Rinpoche:

Generally, the sensory consciousnesses arise when your eye is able to see. The ear consciousness arises when you are able to hear. When you taste something, it is due to the consciousness of taste. When you touch something it is due to body consciousness. In addition to all those, there are all sorts of emotions and thoughts that you experience and these are known as the mental consciousness. All these six consciousnesses are known as the skandha of consciousness, which is defined as mind. There are two more consciousnesses in addition: the afflicted consciousness and the alaya or ground consciousness. One should understand that this is a very brief description of the mind.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 157

Question:

Aren't these consciousnesses simply sensory organs?

Rinpoche:

No. When you are seeing a physical form, the appearance is taking place in the mind. When you hear a sound the actual hearing takes place in mind. The body is simply a channel, a process to experience those. So the nature of the mind and that of the body are really different and are classified differently, with the body being outer phenomena and the mind being awareness, an inner thing.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 157

Question:

Of the eight different kinds of consciousness, I'm wondering if the seventh and the eighth are those which move on into the bardo?

Rinpoche:

No, all of them do. In the bardo you have a mental body and that mental body has its own mental forms of the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness as well. In the bardo you still sometimes see the things from your previous life, the places and people and so on, all kinds of different stuff.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 100

Question:

The normal or the conventional method of distinguishing sentient beings is by their physical basis, the bodies of sentient beings. If what we take as a physical object is merely lucidity and emptiness, what is it that distinguishes different sentient beings?

Rinpoche:

What distinguishes sentient beings are their individual minds which are not objects of your experience and therefore are not projections of your mind. The bodies of sentient beings are things you can see and are therefore projections of your mind.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 109

Question:

If we look at feelings and their insubstantiality, is there any danger that we may simply repress the feeling?

Rinpoche:

There is no danger either of the suppression of feelings or of the cessation of feelings or experience through this. It's simply that we are not used to seeing our feelings for what they are, seeing them as the display of emptiness. But they have been that from the very beginning. So in looking directly at feelings, you are not manipulating them in any way, or actually changing them. You're not trying to make them emptier than they already are, and you're not trying to convince yourself that they are empty. You simply look at them directly as they are, and you experience their nature as it is, which will not change your feelings particularly, except that it will gradually produce feelings of joy and so forth.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 45

Question:

Is the seventh consciousness the mind that tells me that I'm thinking?

Rinpoche:

No. The faculty which recognizes distraction in thinking is the faculty of awareness, which basically is a function of the sixth, the mental consciousness.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 47

Question:

If the seventh consciousness is of the kleshas, is it also the level of the buddha families?

Rinpoche:

The seventh consciousness is not the source of the kleshas, in spite of its name of 'klesha consciousness.' The seventh consciousness is the reason why you have kleshas, but it is not itself the faculty of mind, or the function which produces kleshas. When the eight consciousnesses are purified, upon enlightenment or awakening they become the five wisdoms. The seventh consciousness actually becomes the wisdom of equality, which represents the Buddha Ratnasambhava of the ratna family.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 47

Question:

It seems like sometimes the word ‘look’ is understood in English as a totally intellectual process, but I have a sense that it is much more an experience in Tibetan.

Rinpoche:

In Tibetan when one speaks about investigating and analyzing with prajna, one doesn’t talk about ‘looking’ with that type of mind. One talks about thinking, reflecting, and contemplating. When we say ‘look,’ we mean like when you look at something with your eye, just direct experience without conception. So, probably it is the same thing what you are meaning in English when we talk about experience.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 117*

Question:

I was wondering if the alaya consciousness is what is re-born from one lifetime to the next?

Rinpoche:

Where would one look for this alaya consciousness? Alaya consciousness is a name that is designated to the factor of clarity of the mind. It is not a coarse type of knowing. The factor of clarity appears as well as being called this alaya consciousness. So, I would not say that is what is going from one lifetime to another. What goes from one lifetime to another is the continuum of the six collections of the six consciousnesses.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 119*

Question:

Would that continuum be the seventh consciousness?

Rinpoche:

No. The seventh consciousness is the seventh consciousness. The six consciousnesses are the continuum of the six consciousnesses. The seventh consciousness refers to this conception of self which is unbroken, uninterrupted. This seventh klesha consciousness pervades all the consciousness and is always there. But the six consciousnesses and the continuum of the six consciousnesses are not the seventh consciousness nor the eighth consciousness.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 119*

Question:

What is the difference between conceptual and non-conceptual minds?

Rinpoche:

There is some difference between conceptual and non-conceptual minds.

A non-conceptual mind can see directly. A conceptual mind investigates and analyzes an object that is hidden from its view; it cannot see directly. For instance, there is a difference between an eye consciousness and a mental consciousness. When a mental consciousness considers something, it looks at an unclear image. In the language of valid cognition, we describe this image as a meaning generality. An eye consciousness, however, sees directly. Thus, conceptual and non-conceptual differ significantly in clarity.

From Essential Practice, p. 73

Question:

I understand that the five aggregates are not a self, but I do not understand what goes from lifetime to lifetime.

Rinpoche:

Consider this example. I came from Nepal to Boulder, and I will return from Boulder to Nepal. Who goes? If a self does not go, then who goes? A self does not go. My body goes. Legs, arms, head, intestines, heart, and so on. Those go from place to place. A self does not go. Similarly, if you ask, “Who goes to a subsequent lifetime?” the answer is that the five aggregates—the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness—go to a subsequent lifetime. A self does not go.

From Essential Practice, p. 150

Question:

In what sense does the aggregate of form go to a subsequent lifetime?

Rinpoche:

It changes. The aggregate of form of this lifetime dies. Then another aggregate of form is taken up. In that sense, the aggregate of form goes from lifetime to lifetime. It is the same way with the aggregates of mind. In the case of someone like me, at the end of this lifetime, the consciousnesses of a human being will be thrown away and the consciousnesses of a bear will be taken up. Then, when the bear dies, the consciousnesses of a bear will be thrown away and the consciousnesses of a dog will be taken up. As for the body, first the body of a human being will be thrown away and the body of a bear will be taken up. Then, when the bear dies, the body of a bear will be thrown away and the body of a dog will be taken up.

From Essential Practice, p. 150



Karma

Question:

Rinpoche, what do you think about someone asking to be killed when they are very sick?

Rinpoche:

A negative result would come from that because although that person is experiencing great suffering through his illness, he still hopes that he might get better and find happiness in the future. Killing him would be an act committed out of ignorance: it would be killing without being aware that there is still the hope that he may become free from that suffering. Somebody may be very depressed and say, “Please kill me,” and it may seem that killing this person is beneficial at that moment. But there is always the opportunity to become cured and to find happiness in the future. Even though the person had the wish, he might change his mind as you kill him, “Oh, I think I made a mistake” but then it is too late.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 38

Question:

In other words, ignorance is the unconscious part of the killer's mind, which perceives, although the conscious mind doesn't hear? Is that what you mean?

Rinpoche:

Yes, it is like that. In terms of the eight consciousnesses, it is the sixth consciousness which thinks, "Yes, he is dead. He has been killed." But in the eighth consciousness, which is the ground consciousness, the karmic trace or imprint of having killed someone cannot take place.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 41

Karma

Question:

If I have some of these negative actions, what is the karma?

Rinpoche:

I have the idea that you really do not have negative karma. My feeling is more open. Normally in carrying out negative actions and accumulating negative karma, there is an enjoyment of performing the act. For example, one kills and likes killing, so one carries on and does as much as one is able to. If one has regret, it means you dislike it and don't want to do it anymore. That puts an end to it and from then on you avoid it. Because there is dislike for the action and regret, it causes a transformation in the karmic traces or latencies in oneself. Due to that, the harmfulness of the negative karma gradually diminishes.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, pp. 41–42

Question:

In Buddhist countries or in Rinpoche's monastery, what is done with somebody who is cheating, stealing or lying?

Rinpoche:

There are many different monasteries and each has its own way of managing things. My view is that if somebody is stealing, it is good to meditate on patience. But if one finds that meditating on patience does not work, then it is important to find out the truth. Who really supervises truth? It is the government. So, the best thing is to hand this thing over to the police. If they work out what is right and what is wrong, then this is my view.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 42

Karma

Question:

Do the inner obstacles arise because of past bad karma?
Could inner obstacles be purified through purification practice?

Rinpoche:

Inner obstacles do not come from previous karma. What comes from previous karma is such things as physical suffering and being born in poverty. Inner obstacles, which are various negative conceptual thoughts, come from previous negative habits of thinking. Purifying inner obstacles can be done, for instance, contemplation on the four thoughts which turn the mind (towards the dharma) because inner obstacles are very, very old habits. Doing the four contemplations will gradually change the negative habits of mind and that will help clear away the inner obstacles.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 19

Question:

Rinpoche, would you describe further how to begin and end tonglen practice in general?

Rinpoche:

It is perfectly all right just to send and take in an instant, without much preparation and ceremony. It is also all right to use the traditional method of first beginning with aspiration prayers, guru-yoga, visualizing Chenrezig and so forth. It is also all right to do it in the traditional way. But if one doesn't use a lot of elaborate details, it is also fine.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 56

Question:

I've heard that some illnesses can be caused by external forces. In that case, is it true that these forces can be pacified? What is torma and how can a lay person like me actually offer a torma?

Rinpoche:

Some illnesses can be caused by demonic forces. It is also said that nagas can cause sickness. A good way to pacify them is by offering torma, but the Chö practice visualization is best. Visualize the demon and imagine that you are offering your body. It may appear to be superstitious, but it really helps.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, pp. 72–73

Question:

How much negative karma is erased by doing good actions?

Rinpoche:

The virtue resulting from giving rise to the awakening mind (bodhichitta) is very powerful. In fact, it consumes negative karma. In the case of extremely strong negative karma, awakening mind will, so to speak, take away the effect, though one will have to experience some of the effects of this negative karma. In the case of a slight misdeed, it will be eliminated completely by awakening mind.

For example, if someone has accumulated karma which will result in rebirth in hell and after one has given rise to the awakening mind, the future effect of this negative karma will be very slight. For example, if you drop a ball, it bounces back off the ground. In the same way, rather than having to dwell in the hell realms and then bounce up again like a ball realm for a very long period

Karma

of time, one might just fall down into the hell realms and then bounce up again like a ball.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 16

Question:

I want to ask a practical question. If you do an evil deed during the day, should you try to confess it right away, or should you wait until the end of the day or should you wait until you practice?

Rinpoche:

It doesn't make a big difference when one confesses evil deeds. One confesses what one has done the moment one recognizes that one has committed an evil deed. Whether a day has elapsed, whether it's immediately or after a few years makes no great difference. At the point when one recognizes that one has committed an evil deed and regrets that, one makes a confession. With respect to commitment of the vajrayana tradition on the other hand, timeliness has been mentioned, though generally speaking with respect to evil actions there are no particular time limits.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, pp. 31—32

Karma

Question:

Does one have to feel remorse with confession?

Rinpoche:

Here confession is concerned with recognizing or identifying evil deeds that one has committed. It's not very important to have a feeling of remorse or regret for no particular reason. With respect to confession or disclosure of evil, one actually recalls negative deeds and regrets them.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 32

Question:

What about regret?

Rinpoche:

Well, usually with regret, one has a reason. There is something one has done in a mistaken way. One recognizes this and therefore one feels remorse or regret. Though generally speaking, the nature of samsara is suffering and so forth. So, when this state of mind arises without any particular reason, it's good to meditate or do some practice which could clear away that frame of mind. It just indicates the general nature of samsara and suffering, the fact that state of mind arises.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 32

Karma

Question:

What if one acts very forcefully and doesn't let a person do something which is very self-destructive?

Rinpoche:

This may not be anger but may be determination. For example, if one wants to benefit a person and knows that person doesn't listen to what one says if one is gentle, then one might act in a wrathful way which actually benefits the person. But that's not the anger that we have been talking about because one's mind isn't bent on harming others.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 82

Question:

Could you please explain karmic obscurations?

Rinpoche:

As you know there are three main obscurations: the emotional obscurations, the cognitive obscurations, and the karmic obscurations. The karmic obscurations mean simply that when you act in a wrong way such as killing out of anger, stealing out of desire or whatever, you accumulate all sorts of negative karma. Once you have accumulated that much bad karma, you will be reborn in a lower realm. If you are born in the hell realms or as a hungry ghost or an animal, you won't have the opportunity to hear the dharma and practice it. These beings are obscured by their own karma. This is what stops them from being able to practice. On the other hand, somebody who hasn't accumulated that much negative karma can be reborn as a human being and as such will have the opportunity to practice the dharma.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, pp. 21–22

Question:

Could you explain why Buddhists don't believe in a creator?

Rinpoche:

Some religions and philosophies speak of a creator of the universe. It is believed that he makes everything; he makes the world and he also determines the condition of beings. He makes their happiness. He makes their suffering. This creator is believed to be permanent, meaning that the creator is continually present creating the universe for sentient beings to experience. Again, if one says he is permanent, everything has to be changeless. Everything has to be as it is once and for all. If this creator-God is permanent, then at all times everything is the same. There is no room for any change. If there is change happening, it means automatically that he is not permanent, so this concept of a permanent creator doesn't stand to reason. It isn't valid.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, pp. 41–42

Question:

Christians say that Christ is alive and doesn't that make him permanent?

Rinpoche:

Even if one says that Christ is still alive that doesn't mean that he is permanent. Here we are mixing up two different things. When we say permanent, it's not in terms of whether somebody is dead or not dead. It's in terms of whether there is change or no change. That's the level of things when we speak of permanence or impermanence, change or no change.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 42

Question:

Can't a permanent creator create change?

Rinpoche:

It seems that it's not compatible, because when something is permanent, it's the complete opposite of change. If we say permanence, it means no change. If we consider things in the world, there is constant change. For instance, if we have a cup and it gets a little chip in it, this cup is no longer the same. If it's no longer the same, it has changed. Then it is impermanent. Or if today we are writing, but yesterday we weren't writing, there is a change there. It's impermanent. In the same way, the world as it is today isn't like the world it was yesterday. There is change. Then if there is change it means there can't be somebody creating the world because it would never change. If there were a permanent creator, things would never change. It is incompatible to have a permanent creator and change in the world.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 42

Question:

Millions of beings have visited the earth, and millions of beings will again visit the earth. As far as I know there's not some permanence in that process of change.

Rinpoche:

You can't even say that process is permanent, because it will imply that what will come back is exactly the same, like last year's spring is coming back exactly the same and that's impossible. Even if you look at a tree, the tree of this spring might be nine feet in circumference. Next year it might be ten feet, the year after it might be eleven feet. It's not the same tree, and it's not the same spring. Something might come back, but it's not the same. You can't say it's the same, so it isn't a permanent thing. It's a different spring that comes.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 43

Question:

But the process is repeating itself whatever the spring is doing.

Rinpoche:

No. The process is not repeating itself. If the process repeated itself, the spring would have to be exactly the same each year. But it's a different spring each year so it's not a process repeating itself, it's two different things happening.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 43

Karma

Question:

Are the causes of impermanence, permanent?

Rinpoche:

No, even the causes of impermanence are impermanent. If one takes a child, the child is impermanent and his mother is impermanent so the cause is impermanent and the result is impermanent.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 43

Karma

Question:

How did all this karma get started?

Rinpoche:

We create karma in the frame of reference of the illusory appearances that we experience. Karma functions in this frame of reference, and we experience the results of karma within the same frame of reference. If we examine the real nature, we discover that, actually, no karma has been created, nor have the results of any karma been experienced.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 30

Karma

Question:

Is there any karma?

Rinpoche:

On the conventional level of truth, there is karma. On the ultimate level, there is not. We begin by listening to the idea that there is really no self and try to understand what is meant by this idea. Then, we must contemplate it and examine our experience and try to find where this self is and see that actually there is no objective self to be found. Then after this, we can practice the meditations of samadhi and insight and actually recognize the selfless nature. Because grasping at the notion of an ego is the root of all defilements, in recognizing selflessness, all the defilements dissolve by themselves. We do not have to give up anything in particular and we attain realization.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 30

Karma

Question:

From a spiritual point of view, is family planning right or wrong?

Rinpoche:

I have no fixed opinion on the matter. All details of karma are perceptible only to the Buddha. Personally, I see no great fault in preventing conception. But, of course, once conception has occurred, to kill the fetus would be to destroy a sentient being, to commit an act of killing, and would be a non-virtuous action. But I cannot see much non-virtue in the prevention of conception.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 74

Question:

How is it regarded if you save the life of one person by killing another person? For example, one person is threatening another person's life and is about to kill him and you intervene by killing that person to save the life of the other.

Rinpoche:

This depends on the circumstances or the motivation. For example, if the person who is in danger is a relative or friend and one wishes to save them by killing another person, it can have a negative result. If the person in danger of being killed is somebody who can benefit many people and the one who is going to kill him is not of any benefit to anybody, then one may think, "It is much better if he dies than the other one." That motivation is good because the person whose life is in danger would help many beings. If one kills the bad person, it would not be a negative action, so it depends upon the motivation.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 37

Karma

Question:

What is the karmic result of an accidental killing? For example, someone drives a car and another person stepped out and was run over.

Rinpoche:

I don't think negative karma would come from accidentally killing someone in a car because one does not have the intention to kill. The motivation is not there. Also, one has not carried out an act designed to kill another person, rather one has made a mistake. Therefore, there should not be a negative result. One might be driving along and someone crosses the road. If one gets angry, shouting, "What is he doing on the road?" and hits the pedestrian, a negative result will come because there is the motivation of anger.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 38

Question:

I have two questions: If somebody lies out of fear, what would your view be? Secondly, if somebody creates mischief and tells lies, how would you deal with that?

Rinpoche:

If someone acts negatively out of fear, then I think there is little harm from that. If a person is in danger, he tells lies to become free from that danger. I think there is little harm from that. The habitual lying is harmful if done with a negative motivation.

From Buddhist Conduct: The Ten Virtuous Actions, p. 42

Question:

Why can't gods, sages, and Brahmin reach enlightenment?

Rinpoche:

The gods, sages, and Brahmin are only concerned with their own welfare. They practice to attain Buddhahood only to eliminate their personal suffering. Therefore, they have never even dreamt of an attitude of awakening mind (bodhichitta), being concerned only with their own welfare.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 16

Question:

How is it possible to rejoice if the Communists are praising what they did?

Rinpoche:

You have to examine the motive of the person who is praising the Communists. If their motivation in praising the Communists is really towards benefiting sentient beings, then it should be accepted because the motive is altruistic. But if their motive in praising the Communists is to harm living things, then instead of developing anger, you must develop compassion for them.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 83

Question:

Why is it impossible to remember past lives?

Rinpoche:

Such radical change occurs in the transition from one lifetime to another. Even within this lifetime, the changes that occur make it difficult to remember what has happened. For instance, we do not remember being inside the wombs of our mothers. Nor do we remember coming out from the wombs of our mothers. Not only that, but most of us also do not remember much from the first few years of our lives. Why not? At such tender ages, our minds have yet to experience much. When we come from previous lifetimes to subsequent lifetimes, so much changes. Because of the change, we do not remember much.

From Essential Practice, p. 150

Karma

Question:

Is karma ever circumvented? Is it possible to awaken completely without having purified all of our karma?

Rinpoche:

No, it is not possible to awaken fully without purifying our karma. However, as we traverse the paths of a bodhisattva and begin to awaken, our karma will naturally be purified.

From Essential Practice, p. 97

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General Dharma Teachings

Question:

What is the difference between the pratimoksha and the bodhisattva vows?

Rinpoche:

The discipline of the pratimoksha is based on body and speech, so whatever mistakes we make can be perceived immediately. But the mahayana vows deal mainly with our mind and so we cannot easily tell whether our discipline is progressing or declining. The mahayana vow is compared to a golden vase which can be easily damaged or broken, but also easily repaired. However, the pratimoksha vows are like a big clay vase which can be damaged easily, but once it is damaged it breaks completely.

*From The Tibetan Vinaya: A Guide to
Buddhist Conduct, pp. 24-25*

Question:

Does the Vaibhashika school say that indivisible particles and irreducible moments have the same nature?

Rinpoche:

Such is not held to be the case by the Vaibhashika or the Great Exposition school. Rather the indivisible particles are external phenomena. They are material, atomic particles. Whereas the irreducible moments of consciousness are internal mind. They are luminous, clear awareness. These two are in the relationship of the object apprehended and the subject apprehending the object.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 22

Question:

I didn't understand why the Mind-only school is lower than the Middle-way school?

Rinpoche:

How does one settle the view in terms of the Middle-way school? It is through analyzing worldly, confused or mistaken appearances and understanding that such confused appearances are not inherently established. The word that the Middle-way school uses to describe this lack of inherent existence or lack of any nature of its own is 'emptiness' or shunyata in Sanskrit. Thus, the Middle-way school shows that all outer and inner phenomena to be empty of inherent existence. Nevertheless, such phenomena naturally appear to one's mind conventionally. The demonstration of all phenomena as lacking inherent existence is the particular tenet of the Middle-way school. All outer phenomena being appearances of mind is the view of the Mind-only school.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 24

Question:

According to the Buddhist point of view, if a non-Buddhist were to assert true existence, what would that assertion be? What would that assertion necessarily contain within it?

Rinpoche:

We Buddhists say that all phenomena are not inherently established and we affirm this lack of inherent establishment as the way in which things abide. Others assert that phenomena do exist truly, inherently, by way of their own nature and from that point of view they are mistaken. This does not mean that every last thing that they have to say is useless, however, in that there are many things that are presented and are quite useful, such as upaya, methods that are helpful in a variety of ways. However, from the point of view of asserting a self when there is, in fact, no self and asserting true existence when, in fact, things lack true existence, they are mistaken.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 38

Question:

What does it mean to say that something exists externally?

Rinpoche:

Something existing externally would mean that it is not just an appearance for one's own mind. It is not just an aspect of one's own mind. It is something other than one's mind. It exists somewhere apart from that. Buddhists generally—and here we are particularly talking about the Mind-only school who say that phenomena are just mind and particularly in the division of the Middle-way school called 'empty of other (*shen tong*)—say that things do not exist apart from one's own mind. They do not exist elsewhere, separately. However, people tend to think that they do. Despite thinking that phenomena do exist apart from one's own mind, in fact, such does not occur. If one looks for phenomena somewhere else, one will not find them. The reason why one will not find them is because they do not exist.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 38

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

I do not understand what was meant by there being many different universes?

Rinpoche:

In the Buddhist tradition, it is taught that there are many other universes in which there are other buddhas, other enlightened beings. Some of them teach the dharma, some of them don't, and the text is concerned that we request these buddhas that do not teach the dharma to do so.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 43

Question:

What is an arhat?

Rinpoche:

The arhats have actually subdued the disturbing emotions, that is why they are known in Tibetan as *dag damp*a or ‘subdued enemies’ in Tibetan. However, the manner of overcoming, abandoning, and eliminating the disturbing emotions is different between arhats and bodhisattvas. Arhats have realized the knowledge that the root of all suffering is clinging to the personal identity so they meditate on the egolessness of self. Bodhisattvas meditate on the knowledge of the emptiness of all phenomena.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, p. 158

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

Isn't there some problem of duality there with a mind that goes on and on and a body that stops?

Rinpoche:

It's not really a problem, because it's not a question of the body being annihilated but only of the connection between body and mind being broken. When the body is left behind, the mind continues on to a future lifetime with the body being left as mere matter. It may be burned, but even so there remains ashes. Those ashes can be scattered on the ground and will continue as a physical phenomenon.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 71

Question:

The mind and body are of different categories?

Rinpoche:

Yes, the body is perceptible in ordinary physical terms—we can feel it, touch it, and so on. Mind is not physically perceptible. At the moment, body and mind are occurring simultaneously, but they are, even now, quite distinct.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 72

Question:

When and how does the mind go from a dead body to a new one? Is it at the moment of conception?

Rinpoche:

What usually happens is that the body is afflicted with some kind of disease due to which the mind can no longer remain attached to it. So, the mind leaves the body and death occurs. The body deteriorates. Then, sometimes very quickly and sometimes after a short period of time, the mind perceives another body, identifies with that body as 'my body' and thus forms an attachment to the body. That relationship of attachment is the sense in which the mind and body are connected.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 72

Question:

I have heard that one must complete ngondro practice before going into a three-year retreat and then that it is not necessary. Which is correct?

Rinpoche:

Generally, the ngondro practice is done within the three-year retreat. So, if you have completed it beforehand that is very good. If you haven't then you will do it in retreat.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 119*

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

What about the sentient beings in the higher realms? What prevents them from hearing and practicing dharma?

Rinpoche:

They are extremely comfortable and are not able to feel discouragement with cyclic existence. Because they never feel discouraged with cyclic existence, they cannot generate the wish to enter into the dharma. In dependence upon that reason, they have no opportunity to practice the dharma.

From Essential Practice, pp. 17–18

Question:

Does the Buddhist path exclude all others? If you receive the vows of refuge, does that exclude practice of all other traditions?

Rinpoche:

Receiving the vows of refuge does not require us to abandon all other traditions of dharma. Nor can we say that we do not abandon any other traditions. We abandon whatever contradicts the Buddhist tradition. We do not abandon that which does not contradict the Buddhist tradition, such as excellent action. We cannot say unequivocally that we have abandoned all other traditions of dharma when we have gone for refuge to the Buddha dharma. Nor can we say unequivocally that we have not abandoned other traditions of dharma. That depends upon their individual, internal meanings.

From Essential Practice, p. 27

Question:

Do cyclic existence and nirvana both exist from the start?

Rinpoche:

Cyclic existence and nirvana are both present from time without beginning. Nirvana is present as the factor that is true. Cyclic existence is present as the factor that is mistaken. They differ in that one is true and the other is but they do not differ in regard to time.

From Essential Practice, p. 73

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

What is the difference between happiness and joy?

Rinpoche:

When we feel love for others, we want them to enjoy happiness. When they enjoy happiness, we feel joy.

From Essential Practice, p. 112

Question:

How do we determine causes, in general?

Rinpoche:

Causes are identified in relationship to their effects. If, when a thing is present, its effect arises and, when absent, its effect does not arise, the former may be identified as a cause of the latter. In the treatises on valid cognition, “When present, arising and, when absent, not arising” is given as the definition of cause. Some things have many causes; many causes and conditions must gather before they will come into being. When those causes and conditions are not complete, that thing will not come about. From that point of view, they are posited as its causes.

From Essential Practice, p. 113

Question:

What are the stages of love and joy? What is the experience of those?

Rinpoche:

When you love someone, you want that person to have happiness and the causes of happiness, and you hope that he or she will have them. If happiness or its causes come to that person through your efforts, then you feel the joy of having helped someone. If that person is able to separate from suffering and its causes, or if that person, despite not being able to separate from suffering at that moment, is nevertheless able to abandon the causes of suffering even slightly, then too you feel the joy of having helped someone and having done something worthwhile.

From Essential Practice, p. 114

Question:

Is there a remedy for pride other than offering prostrations?

Rinpoche:

There are many antidotes for pride, just as there are for all afflictions. We may contemplate the faults of pride, the disadvantages of pride, and the advantages of abandoning pride. Also, if we hear the stories of liberation of the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and the learned great ones, and then look at our own qualities, we will think, “I do not have the same measure of good qualities, do I?” That will undermine our pride. In the practice of offering prostrations, pride is abandoned in dependence upon a physical gesture, which makes it beneficial to the mind too.

From Essential Practice, p. 139

Question:

How do we join knowledge with the transcendent actions (paramitas)? If we do not have much knowledge, will we be unable to practice the transcendent actions

Rinpoche:

We can practice the six transcendent actions. Although some people have more knowledge and some have less, things change during the course of a life-time. Knowledge may increase, and it may decrease. Both occur. Those with great knowledge may fail to cherish it and thereby lose it. Those with little knowledge may seek and obtain great knowledge. Knowledge can change, and it depends upon our own interest and practice. If we have interest and bring what we learn into our experience, then our knowledge will increase. If we have no interest and do not bring the learning into experience, then knowledge probably cannot increase. It depends upon the individual's exertion and interest.

From Essential Practice, p. 178

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

Are human beings capable of practicing the dharma?

Rinpoche:

Yes, we are, because we have gained a precious human birth. Within the six realms of existence—gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings—only humans are able to truly practice the dharma. This is due to our precious human birth with all its freedoms and endowments. Other sentient beings, such as animals, do not enjoy the same excellent opportunity as we do. Not only are we able to practice the dharma, our everyday lives are also of a higher quality than beings in other realms.

*From A Life of Happiness: A Practice Guide
for Older Practitioners, p. 27*

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

Who knows when I will die and become a corpse?

Rinpoche:

It is difficult to predict when we will die. It could be months or years away. We can't know for sure. When we die, the body just becomes a lifeless corpse. We really take such good care of our bodies while alive, adorning them with beautiful clothing and feeding them delicious food. But when we die, they merely become corpses. At the time of death, dharma is the only thing that benefits us.

*From A Life of Happiness: A Practice Guide
for Older Practitioners, p. 33*

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

Generally, we have a mind that clings to a self, and this is known as self-grasping. It makes us feel as though we are really important, that we have to become happier than other people. Is it wrong to think in this way?

Rinpoche:

There is nothing particularly bad about thinking like this. However, if we take advantage of others for the sake of our own happiness, we will be the only ones who are happy while others suffer. Building our own happiness upon someone else's pain contradicts the practice of loving-kindness and compassion.

*From A Life of Happiness: A Practice Guide
for Older Practitioners, pp. 35–36*

General Dharma Teachings

Question:

Why do we include the name of Chenrezig in the six-syllable mantra?

Rinpoche:

We usually call out the person's name if we are seeking their help. Likewise, when we are asking for the help and blessings of Chenrezig, we recite his name while praying.

*From A Life of Happiness: A Practice Guide
for Older Practitioners, p. 40*

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Mind Training

Mind Training

Question:

An aspect of Buddhist practice that has been getting more attention in the west these days is social activism to bring your practice out into the community to make a positive change. There has been a growing interest in the socially active aspects of going from your meditation seat into the community and bringing about positive change. Some of the instructions on mind training could be interpreted as a sort of withdrawal from social activism, so that others are not given the benefit and opportunity of dharma practice.

Rinpoche:

If everybody would practice mind training instructions, it would really be good for everyone, including the community in general. For instance, it is beneficial for oneself, and if that person over there is doing it, then it is beneficial both for that person and everybody around. Mind training is very good for individuals and communities.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 21

Question:

I have a question about ‘sending and receiving’. When you are taking in the negativities of others, what do you do with them? Do you dissolve them into emptiness or into the ground?

Rinpoche:

In this teaching it is said that you just imagine that all the non-virtue and suffering dissolve into you, and nothing more is said about it. But there is another way to do it, a special way in which you visualize yourself as Chenrezig with a white letter HRI in your heart. That HRI is very hot and has the nature of flames. When you visualize taking on all the suffering and non-virtue of all beings, you visualize it as a black cloud that comes to you and goes in through your nose and down into your heart center, where the HRI burns it up. So, all the suffering and non-virtue of all beings is burned up. When you are sending forth all your virtue and well-being, you visualize that it goes out in a white mist that spreads to all living

Mind Training

beings, and they become very pure and endowed with great happiness.

From *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, p. 54

Question:

If we are frequently faced with a wrathful person who really wants to destroy us, what is the most effective method of coping with this problem? Is it better to do Tara practice, sending and receiving practice, or some kind of wrathful protector practice?

Rinpoche:

Whether you do Tara or protector practice, the result should be the same. The most beneficial practice is the sending and receiving practice and the practice of patience. Sometimes it is not possible to have this much patience, and if that is the case, then the best thing to do is to stay away from the person. If there is such a strong case of animosity, when that person sees you, the animosity will just increase and nothing good can come of it. At that point the best thing is just to stay away from that person or situation and the sooner it is forgotten, the better the situation will be.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 55

Mind Training

Question:

You said that if I die in a peaceful state of mind, the next birth will also be peaceful, but the bardo teachings say that becoming liberated is best.

Rinpoche:

If you really have a very strong foundation of meditation, then, of course, it is best to be liberated at the time of death. But without the ability to do this deepest kind of meditation, the best thing to do is to raise yourself by stages to the point where you will have the ability to train yourself to get there.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 92

Mind Training

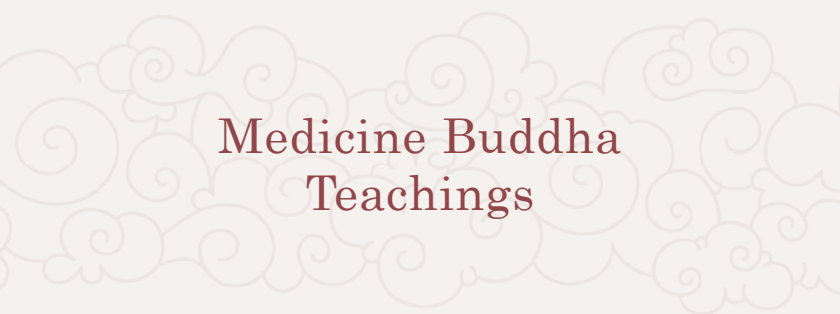
Question:

Rinpoche, in my meditation I've had some experience with looking at thoughts in stillness and occurrence and not seeing any substance. However, it seems that I experience something that is hard to explain. It is not really a feeling even, or a thought. It seems to be something almost intangible like an irritation, or something heavy that almost seems to abide. It does seem to just stay there. I continue to look and I do not know if I just need to look more, but it seems very much present all the time.

Rinpoche:

It is probably that you are just not yet used to looking in this way, and as you become more used to doing it, then this sense of irritation or discomfort or the heavy, abiding presence will be seen through.

*From The Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's
Pointing Out the Dharmakaya, p. 125*

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Medicine Buddha Teachings

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Does the Medicine Buddha ever have a consort and, if so, what is her name?

Rinpoche:

In this case, because he is visualized in the form of a supreme nirmanakaya, he does not. There could be cases in which he is visualized in a sambhogakaya form with a consort in order to indicate the unity of upaya and prajna. It is possible, but I cannot think of an instance, and so I cannot say his consort's name is this or that.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 41

Question:

When doing the mantra towards the end of the practice do we focus our attention primarily on ourself and the mantra in our hear or do we alternate attention between the Buddha in front and ourselves?

Rinpoche:

You apply it to both. You visualize the seed syllable and the mantra garland within the heart of both the self and front visualizations. In both cases, you identify it as the embodiment of the wisdom or mind of the deity. Then normally you would think that rays of light radiate from the seed syllable and mantra garland in the heart of the self-visualization. These rays of light strike and enter the hearts of the deities of the front visualization, arousing their compassion, causing rays of light to come from the front visualization and to dispel the sickness and suffering of all beings and so forth.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 42

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

I can't manage to visualize the front visualization and myself as the Medicine Buddha simultaneously. Should I alternate between them? Should I spend some time doing the front visualization and then come back to the self-visualization for an amount of time?

Rinpoche:

That's fine. You can go back and forth.

Student:

Quickly or slowly or what?

Rinpoche:

The best thing is to go back and forth as frequently as is comfortable.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 42

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Rinpoche, does this particular sadhana have any special significance for you? Is this of special significance to the Thrangu lineage?

Rinpoche:

This does not have any particular significance for me or my monastery, except that it is one of the three Medicine Buddha practices which is normally done in the Kagyu tradition as a whole. There is a long one, a medium one, and this one, which is the short one. We are practicing this one because it is the short one.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 42

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Rinpoche, is there a particular significance for the light radiating from the eastern buddha realms?

Rinpoche:

In the sutras of the Medicine Buddha, the Buddha described their realms. The principal realm of the principal Medicine Buddha and the other realms of the attendant buddhas are described as all being in the east.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 43

Question:

During the recitation of the mantra. When we visualize light going out to the universe, does that include everything? Rocks and trees and chairs and buildings?

Rinpoche:

Yes. Initially, before the generation of the deity, you purify your perception of the entire universe by visualizing that it all dissolves into emptiness. Theoretically, from that point onward all impurity has ceased. But when you get to the repetition of the main mantra you can renew that purification by once again bringing to mind impure appearances and purifying them with the rays of light which emerge from the heart of the deity.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, pp. 43–44

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Rinpoche, in other visualization practices, sometimes there's a sense of seeing one's own root teacher in the form of that deity. Is there anything like that in this practice?

Rinpoche:

Yes, it is appropriate to identify the front visualization with your root guru. People relate to the front visualization in slightly different ways. If they feel particularly devoted to the Medicine Buddha, then they will primarily think of the front visualization as the actual Medicine Buddha. But they can also think of the front visualization as in essence their root guru.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 44

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Is the Medicine Buddha mantra best used for animals that are dying, and what about animals that might have just recently died, perhaps quickly?

Rinpoche:

It will also benefit an animal that has recently died, it is going to be most effective, of course, if it is used just before the animal dies. But it will still benefit them afterwards.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 74

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Could you explain the visualization for the short or condensed practice of the Medicine Buddha?

Rinpoche:

There are two ways you can do this. One way is to make the supplication, paying homage to the Medicine Buddha and thinking that he is actually present in front of you and to visualize him by recollecting his appearance, his colour, what he is holding, what he is wearing, and so on. Another equally valid way is to think that you are paying homage to him wherever he is, in which case you do not specifically have to visualize him at all.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, pp. 74–75

Question:

In the descent of the body, speech, and mind blessings, do they enter respectively into the three centers specifically, or do they enter generally into the body?

Rinpoche:

In the case of sadhana practice and the recitation of mantra, when you have the blessings of the three gates of the deity dissolving into yourself, you can think that they dissolve generally into your whole body, throughout your whole body without specifying that they dissolve into your head and so on. In the case of an abhisheka [empowerment], then they would dissolve into the specific parts of your body.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, pp. 75–76

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Could you give us a little more detail about the sequence of the practice in terms of the small Medicine Buddha in a certain part of your body, or in others' bodies? And can that be done outside the formal practice?

Rinpoche:

You can do the application practice of visualizing a small Medicine Buddha in a specific part of your body or someone else's body, either during the formal practice of the sadhana, while reciting the mantra, or in post-meditation at any time you want.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 76

Question:

Rinpoche, I like to know would it be appropriate to practice the Medicine Buddha in a group including individuals who have not received the empowerment. And would it be appropriate to do the short Mahakala practice in the chant book alone at home?

Rinpoche:

As for your first question, anyone can practice the Medicine Buddha, whether they have the empowerment or not. Secondly, if you have faith in the short Mahakala practice, it is certainly okay to do it at home.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 94

Medicine Buddha Teachings

Question:

Rinpoche, when I go home and talk to my family and friends and say I have been at the Medicine Buddha retreat and they ask me who or what is the Medicine Buddha, I do not know what to tell them. I want to give an explanation that is going to bring them benefit, and although I know that hearing about the Medicine Buddha will help them, I do not want to initially turn them away. So, could you give sort of a short answer in layman's terms?

Rinpoche:

Probably the most convenient thing to say to your family is that you were taught and practiced a form of meditation designed to lead to physical health and freedom from sickness, and leave it at that.

From Medicine Buddha Teachings, p. 133



On Bardo

On Bardo

Question:

If somebody knows nothing about Buddhism, is it possible to recognize the bardo?

Rinpoche:

There is bound to be some difficulty if one hasn't created the imprint within oneself of recognizing the deities. But if the bardo text is recited for the deceased, it would benefit them.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 38

On Bardo

Question:

Is the appearance of a person's body and speech in the bardo similar to that which they had in their previous life? Does it maintain the same appearance or characteristics?

Rinpoche:

There are various explanations of this question, but the most common one is that, given that the bardo lasts for seven weeks, for the first three weeks the body appears to take the form of the body one had in the previous life; for the fourth week, it is a mixture in appearance of the body one had in the previous life and what one will have in the next life; and for the last three weeks it generally takes the form of the body one will have in one's next life.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 31

Question:

If someone dies under heavy pain-killing medication, how will this affect their experience of the bardo?

Rinpoche:

Well, the medication would probably prevent a recognition of the stages of dissolution in the bardo of dying, but at the culmination of those, the mind and body will have separated, even though the mind is still in some way inhabiting the body. So, from that point onward, the mind would no longer be affected by the medication.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 32

Question:

Rinpoche, at what point does the consciousness actually enter the body? Is it at conception or at birth?

Rinpoche:

As it is explained in the traditional texts, there are three necessary factors or causes for gestation to begin, and these are the combining of the sperm, the ovum, and the consciousness of the bardo being. If all three are not present, then a fetus will not be formed. So, if there is no consciousness present from the very beginning, simply the combination of a sperm and the ovum will not, according to the texts, produce a fetus. The consciousness is held to be born there from the very beginning.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, pp. 32–33

On Bardo

Question:

Is there a maximum period of time between lifetimes or between death and rebirth?

Rinpoche:

Generally speaking, it is said that, for most beings, no longer than forty-nine days will elapse after death before they are drawn into the next rebirth. However, this is not an absolute rule. It is said, for example, that the beings who are particularly attached to the circumstances of their previous life may, through that condition, wander around in the bardo in extreme misery for some time.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 33

On Bardo

Question:

You talked about the peaceful and wrathful deities. Most westerners don't know they exist. Is it possible to recognize fear, anger and wrathful things in the bardo?

Rinpoche:

This is the reason Trungpa Rinpoche had the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* translated, printed and distributed everywhere. It is very beneficial in introducing people to the bardo.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 31

Question:

Rinpoche has said that in the bardo of becoming, the condition which accompanies rebirth as a female, for example, is to be attracted to the father and feel aversion for the mother. But is this certain or definite? Because I, for one, do not feel these particular reactions.

Rinpoche:

Well, actually, this refers to what happens in the bardo and not to what happens in the ensuing life. At the moment at which you generate this particular attachment and aversion, you are not perceiving these two individuals as parents. They are not yet your parents. In fact, you do not see the individuals themselves. What you are reacting to is the perception of the sperm and the ovum. The actual emotional state that is generated is a desire for sexual arousal in connection with being drawn into the two substances of the sperm and the ovum. You perceive the sperm as male and the ovum as female, and you react one way or the other to them on that basis. The emotions of attachment and aversion are not actu-

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ally directed at the persons of your future parents but at the substances which make up your body.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 34

On Bardo

Question:

Does one need to be in close proximity of the body when we recite the bardo instructions for others?

Rinpoche:

Yes, it would be good because the consciousness of the deceased returns to the body near the family and friends. So, it is good to recite the bardo instructions in the place where the consciousness returns to. If the deceased was a friend, the consciousness will come to the friend and think, “Oh, that is my friend. He is chanting this prayer for me.” So, one can recite the text in one’s home because the consciousness will be attracted to the friend.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 36

Question:

If someone realizes this in meditation, do they have to know all the deities to recognize them?

Rinpoche:

A practitioner of meditation may not know the deities of the bardo but will have a stable mind, so in the bardo they will have peace and stability of mind, and be able to recognize appearances as being their own manifestations. They will have that understanding. If one can recognize the deities individually and is able to merge with them or pray to be reborn in a Buddha realm, then that would be very beneficial.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 36

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Question:

I don't exactly know what bardo yoga is?

Rinpoche:

Among the six yogas of Naropa there is a yoga of the bardo and of *phowa*, the 'transference of consciousness at death.' In the first practice one meditates on the appearances which arise during the bardo. In phowa practice one doesn't meditate on the deities but only on general appearances that arise in bardo. This practice is done in order to recognize the ultimate clarity and wisdom in oneself that sometimes manifests in the bardo, so the practice is designed to recognize that when it appears.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 39

On Bardo

Question:

I wasn't quite clear about what happened on the first day in the bardo, when I have the choice of following either a soft or strong light, depending upon what I do. Do I have a second chance on the second day to follow another light?

Rinpoche:

If one recognizes the light on the first day, the benefit will come and one will not make a mistake on the second day. One will keep recognizing the principal lights. Whereas one can make a mistake on the first day and not on the second day.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 39

On Bardo

Question:

Who taught these bardo teachings and where were they first revealed? From the historical Buddha or from the Tibetan tradition?

Rinpoche:

These are Tibetan teachings, but the source of these teachings is found in the tantras. In the tantras you can find the forty-two peaceful and fifty-eight wrathful deities. You can't find this complete teaching in the tantra though, but you can recognize deities in specific tantras and know about what is held in their hands and all the contents of this teaching. That was taught by the Buddha.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 41

Question:

Does the diminishing of ego equate with a peaceful death?

Rinpoche:

It is good to have a relaxed and peaceful state of mind in order to die easily. This is primarily due to karma, particular circumstances and features of illness, which can cause difficulties or the absence of difficulties at death. Many people have trouble dying and have much anger, desire and feel sad while others don't. A good death is peaceful and without disturbing conditions.

From An Overview of the Bardo Teachings, p. 41

Question:

Rinpoche, does this first bardo begin at conception, or does it begin at birth?

Rinpoche:

Generally speaking, this bardo is classified as beginning from the moment of birth, and going up to the time of death, especially in the context of talking about practices which can be done by someone who is living in a human body.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, pp. 10–11

Question:

Is the appearance of a person's body and speech in the bardo similar to that which they had in their previous life? Does it maintain the same appearance or characteristics?

Rinpoche:

There are various explanations of this question, but the most common one is that, given that the bardo lasts for seven weeks, for the first three weeks the body appears to take the form of the body one had in the previous life. For the fourth week, it is a mixture in appearance of the body one had in the previous life and what one will have in the next life. Then for the last three weeks it generally takes the form of the body one will have in one's next life.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 11

On Bardo

Question:

Is it possible in states of deep meditation for the soul to go out of the body?

Rinpoche:

There exist such practices of meditation.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, pp. 11–12

Question:

Rinpoche, can the period of time taken for the dissolution of the elements one into another vary?

Rinpoche:

At the longest, two or three days. Normally this dissolution process will occur during one day. In the case of a sudden death, it is a different situation. The whole thing happens very, very quickly. In fact, one can't even talk about a definite sequence.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 25

Question:

If we learn of a friend who has died, without our being in their presence, is it possible to recite these guide-lines after their death and, if so, will it help?

Rinpoche:

Yes, this would definitely be a big help for the person, because when someone has died and when they have regained consciousness in the bardo, their consciousness has the miraculous ability of travel, and the person's consciousness will tend to return to those persons to whom they were most attached. So, if you were someone's friend, then they are likely, at some point, to come close to you.

Now, if you recite things such as *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* (Tib: *bar do thos grol*), and so forth, then, because the person likes you, and if you have a good intention to actually benefit the person with your recitation, then they will be able to directly experience the quality of your intention. Therefore, they

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will feel good about it and they will listen, and what they hear may help them a great deal.

From *Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo*, p. 25

Question:

If someone dies in a sudden accident, does the body still go through this process, and are there still these signs?

Rinpoche:

The dissolution of the physical elements is hard to talk about in that case, but certainly the final stages—the cessation of the thoughts connected with the three root kleshas and so on—will definitely occur. However, it might occur very quickly.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 25

Question:

If the dying person is unconscious for several days or possibly several weeks before their death, how can you best guide them through this process, when they can't tell you what they are experiencing?

Rinpoche:

When someone is in a coma before death, it is believed that, although, of course, they cannot communicate with you, they still may be able to hear and understand some of what you say to them. Therefore, it is still worthwhile to attempt to communicate this dissolution process, and so on, to them. The way to do it would be to give them this guidance in a very gentle and very reassuring way.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, pp. 25–26

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Question:

Would Rinpoche please tell us why Yamantaka is called the slayer of the lord of death, and why this practice is helpful, and if it is helpful in connection with dying?

Rinpoche:

Yamantaka is a wrathful deity, and it is normal for wrathful deities to be given names that make them sound really rough or tough, and so *Yamantaka* in Sanskrit means the slayer of the lord of death. But it does not particularly mean that this particular yidam is more connected with preparing for death in the bardo experience than any other.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 28

Question:

It seems, from what you have said, that the consciousness actually remains within the former body until one enters the bardo of becoming. If this is true, then for how many days does it remain in the body after death? And if this is a definite period, is this period made up of meditation days or solar days? And furthermore, are the forty-nine days of which the bardo period is made up counted in total meditation days or solar days?

Rinpoche:

The period of the bardo of dharmata, which is the period in between death and the point in time when the consciousness actually exits the body, is made up of meditation days, and depends entirely, therefore, upon the stability of mind of each particular person. But the forty-nine day period is made up of forty-nine common or solar days.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 84

Question:

When we are with someone who is dying, what of these things are we able to share, and what are we expected not to share?

Rinpoche:

It depends on the individual person. If the dying person has no reservations about the validity of this, if they have no antipathy towards dharma and towards this aspect of dharma, and if it would not in any way upset them or make them angry, then you can tell them absolutely everything. If, on the other hand, the person, because of an adopted view of some kind, or for other reasons, is unreceptive to it and will react with antipathy, then you really cannot say very much.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 85

Question:

If someone dies under heavy pain-killing medication, how will this affect their experience of the bardo?

Rinpoche:

Well, the medication would probably prevent a recognition of the stages of dissolution in the bardo of dying, but at the culmination of those, the mind and body will have separated, even though the mind is still in some way inhabiting the body. So, from that point onward, the mind would no longer be affected by the medication.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 87

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Question:

If someone does not recognize the ground luminosity in the bardo of dharmata, you said that one becomes unconscious and proceeds directly to the experience of the bardo of becoming. Does that mean that under such circumstances one would miss out entirely on the experience of the peaceful and wrathful deities and so forth?

Rinpoche:

What probably happens is that, having fainted, within that state of faint, one would have fleeting experiences of these peaceful and wrathful deities and of the lights and rays and so forth.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 87

Question:

Rinpoche, how should we treat the body of the person who has died? In this country, at least in some states, it is customary for the body to be removed immediately after death has been pronounced, to be placed in a mortuary where it is embalmed, which involves, among other things, the removal of all the blood and so on, which would seem hardly helpful to the person in the bardo. How should we deal with this?

Rinpoche:

Well, there's a specific case which can occur, which is an exception to this, which is that of organ donors. Organ donors are people who, because they have great compassion, are willing to give up parts of their bodies, such as their eyes or their kidneys or whatever, immediately after death. Those people, probably because they have this intention while they are alive, are probably not particularly attached to their bodies once they have died. But, with the exception of people who have generated that intention during their life, most people will tend

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to be somewhat attached to their bodies, and the consciousness of the being in the bardo will still regard this dead body as their body and identify with it. So, it is best if the body can be treated as gently as possible.

From Journey of the Mind: Teachings on Bardo, p. 27

Question:

How does one know that there is a dharmata that is not just some sort of uncommon appearance?

Rinpoche:

Dharmata is something that has passed beyond, transcended, gone further than either common appearances or uncommon appearances. If one approaches this from the point of view of reasoning, it is through seeing that both common appearances and uncommon appearances are not established, do not exist in the way that they appear, i.e. one discovers that their nature or their entity is an emptiness. In terms of meditation, if one looks within meditation directly at one's own mind's way of abiding and sees that, then this is not something mistaken. In the context of meditation, one knows. The realization of dharmata is not a dawning of an appearance of any sort. It is something that has passed beyond that.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, pp. 48–49

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Question:

Could you please elaborate on the difference between *prajna* and *jnana*?

Rinpoche:

The origin of these terms: *jnana* and *prajna* are Sanskrit which were translated into *yeshe* and *sherab* respectively in Tibetan. Before the translations of the teachings of the Buddha, *jnana* was used in Sanskrit simply to mean ‘understanding.’ However, the Tibetan scholars translated the term *jnana* as ‘understanding very clearly’ and to do this they added the syllable *ye* meaning ‘primordial’ to the syllable *she* which means “wisdom” making *jnana* to mean ‘total, ultimate, wisdom.’ They used *sherab* for *prajna* which also means ‘understanding’ to denote wisdom developed through reasoning and logic. Incidentally the Sanskrit word *prajna* has the syllable *pra* which means ‘extra’ and the Tibetan word *she* has the syllable *rab* meaning ‘highest.’

From *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, p. 156

Question:

Once we stabilize the realization of emptiness, have we developed prajna or yeshe?

Rinpoche:

When we resolve the nature of emptiness, then we are developing prajna. When we bring our experience or realization out of meditation, that experience is jnana.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 157

Question:

Can you say more about developing jnana.

Rinpoche:

It might be suitable to explain an example. First if an individual is trying to grow a flower, having the seed isn't sufficient. We have to gather many conditions together such as water and warmth and a pot. When we have gathered all these together and planted the seed, then we can experience the joy of the development of the flower. In our practice, one experience cannot lead to realization. We need to accumulate merit, accumulate wisdom and understanding, and having done that, then with devotion and practicing the meditation, the effort to meditate even without realization, along with the accumulations, can lead to the development of jnana.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 157

Question:

Could you explain more about the mind being lucid and cognizant?

Rinpoche:

When we say that the nature of mind is both lucid and cognizant, we mean practically the same thing. In general, we find the mind to be empty, lucid, and conscious. When we examine it with a discerning intelligence (Skt. *prajna*), not in terms of meditative experience, we find that the mind is empty. We mean that when we look for the mind, we can't find it, so this not finding the mind is the emptiness of mind. Then when we say the mind has lucidity or luminosity (Tib. *salwa*) we mean the mind can know, it can feel, it can experience. It's not like a stone or dead object, so this lucid aspect of the mind is, in fact, very close to the next aspect, being conscious or cognizant, which means it can know things, it can feel them, it can understand.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 93

Question:

I have a feeling this word ‘emptiness’ causes a lot of problems for us westerners. When I hear emptiness, it means nothing. Does not empty of intrinsic nature mean beyond the duality of subject and object?

Rinpoche:

Yes. The definition of the words doesn’t matter a lot. The point is to overcome one’s strong fixation on conceptualization. When it is said that things are empty, it means that things do not exist in the way they seem to exist. It is one’s fixation on them that must be overturned. As I said before, emptiness does not mean a blank emptiness or space. It is not a dead emptiness. It is an emptiness that is the suitability for everything to appear. It is the possibility for anything whatsoever to happen.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 63*

Question:

It is also said that the dzogchen teachings are the greatest teachings and have the greatest practitioners with the greatest realizations. I am wondering are these essentially the same teachings?

Rinpoche:

In terms of true nature of phenomena or *gnas lugs*, the dzogchen teachings are said to be leading in terms of the mind. The mahamudra teachings are also said to be leading in terms of the mind. So, it is the same words. As for the meditation there isn't much difference.

There is, however, a slight difference in terms of the method with which they are associated and they are taught in different tantras. There are the dzogchen tantras and there are mahamudra tantras. But as far as the meditation itself, they are mostly the same. Some people say they have the great fortune to practice dzogchen teachings, some people have the great fortune to practice mahamudra and each says their teachings are very

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special and the highest teachings. It is like some people like rice and some people like wheat.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, pp. 95–96*

Question:

Are samsara and nirvana inseparable because thoughts are confusion and thoughts are empty?

Rinpoche:

Yes, basically that is right. We can talk about samsara and nirvana that way. Thoughts are mistaken yet we speak about confusion dawning as wisdom. We are not saying confusion is wisdom. But what we are saying is that confusion is not established primordially and therefore it can dawn as wisdom.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, p. 171*

Question:

When one does not recognize ordinary mind (Tib. *thamel gyi shepa*) and is in a mess, then how does one go about practicing the dharma and trying to be of use to sentient beings?

Rinpoche:

It's wonderful if one can give birth to the realization of mahamudra in the stream of one's being. If one is unable to do so, all of one's actions are not worthless and futile, so that there is nothing one can do to develop the dharma. You can revivify your faith and devotion to your root guru, generate love and compassion for sentient beings, practice shamatha which helps to pacify one's own mind when it is in a worried state, and do virtuous activity. When one does such things, then that causes one's understanding to increase and one will be of more help to others.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The Moonlight
of Mahamudra, pp. 208–209*

Question:

You explained that knowledge without method is a problem. That makes sense. You also said that method without knowledge is a problem too. I don't think that I understand that. Please explain that point.

Rinpoche:

Method without knowledge does not see ultimate reality directly. Method alone will not enable us to achieve the rank of a buddha.

From Essential Practice, p. 29

Question:

How can one get rid of the kleshas that are surrounding sugatagarbha without getting rid of sugatagarbha also?

Rinpoche:

Sugatagarbha is what we are, it is our very entity or nature. The various afflictions or kleshas are adventitious which means they are something extra or superfluous. Because they are superfluous, we can purify or remove them. However, removing them doesn't mean throwing out sugatagarbha at the same time. It is like the clouds and the moon. When the moon is blocked or obstructed by clouds, we cannot see it. However, once the clouds have been cleared away, the moon can be seen directly and clearly in all its beauty. However, eliminating the clouds doesn't mean eliminating the moon also. It's the same way with the kleshas and sugatagarbha.

From The Four Dharmas of Gampopa, pp. 47–48

Question:

I have heard it said that just the arising of anger doesn't create an imprint.

Rinpoche:

When you simply have a thought of a klesha, then it doesn't place a habit in the all-basis. The immediate mind does kind of grab it and stick it into the all-basis, but it is not a karmic habit. There are several types of habit. One type, karmic habit, is the imprint of an action; this will manifest as external experience. From among the various results of an action, this is a result of complete maturation. Klesha habit itself becomes kind of an obscuration, but it doesn't manifest as karma.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, p. 37*

Question:

Does that just make it easier for anger to arise again?

Rinpoche:

When the thought of anger arises and is recognized, then the type of habit that it places is very subtle and doesn't even particularly promote further arising of thoughts of anger and certainly not the arising of spite, which normally unrecognized anger would produce. When the phrase 'the thought is liberated' is used it basically means that particular thought is not leading to further thoughts, not that it doesn't place any habit whatsoever.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, pp. 37–38*

Question:

What is the cause of ignorance?

Rinpoche:

The lack of being familiar with wisdom, the lack of being used to and having developed awareness. Due to the absence of wisdom and of awareness, and due to having failed to learn how phenomena manifest and how they are, the mind has built up and developed the habitual pattern of ignorance since beginningless time and remains entangled in its darkness.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, p. 40*

Question:

Rinpoche, how should one apologize and be sorry for misdeeds? Also, how long should one keep feeling sorry for misdeeds?

Rinpoche:

There is something called ‘the four powers,’ one of which is called ‘the power of remorse.’ This is to actually acknowledge that what is not good really is not good, and not just paying lip-service. When we really understand that something that was nasty was nasty and not in an artificial, fabricated way then that is the limit to which one should carry the practice.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 70

Question:

It is said that anger is the worst of the disturbing emotions. I never really understood why anger is worse than passion or stupidity.

Rinpoche:

The other disturbing emotions, such as passion, pride, and jealousy do cause harm, but it is more gradual. For instance, if you have attachment and only think about pleasure and good things, it will eventually become a cause of suffering. The same thing with pride, thinking, “I am so great!” Right then and there nothing terrible is happening, but eventually it will become the cause of suffering.

However, anger and hatred are immediate. The worst part is the actual harm done to self and others. Anger and hatred that do not cause outright actions such as hitting and harming others, but cause the thought, “I would like to destroy him or her,” constitutes what we call a ‘black mind.’ This black mind is more immediately

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negative than other disturbing emotions and is therefore said to be the worst.

From *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, p. 72

Question:

How can we completely eliminate the disturbing emotions?

Rinpoche:

One speaks of suppressing, for example, anger, and the antidote for this is patience. One develops patience by considering the result of what ensues from anger. Based on this one is able to suppress anger, but it's not uprooted. To abandon, for example, anger one then meditates on selflessness, that is, one meditates on the emptiness of all phenomena. In terms of the Vajrayana tradition, one meditates on mahamudra or dzogchen, and anger or any other affliction will be abandoned when the true nature of mind is realized. Then naturally these afflictions will have been pacified.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 82

Question:

Can't anger be used for beneficial means?

Rinpoche:

Sometimes it seems that there are occasions that you could use your anger as a means to be of some benefit. Such as when you use a strong word and that seems to help you. But actually, anger is never beneficial. What has helped you here is your self-confidence. One should not mistake self-confidence and anger. Self-confidence is necessary, but anger does not lead to any benefit and there is no occasion for positive time for anger at all.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 83

Question:

How does forsaking attachment to friends and relatives relate to the relationship one has for one's children?

Rinpoche:

There is the feeling of attachment and there is the feeling of wanting to benefit others. We need to understand that wishing good for our children is not something undesirable, but is something good. It is all right to think, "I wish that my children will be healthy, they will have a good education, and that they will have a good life." That is simply wishing them well and is giving up nothing. On the other hand, thinking, "I must always be with my children and I cannot live without them" is attachment and this is not healthy. If one wishes well for one's children, then it's fine and there's nothing to give up.

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, p. 129

Question:

What if you think you have a high view but you are actually very stupid and just arrogant. How can you determine this?

Rinpoche:

It is possible that you could deceive yourself in the way you describe, but if you really look at your own situation, completely, then you will be able to detect that self-deception. This situation of considering yourself to possess qualities that you do not, from among the types of pride, is what is called 'full-blown pride.' Fully manifest, full-blown pride. Full-blown pride is not that difficult to detect. If you look to see in your way of thinking and in your motivation if this pride is present, then you can usually spot it very easily.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 46

Question:

You were talking about the arising of thoughts and having the direct experience of them. Personally, if anger comes up then the next feeling or thought that comes up is guilt. Do you just keep on looking at them as they keep on arising?

Rinpoche:

It doesn't matter. While the thought of anger is present you can look directly at the thought of anger, or if it is succeeded by a thought of guilt, you can look at the thought of guilt. In either case, when you look at a thought what you discover is that although there is something you can experience that you can call a thought, an experience of anger, a feeling of anger, when you look right at it, there is nothing there. In that way it is called the unity of clarity and emptiness. Clarity is the fact that it is an appearance or experience but it has no substantial existence. Thoughts are all the same. They are just like water bubbles. You see them but then there is nothing there.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 124

Question:

My question is on attachments and relationships, specifically with loved ones and how one can be a good father, husband, mother, brother, friend and yet maintain non-attachment

Rinpoche:

Well, attachment and love are fundamentally different. Attachment is selfish. Attachment makes us use people and love is a concern for the welfare of others. Whether it's your family, your spouse, or anyone else, it's a concern that things go well for others, that they be happy, that they have what they need, that they acquire an education, and so on. So, there is no conflict with being a loving husband and father. Attachment is something entirely different.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 59

Question:

Can we get a clear definition of what is self?

Rinpoche:

We always think about a self. We always think, “I want some food,” “I want something to drink,” “I want to do this,” “I want to be happy,” and so on. This ‘I’ that we are always thinking of and referring to is what is being designated a ‘self.’ Although we always refer to it, if we examine carefully, we can never find such an ‘I.’ It does not exist as a solid entity.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, pp. 23–24

Question:

That's on the ultimate level. But on the relative level, aren't there 'I' and 'others'?

Rinpoche:

Yes. All the teachings on the 'non-self' concern the ultimate level, not the conventional level. They are taught for the purpose of allowing disciples to recognize the nature of reality in order that they can meditate on it and attain realization.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, pp. 23–24

Question:

What if I killed someone and then in court said I did not do it, because I did not believe in a self?

Rinpoche:

In ultimate terms, there was no one who was killed, no one who did the killing, no one who was arrested and taken to court, and no one who was put in prison. On the conventional level, someone was killed, someone killed him, someone was taken to court and put in jail.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, pp. 24–25

Question:

If there is no self, who is this one who is doing all these things?

Rinpoche:

The idea of an agent, that someone is doing all this, is a result of some basic idea of a self. If we do not have the basic idea of a self, then we cannot have an idea of anyone doing anything. The basic idea of a self comes from attributing reality to something or other. We can see its absurdity by analysis.

From The Open Door to Emptiness, p. 25

Question:

If lethargy is the obstacle, how do we recognize it?

Rinpoche:

We must catch lethargy at the beginning. For instance, if we are falling asleep. Just as our minds begin to sink, we must apply the methods for abandoning laxity. Similarly, just as our minds begin to scatter, we must apply the methods for abandoning excitement. Thus, we must destroy them at the outset.

From Essential Practice, p. 51

Question:

How do we distinguish between lethargy and equanimity?

Rinpoche:

Lethargy refers to thoroughly unclear states of mind. Probably we are falling asleep. We do not want to meditate. Even just sitting there is difficult, and we feel depressed. As for equanimity, when meditative stabilization shines forth clearly and brightly, then relax and meditate continuously.

From Essential Practice, p. 51

Question:

What does it mean to flee from the mental afflictions?

Rinpoche:

When we know that an affliction will arise in a particular situation, then we use methods to prevent their arising. For instance, we may know that we will become angry if we meet a certain person. Instead, for the time being, we go out of our way not to meet him or her. Or, we may know that, in dependence upon some particular thing, desire will arise. Instead, for the time being, we avoid it. Sometimes it is necessary to do such things.

From Essential Practice, p. 149–150

Question:

You described desire as an affliction. It seems to me that some desire is beneficial. What is the problem with desire?

Rinpoche:

When desire is minimal, it tends to bind us in cyclic existence but is not a great fault. However, it is the nature of desire to increase without limit. It grows boundlessly. It overflows every container. At that point, desire has become terribly dangerous. For that reason, however much we can subdue desire, so much the better.

From Essential Practice, p. 184

Question:

Does every kind of desire or attachment lead to pain?

Rinpoche:

Not all attachment leads directly to pain. However, the very word expresses the sense of sticking to something. It does not permit freedom. It binds. When attached and fastened to something, we cannot move far away. It is as if the desired object pulls us back, and we cannot free ourselves from it. For this kind of desire, we use a term meaning attachment. So long as we are attached, we stick there and cannot achieve liberation.

From Essential Practice, p. 184

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Meditation

Question:

How do you practice meditation when you are suffering from all the negative emotions? How is it best to practice? With visualization of the dhyani buddhas?

Rinpoche:

The teachings on the five buddha families, five wisdoms and the purification of the five negative emotions are general instructions. The wisdoms and buddhas are the ultimate state. The method to reach the ultimate state by transforming the five negative emotions is achieved by following the gradual practices, beginning with ngondro, or the four preliminary practices. Upon completion of the preliminaries, one continues practicing meditation, which enables you to transform the negative emotions into wisdom and to achieve realization of the five dhyani buddhas.

*From The Five Buddha Families and the
Eight Consciousness, p. 40*

Question:

I am wondering about the effort that one makes in staying with the first moment and not rushing on to the second. In my own experience I find that the most difficult aspect of the meditation. I try too hard to create very quickly the second thought. What's happening? I bring myself off of that moment, it seems, through genuine effort, but how do you realize the nature of emptiness in the effort itself?

Rinpoche:

First, all the effort that you describe is necessary because what you are talking about is the placement of mindfulness and alertness, but if you find that the effort itself somehow becomes a cause of distraction or disturbance, then you should look right at the nature of that distraction that occurs, or look at the nature of the effort.

*From The Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's
Pointing Out the Dharmakaya, p. 125*

Question:

In the meditation practice if we have thoughts of love and of benefiting others only in our own mind, are only uncommon appearances, how can they possibly benefit anyone else?

Rinpoche:

Such meditation, such cultivation of love and compassion, does not directly benefit other people. Rather, through meditating in that way, one's own love and compassion increases. The potency or capacity of one's own love and compassion becomes stronger. Through becoming stronger it enters into all of one's behaviour, whether by way of body, speech or mind or one's behaviour becomes pervaded by love and compassion. When that happens, then one can actually help others. For that reason, we cultivate love and compassion in meditation.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 37

Meditation

Question:

I didn't really understand what you were saying about direct perception of another person's mind, whether one is in a state of meditation or whether one is not in a state of meditation. Would you give an example?

Rinpoche:

The difference between the two is that the direct apprehension of another person's mind within meditative equipoise is as an aspect of one's own samadhi, one's own meditative stabilization. Whereas the apprehension of another person's mind not from within meditative equipoise, its way of appearing, is just a likeness or a reflection of one's own mind.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 41

Question:

How do we know that the realization is not deluded?

Rinpoche:

When one meditates, various sorts of experiences come about: this, that and the other. Sometimes they are quite pleasurable. Different sorts of things appear and are seen. However, those sorts of things are just occasional or temporary. What we are talking about here is something called ‘the mind’s way of abiding,’ something that goes through all of that. One sees that the mind is luminous and empty and this is not something that is made by one’s own mind. Rather in seeing it, one has a definite knowledge of that. Such is called ‘introduction to the nature of mind.’ It’s not just some sort of experience that comes along. It is seeing that which actually abides as the nature of mind.

From Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, p. 49

Question:

Is there a particular meditation on a particular deity that is particularly beneficial in understanding the Middle-way?

Rinpoche:

There are lots of different meditations, but in fact they all have the same purpose. There are meditations on some deities in order to increase our capacity to understand emptiness, compassion, or bodhichitta. But basically, because they all stem from these same basic points, when we begin to meditate, it doesn't really matter on which deity we meditate because they all lead to the same thing.

From *The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions*, p. 23

Meditation

Question:

When sitting in meditation my body sometimes gets very hot or I get a funny kind of tingling in the end of my fingers. Why does this happen?

Rinpoche:

When we meditate, we need to be extremely relaxed both physically and mentally. Sometimes when we are not quite relaxed enough, we will get different kinds of feelings, and this feeling of heat could be one of them. If you can relax more in your meditation, there will be no particular strange feeling in your meditation.

From The Middle-Way Meditation Instructions, p. 73

Question:

In the sutra tradition of the Middle-way, are there analytical meditations which specifically reveal the luminous nature of mind? And if that is so, what are those analytical meditations?

Rinpoche:

Not directly, because in analytical meditation you are always concerned with the maintenance and cultivation of some kind of conviction. Therefore, it is very indirect. It takes a very long time. If you persisted with the maintenance and refinement of your conviction about the nature of mind long enough, then eventually there could be a discovery of the mind's innate lucidity, but it is not directly pointed out in the sutra system.

*From The Essences of the Creation and
Completion, pp. 124–125*

Question:

Do you mean we should practice tonglen as a means to reach tranquility, or should we try to reach some tranquility in our meditation first and then practice tonglen?

Rinpoche:

Tonglen is not really a method of shamatha or tranquility meditation. Tranquility meditation is a practice done just to allow your mind to come to rest. Tonglen, taking and sending, is concerned with the cultivation of benevolence. The order of practice is up to you. If you first practice shamatha and develop a mind that is restful and stable it will be good to go on and practice tonglen and cultivate benevolence. On the other hand, if you first cultivate benevolence through the practice of tonglen that will make it easier for you to cultivate a mind that is calm and stable.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 13

Question:

Is discipline first in bodily and verbal action a prerequisite to practicing meditation?

Rinpoche:

It definitely helps, but it is not impossible to practice meditation without it. The relationship between moral discipline and meditation goes both ways; they each serve as causes for the other. For example, if someone has good moral discipline that will lead to some degree of tranquillity, which will affect or help the practice of meditation. But even if someone begins the practice of meditation at a time in their life when they don't have much moral discipline, as soon as their mind calms down, through doing the practice, they will start to have moral discipline. It can work in either sequence.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 14

Question:

I find that the more I work on trying to keep my mind quiet, the more noisy it becomes at night when I am asleep. Is there anything that Rinpoche would suggest?

Rinpoche:

Do you mean literally that when you are asleep your dreams are more agitated?

Student: Yes.

Rinpoche:

This is probably not caused by your meditating but by your thinking a lot at other times of the day, likely particularly just before you go to sleep, so if you're finding that your dreams are agitated, it may help to meditate just before you go to sleep and in particular to go sleep with your mind very relaxed and calm.

From An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation, p. 47

Question:

Rinpoche, how do we deal with the physiology of sluggishness or the physiology of pain or the physiology of exhilaration that occurs in meditation? How do we approach or utilize our mind so that the mind does not reflect that physiology?

Rinpoche:

The physical feeling and mental feeling do appear to be different. In fact, the mind is powerful and if one feels the joy and enthusiasm for meditation, and has no doubt about wanting to practice meditation, then such heaviness or restlessness of the body will not pose an obstacle. If one doesn't have such a strong wish to meditate, one feels lazy and then the body will feel heavy or restless, not being able to just sit and meditate. Temporarily, body and mind appear to be very separate in that way, but in fact, the mind is dominant and is able to overcome the situation of the body.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, pp. 27–28*

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Practice

Practice

Question:

Does the Vajrasattva practice eliminate negative emotions?

Rinpoche:

No, it cannot totally eliminate negative emotions but this practice can lessen the intensity of the negative emotions.

From The Seven Points of Mind Training, p. 114

Question:

What are some examples of beginner's practices, middle practices and advance practices?

Rinpoche:

One begins with shamatha practice and meditation on the four reminders and the cultivation of the preliminary practices in order to accumulate merit. Then one undertakes the meditation of the generation and completion stages, then finally one engages in the conduct of a sidha in order to attain full awakening.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, pp. 46–47

Question:

Rinpoche, in terms of generation practice itself, it seems to be dealing with body, speech and mind. I'm curious as to what part of the generation stage practice actually purifies relationships with our world and the inhabitants in it, family and friends and those around us?

Rinpoche:

Because your connection to others, whether it is a positive or a negative one, is a part of your interaction with the world, in general your interactions are all purified by the homage, offering and praise sections of the sadhana, whatever it is.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, pp. 78–79

Practice

Question:

Could one person settle on one deity and try to do this completely, or do you try to practice with as many deities as possible?

Rinpoche:

It doesn't matter. It is a question of individual taste and interest. Some people naturally find themselves utterly devoted to the practice of one deity. Then it is perfectly possible under those circumstances to pursue that one practice until through it you attain the final result. Other people find that they are naturally attracted to combining the practices of different deities. They might practice two or three or even more than that. There is nothing wrong with that either. By combining the practice of these different deities, they will achieve the same result as the other person does with one.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, pp. 79

Practice

Question:

I had read that one should not exhaust oneself with things that are not going to be of benefit but to me practice is of great benefit so that was the point of my question.

Rinpoche:

The most important thing to understand about exertion in practice is that the long term is more important than the short term. It is not so important to make a heroic effort on a given day when you are exhausted, to force yourself to practice, as it is to practice steadily over a long time.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 111

Practice

Question:

Why do people who have already attained enlightenment continue to do yidam practice?

Rinpoche:

There are many different types of teachers and they are all not necessarily at the same level, so it would be difficult to give one answer for why they would all continue to do these practices. In the case of some of them, they do them because they still have some distance to go on the path and so they continue to practice for their own benefit, to expand their experience and realization. In the case of others who have already attained supreme siddhi, who in fact may be fully awakened buddhas, then if they continue to do formal practice, they do it as an example to others, to show the importance of formal practice.

From The Essences of the Creation and Completion, p. 125

Question:

How have you benefited people by giving vows?

Rinpoche:

After authorizing me to be a khenpo, the sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa instructed me to give vows in the future. This is why I have given vows. I have given the vows two or three times in Tibet and a few times in India and Nepal. Some have not been able to keep the vows, as always happens, but still, there's great benefit in giving the vows. I have also done the three bases for purifying the precepts—the sojong ceremony, rains retreat, and release of strictures and I hope this has been of good service to the dharma of the vinaya.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 82*

Practice

Question:

How have you benefited others by teaching the academic subjects?

Rinpoche:

I have not taught the academic subjects extensively, but I have taught grammar, spelling, and poetry a bit. Some of my students have become able to write and teach.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 82*

Practice

Question:

How have you encouraged the people you have met to practice virtue?

Rinpoche:

I don't have any compassion or blessing, but I wear the monastic robes, and in traveling to many places, I've been able to create good dispositions in many people. Because I was wearing unusual clothing, some people who had no faith in the dharma came and asked me questions, engaged me in conversation, and so on, so that I was able to create good dispositions in their mind. When people who liked the dharma saw a monk was coming along with them, they would talk about subjects related to the dharma. This increased their diligence and conviction, so there was much positive benefit.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 82*

Practice

Question:

How have you done retreat practice?

Rinpoche:

Other than a bit of retreat here and there, I have not had many opportunities. From the age of thirteen to sixteen I was in retreat, during which I did have the opportunity to do the preliminary and main practices. That was when I did an approach retreat. Then from the age of sixteen on, I was in the college.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 97*

Practice

Question:

How did you develop realization?

Rinpoche:

I don't have anything to say about that. If you look at me from the outside, I appear to be a lama, but apart from that, on the inside, the three or five poisons of the afflictions still blaze. Other than that, I haven't had any so-called experience or realization.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 97*

Practice

Question:

How did you serve your guru?

Rinpoche:

As for serving the lamas, I have not been able to do much particular physical service. My root guru was the sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa. The precious teachings have been his kind gift to me, and through that I was able to establish a college and retreat center, though they are not all that big. Establishing those has been my service to him. I think of it as my service.

*From Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's Short
Autobiographical Works, p. 97*

Question:

Rinpoche said that yidam practice in the vajrayana is superior to attention to the breath because your mind doesn't wander. My mind wanders in visualizations, so how does one work with wandering mind in yidam practice?

Rinpoche:

Meditating upon the breath or upon some visualized object is a way of developing one-pointedness of mind. It is a very good way to proceed and does bring about one-pointedness of mind. However, it is somewhat boring. When you meditate upon the deity, there are all sorts of things to look at. There is the face, the hands, the various ornaments, the clothing, and what is held and it is terribly interesting. So, there is always a sense of something fresh and new going on. From that point of view, it increases the quality of stability greatly.

*From Looking Directly at Mind: The
Moonlight of Mahamudra, pp. 45–46*

Practice

Question:

How do we know when to exert ourselves and when to apply an antidote?

Rinpoche:

We investigate our meditative stabilization. Is there a fault? If there is a fault, then we must make effort in order to abandon it. If there is no fault, then there is no need to make that effort. Rather, we must relax in equanimity.

From Essential Practice, p. 51

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May all your wishes come true, and may you attain buddhahood soon to help all beings.

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