

THE THREE VEHICLES OF
BUDDHIST PRACTICE

*The Three Vehicles of
Buddhist Practice*

by

The Venerable
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Translated by
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Namo Buddha Publications

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Published by
Namo Buddha Publications
P. O. Box 1083
Crestone, CO 81131
Phone: (719) 256-5367
E-mail: cjohnson@ix.netcom.com

These teachings were given at Samye Ling, Scotland in 1984.

Second Edition.
By Rinpoche, Thrangu, 1933-
ISBN: 1-931571-02-3

Summary: Study relates to doctrines of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana - the three main vehicles (yanas) according to Tibetan Buddhism.

Subjects: Buddhism--China--Tibet--Doctrines.
LC Classification: BQ7634.T47
Dewey Classification: 294.3/4 20

Note

The technical words are italicized the first time they are used to alert the reader that their definition can be found in the Glossary.

Tibetan words (which contain numerous silent letters) are given as they are roughly pronounced, not spelled. For their exact spelling please see the Glossary of Tibetan Terms.

We use the convention of B.C.E. (Before Current Era) for B.C.. and C.E. (Current Era) for A.D.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the persons who helped make this book possible. First of all, we would like to thank Ken Holmes for translating this work. We would also like to thank Gaby Hollmann for transcribing the tapes and Jean Johnson and Dr. Alta Brown for editing the manuscript.

We would also like to thank Tom Leeser for the cover design. The cover photo is of Thrangu Rinpoche's Vajra Vidya monastery in Sarnath, India. The three calligraphies by Thrangu Rinpoche were made specifically for this book.

Foreword

In the 1970s when a non-scholar was curious about Buddhism, there were only about a dozen books on Buddhism readily available. Then over the next twenty years the West began to invite masters from the East who had actually practiced and studied Buddhist meditation and this changed the number and quality of books on this subject.

What emerged from inviting actual practitioners in Buddhism to the West was the understanding that Buddhism was a vast and diverse subject. While Christianity was based on teachings given in the last few years of the life of Christ, the Buddhist teachings consisted of almost fifty years of teachings of the Buddha filling over forty volumes. What was also surprising was that while the Buddha was an Indian and taught all over Northern India with his teachings becoming vastly important in Indian culture, by the 14th century of our era Buddhism had virtually disappeared from India. Not only had Buddhism left India to the surrounding countries, but all the extensive Buddhist teachings which had been written down since the first century C.E. were almost completely destroyed in India. The Buddhist teachings both in the original Sanskrit and translated into other languages existed almost exclusively outside India. It was these historical conditions that lead to thinking about Buddhism as having three vehicles which, of course, is the topic of this book.

The first migration of Buddhist teachings occurred about 200 years after the Buddha had passed away. The brother of the famous Buddhist emperor Ashoka took the teachings to the island of Shri Lanka and these teachings were written down in the first century of our era in Pali. These teachings became the basis of what we now call the Theravada school and these

teachings spread primarily to the “southern” lands of Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Because these teachings were taken to Sri Lanka so early, they are considered to be the earliest teachings of the Buddha.

In the third century C.E. a new movement occurred in which many Buddhist shifted their attention from the Vinaya, which concerned the strict discipline of monks and nuns and the Four Noble Truths towards the teachings of the Buddha on compassion and helping others. This shift was not the creation of a new Buddhism as some have suggested because the Vinaya was still strictly observed and Buddhist teachers even to this day often begin with the Four Noble Truths as the foundation of their teachings. Rather it was more like the establishing of monasteries and nunneries and the setting up of the rules governing these had been established in the first centuries of Buddhism and now it was time to reach out to others which had always been an important aspect of the Buddha’s teachings. This movement lead to the Mahayana or the second vehicle of Buddhist teachings.

A few centuries of elaborating the Mahayana teachings lead to an extraordinary movement called the Madhyamaka school. This school was founded by Nagarjuna and was located in Northern India and used the scholarly language of the time—Sanskrit. To greatly simplify, up to this time the Buddhist scholars had been building up the Abhidharma teachings which classified all the concepts and ideas of Buddhism. For example, mind was classified into over 100 factors and each of these were classified into wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral states of mind. Furthermore, the followers of the Abhidharma relied heavily on the teachings of the Buddha which taught that the outside world, or phenomena as it is called in this text, was solid and real, while ideas and thoughts in the mind were impermanent and not real. The Madhyamaka school using teachings of the Buddha not emphasized by the Theravada school were able to show that not only was the mind not solid and “empty,” but also all of

external phenomena was empty as well. Thrangu Rinpoche has said that even when he was learning Buddhism from a great Buddhist master, he had doubts about the emptiness of phenomena. However, with careful study and meditation on this topic, he was convinced and presents some of the most lucid teachings on this subject.

In summary, the Mahayana school emphasized compassion and helping others and the importance of understanding emptiness to achieve enlightenment. To do any work on the Mahayana path one must begin with the accumulation of merit and wisdom and adhere to strict conduct both of which are part of the Theravada level of Buddhism.

The development of the Mahayana level of teachings led to the establishment of great monastic universities such as Nalanda University which contained over 10,000 students and teachers. Here philosophical views of followers of various Hindu traditions, followers of the Theravada, and followers of the Mahayana studied and debated with each other. Outside these scholarly institutions there was another type of Buddhist practitioner whom we would call a “yogi” today. These practitioners did not put on monastic robes and debate each other on the fine points of Buddhist logic, but lived as villagers, often married with children, and practiced a profound type of Buddhism called tantrism. For example, there was Naropa, a famous scholar who spent his days defeating non-believers in debates at Nalanda University. Then one day after meeting a dakini he left the university and went in search of Tilopa who was a yogi and then spent the rest of his years in the forests of India and practicing tantric Buddhism until he eventually reached enlightenment.

The Theravada teachings of the Vinaya along with the Mahayana teachings of compassion and emptiness were carried to the “northern” countries of Pakistan, China, Japan, and Korea. All these teachings and also the Buddhist tantric practices were carried to Tibet in a series of waves that lasted from the 8th century until the 12th century. After the 12th

century, there was a Moslem invasion of India in which all the Buddhist colleges and monasteries were destroyed, and almost all of the Buddhist writings were obliterated in India.

When early Western scholars first studied Buddhism, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that the Theravada teachings, because they left India first were the “true Buddhist teachings,” and that the Mahayana teachings, which came later were “invented” in Northern India. They furthermore concluded that the Vajrayana teachings because they resembled Indian tantrism were a “degenerated” form of Buddhism. Many arguments can be advanced to refute these early views. However, nowadays it seems ridiculous to say that a Zen Buddhist practitioner was practicing an “invented” Buddhism or that the Dalai Lama who practices the Vajrayana is practicing a “degenerated” form of Buddhism.

In 1969 Thrangu Rinpoche was invited to the West and began a series of yearly visits to Samye Ling in Scotland where he shared his vast knowledge with Western students. He first taught the *Uttaratantra* and the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Interspersed with commentaries on these ancient works, he also gave teachings on dharma topics to the Western students. This book, the *Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice* or *The Three Yanas*, was one of these teachings.

The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice takes the reader through the levels of practice—all of which are essential to master if one is to achieve enlightenment. The Theravada level of teachings explain in detail the Four Noble Truths and the foundational methods of meditation practices. Thrangu Rinpoche has told his students that they should not in any way consider the Theravada teachings a lower or inferior path. Rather it is more like the lower rungs in a ladder, you cannot reach the top without using them. Rinpoche then describes the path of the bodhisattva—that Buddhist practitioner who has vowed to help all beings reach enlightenment before he or she reaches enlightenment. Here Thrangu Rinpoche gives a very

The Foreword

clear and lucid account of that hard-to-define topic of “emptiness” and “non-self.”

Finally, Thrangu Rinpoche gives a clear account of what is perhaps the most misunderstood level of Buddhist practice—the Vajrayana. Being an accomplished Vajrayana practitioner, he is able to describe this level in experiential terms.

Throughout this book Thrangu Rinpoche points out that all three of the vehicles of practice were practiced and preserved in Tibet. These levels are just three different ways that the Buddha explained the path to enlightenment. The level a reader actually takes depends entirely on his or her own needs, inclinations, and capabilities.

Clark Johnson, Ph. D.



The Buddha in the “touching the earth” position. When the Buddha reached enlightenment, after meditating under the bodhi tree for six weeks, and was asked how he knew he was enlightened, he touched the earth and said, “As the earth is my witness.”

**The First Vehicle
of
Buddhist Practice**

The Theravada Path

ཐལ་པ་

ཚུང་ཏུ།



Thegpa chungngu (Hinayana)
by

Thrangu Rinpoche

Chapter 1

The Theravada Path

Some say Tibetan Buddhism is the practice of *Maha-yana*¹ Buddhism. Others say that Tibetan Buddhism is actually the practice of *Vajrayana* Buddhism. Really one cannot say that Tibetan Buddhism is just Mahayana or just Vajrayana Buddhism. The teachings of *dharma* in Tibet are called the “three immutables” or the “three-fold vajra” meaning the dharma of Tibet contains the teachings of the *Theravada*, of the Mahayana as well as of the Vajrayana. More specifically, Tibetan Buddhism has the outer practice of the Theravada, the inner motivation or *bodhichitta* of the Mahayana, and the view and practice of the Vajrayana known as the secret or essential view. This is why it is necessary to study these three main levels or vehicles (Skt. *yanas*) of Buddhist practice.

One needs to understand that when the Buddha taught, he was not teaching as a great scholar who wanted to demonstrate a particular philosophical point of view or to teach for its own sake. His desire was to present the very essence of the deep and vast teachings of realization. For this reason he gave teachings which matched the abilities of his disciples. All the teachings he gave, some long and some short, were a direct and appropriate response to the development of the disciples who came to listen to him. Of course, people have very different capacities and different levels of understanding. They also have very different wishes and desires to learn and understand the dharma. If the Buddha had taught only the very essence of his

own understanding of those vast and far-reaching teachings, then apart from a small number of disciples who had great intelligence and diligence, few people would have ever entered the path. The Buddha taught whatever allowed a person to develop spiritually and progress gradually towards liberation. When we analyze all the Buddha's teachings, we see that they fall into three main approaches or vehicles.

The Buddha's teachings helped each student in a way appropriate for the level he or she was at. Because of that, one finds that on the *conventional level*² each student received some benefit from what Buddha taught. On the *ultimate level*, one finds all of the Buddha's teachings have the same goal. When one analyzes the Buddha's teachings on the relative level, one finds that there are three levels. But, when one examines them from the ultimate level, one sees all levels are directed towards the same goal.

The Theravada Path

Of the three yanas the first is the Theravada path which is often called the "Hinayana." "Hinayana" literally means "lesser vehicle" but this term should in no way be a reproach or be construed to in any way diminish the importance of these teachings. In fact, the teachings of the Hinayana are very important because they suit the capacities and development of a great number of students. If it weren't for these teachings, which are particularly appropriate for those with limited wisdom or diligence, many persons would never reach the Mahayana path. Without the Theravada teachings there would be no way for practitioners to enter the dharma because they would not have had a way to enter the Buddhist path. This path is similar to a staircase: the lower step is the first step. This doesn't mean it is not important or should be ignored because without these essential steps one can never gain access to the upper stories. It should be very clear that this term "lesser"

vehicle is in no way a pejorative term. It provides the necessary foundation on which to build.

The fundamental teachings of the Theravada are the main subject matter of the first turning of the *wheel of dharma*. These teachings were given mainly in India in the town of Sarnath which is near the Indian city of Varanasi which is also called Benares. The main subject matter of these teachings were the *Four Noble Truths*.

The Four Noble Truths

If the Buddha had taught his disciples principally by demonstrating his miraculous abilities and powers, this would not have been the best way to demonstrate the path to liberation. The best way to help them attain wisdom and liberation was to point out the very truth of things; to point out the way things are. So he taught the Four Noble Truths and the two truths (conventional and ultimate truth). By seeing the way things really are, the students learned how to eliminate their wrong view and perceive their delusion. By eliminating wrong views and the causes of the delusion automatically the causes of one's suffering and hardships will be destroyed. This allows one to progressively reach the state of liberation and great wisdom. That is why the Four Noble Truths and the two truths are the essence of the first teachings of the Buddha.

The First Noble Truth

The first noble truth is the full understanding of suffering. Of course, in an obvious way, people are aware of suffering and know when they have unpleasant sensations such as hunger, cold, or sickness. But the first noble truth includes awareness of all the ramifications of suffering. It encompasses the very causal nature of suffering. This includes knowledge of the subtle and the obvious aspects of suffering. The obvious aspect of suffering is immediate pain or difficulty in the moment.

Subtle suffering is more difficult to recognize because it begins with happiness. But by its very nature this happiness must change because it can't go on forever. Because it must change into suffering, this subtle suffering is the impermanence of pleasure. For example, when I went to Bhutan with His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, I was invited to the palace of the king of Bhutan. The palace of the king was magnificent, the king's chambers were beautiful, there were many servants who showed complete respect and obedience. But we found that even though there was so much external beauty, the king himself was suffering a great deal mentally. The king said that he was quite relieved that His Holiness had come and emphasized how much the visit meant to him because of the various difficulties with which he had been troubled. This is the subtle aspect of suffering. One thinks that a particular situation will give one the most happiness one can ever imagine, but actually, within the situation, there is a tremendous amount of anguish. If one thinks of those who are really fortunate—gods or human beings with a very rich and healthy life—it seems as though they have nothing but happiness. It is hard to understand that the very root, the very fiber of what is taking place is suffering because the situation is subject to change.

What is happiness? By its very nature it can often mean that there will be suffering later on. There is no worldly happiness that lasts for a very long time. Worldly happiness includes an element of change, of built-in suffering. For that reason the first noble truth of the awareness of suffering refers not just to immediate suffering, but also to the subtle elements of suffering. The Buddha taught the truth of suffering because everything that takes place on a worldly level is a form of suffering.

If we are suffering but are not aware of it, we will never have the motivation to eliminate this suffering and will continue to suffer. When we are aware of suffering, we can overcome it. With the more subtle forms of suffering, if we are

happy and become aware that the happiness automatically includes the seed of suffering, then we will be much less inclined to become attached to this happiness. We will then think, “Oh, this seems to be happiness, but it has built-in suffering.” Then we will want to dissociate from it. The first truth is that we should be aware of the nature of suffering. Once we have a very clear picture of the nature of suffering, we can really begin to avoid such suffering. Of course, everyone wants to avoid suffering and to emerge from suffering, but to accomplish this we need to be absolutely clear about its nature.

When we become aware that the nature of day-to-day existence is suffering, we don't have to be miserable with the thought that suffering is always present. Suffering doesn't go on forever because the Buddha entered our world, gave teachings, and explained clearly what suffering is. He also taught the means by which suffering can end and described a state of liberation which is beyond suffering. We do not have to endure suffering and can, in fact, be happy. Even though we cannot immediately eliminate suffering by practicing the Buddha's teachings, we can gradually eliminate suffering in this way, and move towards eventual liberation. This fact in itself can help us gain peace of mind even before we have actually emerged completely from suffering. Applying the Buddha's teachings, we can be happy in the relative phase of our progress and then at the end we will gain wisdom and liberation and be happy in the ultimate sense, as well.

The first noble truth makes it clear that there is suffering. Once we know what suffering is, we must eliminate that suffering. It is not a question of eliminating the suffering itself, but of eliminating the causes of suffering. Once we remove the causes of suffering, then automatically the effect, which is suffering, is no longer present. This is why to eliminate this suffering, we must become aware of the second noble truth, the truth of *interdependent origination* (Tib. *tendrel*).

The Second Noble Truth

The truth of interdependent origination is an English translation of the name the Buddha gave to this noble truth. It means “that which is the cause or origin of absolutely everything.” The truth of universal origination indicates that the root cause of suffering is *karma* and the *disturbing emotions* (Skt. *kleshas*). Karma is a Sanskrit word which means “activity” and klesha in Sanskrit means “mental defilement” or “mental poison.” If we do not understand the Buddha’s teachings, we would most likely attribute all happiness and suffering to some external cause. We might think that happiness and suffering come from the environment, or from the gods, and that everything that happens originates from some source outside of our control. If we believe this, it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to eliminate suffering and its causes. On the other hand, when we realize that the experience of suffering is a product of what we have done, that is, a result of our actions, eliminating suffering becomes possible. Once we are aware of how suffering takes place, then we can begin to remove the causes of suffering. First we must realize that what we experience is not dependent on external forces, but on what we have done previously. This is the understanding of karma. Karma produces suffering and is driven by the disturbing emotions. The term “defilement” refers mainly to our negative motivation and negative thoughts which produce negative actions.

The Third Noble Truth

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering through which the causes of karma and the disturbing emotions can be removed. We have control over suffering because karma and the disturbing emotions take place within us—we create them, we experience them. For that reason, we don’t need to depend on anyone else to remove the cause of suffering. The truth of

interdependent origination is that if we do unvirtuous actions, we are creating suffering. It also means that if we abandon unvirtuous actions, we remove the possibility of experiencing suffering in the future. What we experience is entirely in our hands. Therefore the Buddha has said that we should give up the causes of karma and the disturbing emotions. Virtuous actions result in happiness and unvirtuous actions result in suffering. This idea is not particularly easy to grasp because we can't see the whole process take place from beginning to end.

There are three kinds of actions: mental, verbal, and physical. These are subdivided into virtuous and unvirtuous physical actions, virtuous and unvirtuous verbal actions, and virtuous and unvirtuous mental actions. If we abandon the three types of unvirtuous actions, then our actions become automatically virtuous.

There are three unvirtuous physical actions: the harming of life, sexual misconduct, and stealing. The results of these three unvirtuous actions can be observed immediately. For example, when there is a virtuous relationship between a man and woman who care about each other, who help each other, and have a great deal of love and affection for each other, they will be happy because they look after each other. Their wealth will usually increase and if they have children, their love and care will result in mutual love in the family. In the ordinary sense, happiness develops out of this deep commitment and bond they have promised to keep. Whereas, when there is an absence of commitment, there is also little care and sexual misconduct arises. This is not the ground out of which love arises, or upon which a home in which children can develop happiness can be built. One can readily see that a lack of sexual fidelity can create many kinds of difficulties.

One can also see the immediate consequences of other unvirtuous physical actions. One can see that those who steal have difficulties and suffer; those who don't steal experience happiness and have a good state of mind. Likewise, those who

kill create many problems and unhappiness for themselves, while those who support life are happy.

The same applies to our speech although it is not so obvious. But on closer examination, we can also see how happiness develops out of virtuous speech and unhappiness results from unvirtuous speech. At first, lying may seem to be useful because we might think that we can deceive others and gain some advantage. But the *Sakya Pandita* said that this is not true. If we lie to our enemies or persons we don't get along with very well, because they are our enemies they are not going to pay attention to what we are saying anyway. It will be quite hard to deceive them. If they are our friends, we might be able to deceive them at first by telling a lie. But after the first time, they won't trust us any more and may see us as untrustworthy. Lying therefore doesn't really accomplish anything. Then if we look at the opposite, a person who takes pains to speak the truth will develop a reputation for being a truthful person and out of this trust many good things will emerge.

Once we have considered the example of the consequences of lying, we can think of similar consequences relating to other kinds of damaging speech: slander, and coarse, aggressive, and useless speech. In the long term virtuous speech produces happiness and unvirtuous speech produces suffering. When we say "useless speech," we mean speech that is really useless, not just conversational. So, if we have a good mind and want someone to relax and be happy, even though the words may not have great meaning, our words are based on the idea of benefit and goodness. By useless speech we mean chatter for no reason at all. Worse than that is "chatter rooted in the disturbing emotions." When we say bad things about other people because of a dislike or jealousy of them. We just gossip about people's character. That is really useless speech. Besides being useless, this very often causes trouble because it sets people against each other and causes bad feelings.

The same applies to “harmful speech.” If there is really a loving and beneficial reason for talking, for example, scolding a child when the child is doing something dangerous or scolding a child for not studying in school, that is not harmful speech because it is devoid of the disturbing emotions, rather it is a skillful way of helping someone. If there is that really genuine, beneficial attitude and love behind what we say, it is not harmful speech. But if speech is related to the disturbing emotions such as aggression or jealousy, then it is harmful speech and should be given up.

We can go on to examine the various states of mind and see that a virtuous mind produces happiness and unvirtuous states of mind create unhappiness. For instance, strong aggression will cause us to lose our friends. Because of our aggressiveness, those who don’t like us or our enemies will become even worse enemies and the situation will become inflamed. If we are aggressive and hurt others and they have friends, eventually those friends will also become enemies. On the other hand, goodness will arise through our caring for our loved ones and then extending this by wishing to help others. Through this they will become close and helpful friends. Through the power of our love and care, our enemies and people we don’t get along with will improve their behavior and maybe those enemies will eventually become friends. If we have companions and wish to benefit others, we can end up with very good friends and all the benefits which that brings. In this way we can see how cause and effect operate, how a virtuous mind brings about happiness and how an unvirtuous mind brings about suffering and problems.

There are two main aspects of karma: one related to experience and one related to conditioning. The karma relating to experience has already been discussed. Through unvirtuous physical actions we will experience problems and unhappiness. Likewise, through unvirtuous speech such as lying, we will experience unhappiness and sorrow. With an unvirtuous state of mind, we will also experience unhappiness as was

demonstrated by the example of having an aggressive attitude. All of this is related to the understanding that any unvirtuous activity produces unhappiness and pain.

The second aspect of karma relates to conditioning. By acting unvirtuously with our body, speech, or mind, we habituate ourselves to a certain style of behavior. Unvirtuous physical or verbal behaviors create the habit of this type of behavior. For example, each time one kills, one is conditioned to kill again. If one lies, that increases the habit of lying. An aggressive mind conditions one's mind so one becomes more aggressive. In our later lives, that conditioning will continue on so that we will be reborn with a great tendency to kill, to lie, to engage in sexual misconduct, and so on. These are the two aspects to karma. One is the direct consequence of an act and the other is the conditioning that creates a tendency to engage in behavior of that kind. Through these two aspects karma produces all happiness and suffering in life.

Even though we may recognize that unvirtuous karma gives rise to suffering and virtuous karma gives rise to happiness, it is hard for us to give up unvirtuous actions and practice virtuous actions because the disturbing emotions exercise a powerful influence on us. We realize that suffering is caused by unvirtuous karma, but we can't give up the karma itself. We need to give up the disturbing emotions because they are the root of unvirtuous actions. To give up the disturbing emotions means to give up unvirtuous actions of body (such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct), the unvirtuous actions of speech (such as lying, slander and harmful and useless speech), and the unvirtuous aspects of mind (such as aggression, attachment, or ignorance). Just wanting to give up the disturbing emotions does not remove them. However, the Buddha in his great kindness and wisdom has given us a very skillful way to eliminate the very root of all the disturbing emotions through the examination of the belief in the existence of an ego or a self.

The False Belief in a Self

We cannot easily understand this belief in a self because it is very deep-rooted. But if we search for this self that we believe in, we will discover that the self does not actually exist. Then with careful examination we will be able to see through this false belief in a self. When this is done, the disturbing emotions are diminished and with the elimination of a belief in self, negative karma is also eliminated.

This belief in a self is a mistaken perception. It's an illusion. For example, if one has a flower and were to interrogate one hundred people about it, they would all come to the same conclusion that it is indeed a flower. So one could be pretty sure that it is a flower. But, if one asked a person "Is this me?" he would say, "No, it's you." A second person would say, "It's you." One would end up with one hundred persons who say its "you" and only oneself would consider it as "me." So statistically one's self is not verifiable through objective means.

We tend to think of "me" as one thing, as a unity. When we examine what we think of as ourselves, we find it is made up of many different components: the various parts of the body, the different organs, and the different elements. There are so many of them, yet we have this feeling of a single thing, which is "me." When we examine any of these components and try to find something that is the essence of self, the self cannot be found in any of these parts. By contemplating this and working through it very thoroughly, we begin to see how this "I" is really a composite.

Once we have eliminated this incorrect way of thinking, the idea of an "I" becomes easy to get rid of. So, all of the desire rooted in thinking, "I must be made happy" can be eliminated as well as all the aversion rooted in the idea of "this difficulty must be eliminated." Through the elimination of the idea of "I" we can annihilate the disturbing emotions or defilements.³ Once the disturbing emotions are gone, then the negative

karma which is rooted in the disturbing emotions will cease. Once the negative karma ceases, suffering will no longer take place. This is why Buddha said that the root of suffering needs to be abandoned.

The first two noble truths may be summed up with two statements:

*One should be aware of and know what suffering is.
One should give up the origin of suffering.*

To summarize, once we recognize what suffering really is, then we begin by removing its causes. We do this by stopping doing unvirtuous actions which create suffering. To stop these unvirtuous activities, we eliminate them at their root which is the disturbing emotions and various unhealthy attitudes. To eradicate the disturbing emotions we need to remove their heart, which is the belief in a self. If we do that, then we will eventually come to realize the wisdom of non-self. By understanding the absence of a self, we no longer create the disturbing emotions and bad actions and brings an end to that whole process. This is highly possible to achieve; therefore there is the third noble truth, the truth of cessation.

The very essence and nature of cessation is peace (Tib. *shewa*).⁴ Sometimes people think of Buddhahood in terms of brilliant insights or something very fantastic. In fact, the peace we obtain from the cessation of everything unhealthy is the deepest happiness, bliss, and well-being. Its very nature is lasting in contrast to worldly happiness which is satisfying for a time, but then changes. In contrast, this ultimate liberation and omniscience is a very deeply moving peace. Within that peace all the powers of liberation and wisdom are developed. It is a very definitive release from both suffering and its effect is a definitive release from the disturbing emotions which are the cause of suffering. There are four main qualities of this truth of cessation. First, it is the cessation of suffering. Second, it is peace. Third, it is the deepest liberation and wisdom. Fourth, it

is a very definitive release from *cyclic existence* or *samsara*. Cessation is a product of practicing the path shown to us by the Most Perfect One, the Buddha. The actual nature of that path is the topic of the fourth noble truth, which is called the truth of the path because it describes the path that leads to liberation.

The Fourth Noble Truth

The fourth noble truth is called “the truth of the path” because the path leads us to the ultimate goal. We do this step by step, stage by stage, progressively completing our journey.

The Buddha’s teaching⁵ are called “the dharma,” and the symbol of these teachings is the wheel that you see on the roofs of temples and monasteries (as shown on the cover of this book). This is the symbol of the Enlightened One’s teachings. For instance, if you go to Samye Ling, you will see on the roof of the temple the wheel of the dharma supported by two deer. Why a wheel? Wheels take you somewhere, and the dharma wheel is the path that takes us to the very best place along the finest road. This wheel of the Buddha’s teaching has eight spokes because the path that we follow as Buddhists has eight major aspects known as “the eight-fold path of realized beings” or “the noble eight-fold path.”

We need to follow this eight-fold path and it is essential that we know what this path is and how to practice on this path. These eight aspects to the noble eight-fold path can be grouped into three areas: superior conduct, superior concentration, and superior wisdom which make up seven of the eight spokes with the eighth spoke, superior effort which is the quality that supports the other seven. Superior effort is needed for achieving correct conduct, correct concentration, and the development of correct wisdom.

A. Superior Concentration

1. Correct Meditation. When we practice the dharma it is most important to stabilize our mind. We are human beings and we have this very precious human existence with the wonderful faculty of intelligence. Using that intelligence we can, for instance, see our own thoughts, examine them, and analyze our thinking process so we can determine what are good thoughts and what are bad thoughts. If we look carefully at mind we can see that there are many more bad thoughts than good ones. The same is true with our feelings. We find that sometimes we are happy, sometimes we are sad, and sometimes we are worried, but if we look carefully we will probably find that the happier moments are rarer than those of suffering and worry. To shift the balance so that our thoughts are more positive, and happier, we need to do something and this is where *samadhi* or meditative concentration comes in, because *samadhi* is the root for learning how to relax. When our mind is relaxed, we are happier and we are more joyous.

The word “*samadhi*” means “profound absorption.” If we can learn how to achieve *samadhi* then even if we apply this *samadhi* to worldly activities, it will benefit us greatly. With *samadhi* our work will go well and we will find more joy and pleasure in our worldly activities. Of course, if we can use *samadhi* for dharma, then it will bring about really good results in our life.

Some people may have been practicing dharma for some years and might feel they have achieved few results from the practice and think, “Even after all these years that I have been meditating, there is not much to show for it. My mind is still not stable.” This thinking shows us the real need to learn how to develop *samadhi* or concentration so that *samadhi* becomes a great support for our meditation. No matter what time we can give to meditation, that time is very well-spent. Often if we do an hour of meditation it doesn’t mean we did one hour of perfect *samadhi*. Rather it probably means we had a half hour engaged with a lot of thoughts and a half an hour of what we could call good sitting of which about 15 minutes of this was

good samadhi. So it is really important to learn how to meditate properly, so our time meditating is most fruitful.

2. Correct Mindfulness. How do we achieve superior concentration? That is where the second factor of correct mindfulness is necessary. It is through mindfulness that we will be able to actually achieve samadhi. When we have mindfulness, we are very clear about what is happening in our meditation. Also between our meditation sessions we shouldn't lose the thread of meditation, so we should with mindfulness carry this power of the meditation into our daily life. Our mindfulness needs to be very stable, it needs to be clear, and it needs to be the strongest mindfulness so that we can achieve the highest samadhi.

In the *Moonbeams of Mahamudra* by the great Takpo Tashi Namgyal it says, "When one meditates one needs mindfulness which is clear and powerful. It needs to have the quality of clarity and at the same time it needs to be stable." Mindfulness can be just clear, but if there isn't enough force to the mindfulness, it won't be effective. For there to be a change in our postmeditation behavior, we need to have mindfulness and awareness. Without this clarity of awareness and without the strength of mindfulness, we won't recognize the subtle thoughts that keep our samadhi from developing. So with these subtle thoughts, we become accustomed to a very superficial kind of meditation that will keep us from progressing. Clear and strong mindfulness, however, will allow us to recognize the obstacle of these subtle thoughts. So, strong and clear mindfulness is very important.

B. Superior Wisdom

Normally when we speak about wisdom in Buddhism we speak of the three knowledges (Skt. *prajnas*) of study, contemplation,

and meditation. Reading and studying in all sorts of Buddhist books will develop a certain kind of wisdom, but this wisdom is never advanced enough to lead us to enlightenment, or Buddhahood. So, wisdom received from books and contemplating these teachings is limited. To develop superior wisdom that will allow us to become enlightened can only be obtained through meditation. So far we have discussed the excellent training that develops correct samadhi and correct mindfulness. Now we need the most excellent training to develop correct intention and correct view.

3. Correct Intention. Through our meditation, the realization of the true nature of reality will develop. Actually in the meditation itself, when we have a direct awareness of reality, we may wonder, “Is this it? Is this not it?” We will have all sorts of subtle thoughts and we need to confirm the accurateness, the rightness of the meditation that we are achieving. With time and with the right instruction we will gain confidence and come to know what in meditation is the finest, clearest, highest view of the true nature of phenomena. There will be confidence and conviction in our belief due to primordial wisdom (Skt. *jnana*). The development of wisdom at this stage is called “the very best philosophical view.” After attaining this state of *jnana*, our postmeditation sessions will contain wisdom about the relationship of conventional reality which allows us to cultivate the very best intention. These two together make the very best wisdom: one applies to the depth of meditation and the other to the postmeditation state. So we need to develop these and strive whole-heartedly to cultivate these two wisdoms.

4. Right View. There are many levels of the Buddha’s teachings each which has its own way of describing what the highest view of reality is. There are the Theravada teachings, the Mahayana teachings, the Vajrayana teachings, and the Mahamudra teachings. Each Buddhist tradition has its own

way of defining what is the highest view, and whichever view we hold we need to strive in developing the right view during the meditation and to develop right view during postmeditation experience.

C. Superior Conduct

We definitely need to meditate in order to train our mind. But the training of meditation needs the support of right conduct. The importance of right conduct is not mainly for meditation but to the rest of our life, our interaction with the rest of the world. The importance of right conduct is illustrated by the fact that it has three aspects of its own. Whereas wisdom and meditation concern cultivating the finest understanding of our mind, right conduct concerns the actions of body and speech and our interrelation with other beings around us. It would be an error to think that the mind is the main thing to work on and what we do with our body and speech doesn't matter much. What we do with our body and speech is very important and that is what the last three paths of the eight-fold path concern themselves.

There are many, many ways of explaining right conduct, but the eight-fold path does it through correct speech, correct action, and correct livelihood.

5. Correct Speech. Speech is very important to us. For instance, we can't see another person's mind so we judge and are judged by behavior and speech. Speech can also be very powerful. Whether we are addressing 100 or 1,000 people, if the speech is good and beneficial then 100 or 1,000 people will be benefited; but if the speech is harmful then it can hurt 100 or 1000 people, which is much more than we can do physically. So we need to have not just correct speech, but we must train in the very best speech so that when we speak, we know what our speech is doing. Is it harming? Is it benefiting?

What techniques can we use to develop this most excellent speech? We can say prayers, such as, “Great Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa, Gampopa” and we can recite *mantras* like OM MANI PEDME HUNG. These prayers and mantras show us how to express thoughts which are most noble, which are completely beneficial, pure, and good. Part of our dharma practice is the study, the reciting of texts, prayers and mantras which brings about the very excellent training of the best of speech. All of these activities sow the seeds for the good and right things in our mind which will afterwards become the basis for the expression of what will benefit ourselves and others. This is perhaps even more important today than it was in the past because we have such powerful means of communication. With the telephone we can contact people all over the world. With Internet and faxes the power of speech is really important, so there is even more reason to be mindful, aware, and careful of how we use this tremendous power of communication and speech. We should always be aware of its potential to either benefit or to harm others. So, training in correct speech is the first of the three paths of right conduct.

6. Correct Action. In our busy lives, we need to do many different things and everything we do has a consequence to others and ourselves. So training to engage in the very best actions is to do what will not only bring benefit to oneself but to others. So with an excellent motivation we do excellent actions which benefit ourself and others. We need to therefore analyze the quality of actions and to be able to discern between what is right and what is wrong.

7. Correct Livelihood. Closely connected to right conduct is having a correct livelihood. Of course, livelihood means not just our job, but also all our main daily activities that we do to have food, clothes, a roof over our head and so on. Because we do this day after day and because it involves by its very nature our speech and our physical actions, we need to learn what is a

correct and what is a negative livelihood that brings harm to others. We need, of course, to give up anything that harms others and to adopt a livelihood that is beneficial either directly or indirectly for us and for others.

8. Correct Effort. Let us go back to the first spoke of the wheel of dharma—samadhi—that comes through the second spoke of mindfulness. These qualities won't come by themselves unless there is the greatest effort applied to bring these qualities out. The next three spokes of wisdom, correct view, and correct thought won't just come about one day by themselves without a great deal of skillful, intelligent, hard work. Then the last three spokes of correct conduct, correct speech, and correct livelihood also need a great deal of effort for these values to come about. So this eighth spoke, best effort or diligence, is a support for all the other spokes.

We could say that there are two types of effort. In Tibetan the word for “effort” (*tsultrim*) has the notion of joy and enthusiasm, while in English “effort” has the notion of drudgery. So there are two kinds of effort. One is a vacillating sort of effort in which we jump into something and then when it becomes more difficult we slack off and the other is a steady, constant sort of effort. The first kind is more with what we associate with “enthusiasm” and the other is more stable and the very best support for the other seven spokes.

The Five Paths

We can also divide the Buddhist path into five main stages because by traversing them we eventually reach our destination which is cessation of suffering. The Buddhist path can be analyzed through these stages called the five paths. The names of the five paths are the stage of accumulation, the stage of junction, the stage of insight, the stage of cultivation, and the stage of nonstudy. Properly speaking, the first four of these are the path with the fifth one being the fruition of the other four paths.

The first path is called the “path of accumulation” because we gather or accumulate a great wealth of many things. This is the stage in which we try to gather all the positive factors which enable us to progress. We try to cultivate diligence, the good qualities, and the wisdom which penetrates more deeply into the meaning of things. We commit ourselves to accumulate all the various positive aspects of practice. We gather the positive elements into our being while at the same time working in many different ways to remove all the unwanted elements from one’s life. We also apply various techniques to eliminate the various blockages and obstacles which are holding us back. This is called the stage of accumulation because we engage in this manifold activity which gathers these new things into our life.

In ordinary life we are caught up in the level of worldliness. Even though we don’t want to be, we are still operating on a level of cyclic existence (Skt. *samsara*) because we are still under the influence of the disturbing emotions. They have a very strong habitual grip on our existence. We need to get rid of these disturbing emotions in order to find our way out of *samsara*. Of course, we want to find happiness and peace and we know it is possible. But even with the strongest will in the world, we cannot do it overnight. It is like trying to dye a large cloth that contains many oil stains on it. It requires a great deal of effort to change its color.

So, first of all, in order to achieve the good qualities, we need to work on creating all the different conditions which will make these qualities emerge. To develop the various insights of meditation and real wisdom, we need to develop great faith and confidence in the validity and usefulness of this wisdom. Once we are convinced of its value, we need to change our habits so that we have the diligence to do all the things necessary to make insight and wisdom emerge. Therefore, there are many factors and conditions we must generate within our life to bring about our happiness.

To remove all the unwholesome factors binding us in samsara, we must uproot belief in a solid self, eliminate the various disturbing emotions which hinder us, and bring together the many different conditions that make this transformation and purification possible. We talk about accumulation because we are assembling all the different conditions that make this transformation possible. We won't be able to progress in a significant manner until we have gathered all these causes and conditions properly, completely and perfectly within ourselves. For that reason the purpose of this stage of accumulation is to complete all the necessary conditions by gathering them into our existence.

Eventually, because of the complete gathering of favorable conditions, we will reach the third path which is the "path of insight." This is the stage during which insight into the true nature of phenomena are developed. This insight is beyond the veil of delusion. Linking the path of accumulation and the path of insight is the second path of junction. Here our inner realization, the very way we perceive things, begins to link up with the truth of the actual nature of phenomena because we are gathering all the favorable circumstances that will eventually lead us to the actual insight itself. When we attain insight into the way things really are and this insight develops beyond the level of delusion and mistaken views, we realize that there is no self. Once there is no longer a belief in self, there are no longer any root disturbing emotions of attachment,

aggression, or ignorance associated with the false belief in a solid self. Once there are no longer any disturbing emotions, we do nothing unvirtuous and have no more suffering.

Now, it is true that once we have that insight, all suffering is immediately removed, but in another way, that is not true. This is because the delusion of a self is a habit which has been built up for such a long time and is very, very hard to remove. For example, when we have realized that an unchanging self is a delusion fabricated by our mind, still when we hit our finger with a hammer, we experience pain. We still have the feeling, “I am suffering” because there is an enduring built-up association of “I” with the flesh of our body. Removal of that long established conditioning of self occurs through a long process of cultivating the truth of non-self. This is the fourth stage of the cultivation of insight.

The fourth stage is called the path of cultivation (*gom lam* in Tibetan). The word *gom* is usually translated as “meditation” but actually means “to get used to something” or “to accustom oneself.”⁶ This is why it is translated here as “the path of cultivation,” while other texts translate it as “the path of meditation.” But in this stage it is the insight into the nature of phenomena and getting used to that insight. By becoming more and more familiar with the truth of phenomena, we can remove the very fine traces of disturbing emotions and the subconscious conditioning that still exist. Through gradual working on these, the goal of enlightenment will be attained.

Through the cultivation of insight we eventually reach the goal of the fifth path which is called “the path of no more study.” Through cultivation we remove even the subtlest causes of suffering. Once this is completed we have reached the highest state and there are no more new paths to traverse making this “the path of no more study” or “the path of no more practice.”

To the first two quotations from the Buddha which have already been presented, two more can be added to sum up the last two noble truths:

*One should be aware of and know what suffering is.
One should give up the origin of suffering.
One should make cessation of suffering manifest.
One should establish the path thoroughly in one's being.*

We need to make the truth of cessation real, to manifest it in ourselves. We can't just make it manifest by wishing, hoping, or praying for it. We can't just pray to the *three jewels* (the Buddha, dharma, and *sangha*) for cessation and through their kindness they will just give it to us. The law of cause and effect, karma, makes that impossible. To attain the goal of cessation, we must be thoroughly established on the path and the path must be properly and thoroughly developed in ourselves.

One may wonder if the five paths overlap. Generally speaking, for nearly everyone, the stages of the path are consecutive and separate. Having finished the first stage, one progresses to the second stage and so on. Some texts such as the *Abhidharma* say that there are some individuals who can travel the paths simultaneously. But they are very exceptional persons; most persons need to complete one path at a time. For instance, in the path of accumulation one can start on the work that is primarily associated with the path of junction, developing insight into the truth. The principle purpose for separating these two stages is to enumerate the positive factors one must gather to complete the path of accumulation and to distinguish them from the development of insight and the level of the path of junction. These paths are not completely separate. So one cannot say they do not overlap, that there aren't several things taking place at the same time.

The Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha are very important. One can compare them to someone who is sick. When someone is sick and has much discomfort, the first thing to do is to investigate the nature of the problem. What is the sickness? Is it in the brain? In the heart? etc. One needs to

locate the actual problem and investigate the symptoms of the illness. Then in order to cure that person one also needs to know what is producing the disease. Only by attacking the cause of the symptoms can one actually cure the person. This is a very good analogy for the first two noble truths. One needs to understand the nature of suffering and to know just what it entails. But just understanding the problem is not enough to bring an end to the suffering because one also needs to understand the causes of suffering, which are karma and the disturbing emotions. Then one needs to be able to eradicate the causes.

The inspiration to overcome illness is, of course, to understand all the qualities of good health and to be free from the sickness. To continue the example, the Buddha shows one all the qualities of cessation (enlightenment); that is a healthy and wonderful thing. Once one knows that the remedy exists, then one applies the remedy to what has been blocking the state of good health. One applies the very skillful remedies of the path making it possible to deal with karma and the disturbing emotions in order to obtain that good mental health. For that reason the last two truths are like the medicine whose result is cessation of suffering.

The order of working through the Four Noble Truths is not a chronological order. They are ordered logically to help us understand. The first two truths relate to suffering and its cause (samsara). First of all, the character of suffering is explained. Once one understands the character of suffering, one will want to know what causes it so the suffering can be eliminated. The second two truths are related to *nirvana*. These are not arranged in order of experience because the cause of suffering must obviously come before the suffering itself.

Meditation of the Theravada Path

When we study the Theravada path, we study it in the beginning from the viewpoint of intellectual understanding.

Then through meditation practice, we investigate the results that emerge. The Four Noble Truths, which are the heart of the Theravada are the view of the Theravada vehicle. The principle focus of Theravada practice is the validity of the Four Noble Truths. The actual practice of meditation within the Theravada is a little bit different from the understanding of the truths themselves. When we understand suffering and its causes, we realize that as long as we are involved with worldly affairs, we will continue creating the causes of suffering, which means we will be reborn over and over again in this vortex of samsara. Therefore the way out is to cut this attachment to samsara. There are several meditation practices which enable us to do this.

The principle practice which enables us to cut attachment to samsara is to meditate on the impermanent nature of samsara. By meditating on impermanence, we will be less inclined to become involved in worldly activities. Attachment becomes less attractive as we begin to appreciate how quickly circumstances change. We can see that even though kings and heroes of the past might have been very famous and wealthy, their fame and wealth did not go on forever but eventually ended. In meditation we contemplate people and the changes they undergo; we contemplate objects and their changes and the ways in which they change. When we see that there is nothing that stays the same, we begin to realize that activities and objects in samsara are not worth that much involvement and attachment. The liberation of the mind then begins to take place. We do not completely give up everything overnight but realize that too much involvement and attachment are not very beneficial. We realize that it's not worth spending much time with samsaric conditioning.

The second principle meditation practice is on the nature of suffering in samsara. Previously, it has been explained how we can directly experience the actual emergence of suffering. As explained before, things which seem quite pleasant initially, by their very nature, must bring about suffering later. We realize

that suffering is inherent even in pleasant things. Therefore this contemplation on suffering, which is part of all samsaric phenomena, is the second point. It helps us to realize to not spend so much time and involvement in worldly things. It also helps us realize that by devoting energy to these contemplations we can profit greatly.

The third main meditation is on *emptiness* and the fourth meditation is on the absence of ego or self. As was explained previously, meditation on emptiness is mainly concerned with realizing that the inner phenomena which we think of as “mine” and the outer phenomena which we think of as “belonging to me” has no validity. The fourth meditation on non-self is concerned more with the idea of the “self” itself, the owner of those things. Through this meditation the delusion of self is seen.

The Examination of the Self

We must separate the belief of self from the cause from which it springs. The idea of the self is principally derived from a deluded apprehension of the *aggregates* (Skt. *skandhas*). The various aggregates, of which we are composed, are made up of many, many different individual elements. Because of the gross way in which we perceive, we don't see the actual composite nature of reality. We tend to form these elements together and see them as just one single individual thing. Once we see these composites as one, we tend to name it, define it, and give it an identity. So when we see things with our deluded perception we do not see many minute, short-lived components, but tend to see them as a whole and solidify them as real and existent. It is because we relate to gross wholes and give them an identity that we develop this idea of a self.

Beginningless Time

We also have a problem with time. There is no point at which we could say, “At this point there wasn’t that delusion and then at this point this mistaken view took place.” The mistake is beginningless. When we first see this word “beginningless” in Buddhist texts, it seems a rather unusual idea that a delusion could not have a beginning. However, if we examine almost anything we find that it is beginningless. For example, take a brass pot.⁷ It was probably made in India, but that was not its beginning because in India that brass came from ore and we can trace the ore back through time by tracing all the minute particles of which it is made up going back forever. Nearly everything we examine is beginningless. So it is the same with the concept of self. We can trace it back, and keep going back and back and back. It is not as though there is one point in which its there and in the next moment delusion occurs. We can never find the beginning. There is something happening all the time. Because of the grossness of our perception and the mistaken consciousness that labels all objects of perception.

For instance, consider the example of a flower and its seed. This example demonstrates that one thing originates from another. Now there is a flower but when we trace back, we find there was a seed and the seed itself came from a flower and so on. The same with a brass pot, we can trace it back to some geological time and never find a point where the pot actually began. The point is that it is beginningless. When we examine our own existence, we say there is suffering because of karma and that there is karma because of the disturbing emotions and the disturbing emotions are there because of ignorance. But we cannot find one point where this process began because if we trace it back we find that each step involves more history. We can keep going back and back and each event has even more history behind it and so on. That is why we say it is “beginningless” because we cannot answer the question, “What happened in the beginning?” It is not as though there was one ignorant thought and that was the beginning of everything. Ignorance is taking place continually and has been occurring

since this beginning without beginning. Ignorance is then a continuing mistaken perception of the minute aggregates. We conceptualize the idea of a thing which isn't there except in the mind of the observer. That is the actual process of ignorance which takes place over and over again. Even though there are so many different components in the skandhas, we conceive them as a mistaken "I." Perceiving the millions and millions of particles of the pot as a single idea of "a pot" is a mistaken perception. This faulty perception continues into the future and we can trace it back into the past. The inability to perceive correctly is continuous, that process occurs again and again. All the problems have come from that ignorance. We can never find a beginning but it does have an end because once we pierce this delusion and reach the truth, we can find liberation from this deluded process.

The Aggregates

We can make that split between the perception and what is perceived. At the beginning we may think that the perceiver is the actual self and the delusion involves only the object of perception. But actually when we examine the perception of the perceiver, we discover that this same mistake is taking place. The many minute particles are mistaken for solid things. An analysis of the five aggregates reveals that the first aggregate deals with form and the way in which things are perceived externally. The other four skandhas deal with the internal mind—feelings, the process of perception, cognition, and consciousness. There are many elements that come together which can be mistaken for a self in just the same way one mistakes collections of minute particles as just one thing. For instance, if we look at the aggregate of consciousness, there are many different elements of consciousness and they are always changing. For example, we have happy feelings, unpleasant feelings, fearful feelings and so on. When we look at all the contradictions which make up the mind, we see that

there is not just one unique, unchanging perceiver, but that the perceiving mind is made up of many different changing elements. We could never say any one of these are consciousness of a self. If there were a self, we could say, “Oh, yes, that is definitely the self, that is the consciousness of a self.” In fact, what we sometimes think of as the “I” is a feeling associated with happiness or sadness or a certain kind of consciousness. Sometimes the “I” seems to be the body, sometimes the “I” seems to be the mind which perceives the body, sometimes it seems to be both. That is why the perception of a self is a delusion. The “I” is never constant. It is simply an idea associated with what is happening. If it were the same all the time, then we could point to it very clearly and say, “This is I.” But when we think about “I” or when we talk about “I” we continually shift from one identification to another never really establishing what is “I.” Once there is this delusion of “I,” there is the idea of “mine” and the process becomes even more complicated.

The Self in Reincarnation

We may wonder if there is no “self,” then what is it that passes on in rebirth or reincarnation.⁸ There is rebirth, but this reincarnation is not particularly linked to a self or ego. It is not that there is a self which creates one life after another so that one develops the idea, “I have been reborn, I have been somebody else before I was reborn.” But actually what transmigrates is not the same self; it is not the same “I” which crops up again and again or the same “I” which provokes all these different rebirths.

To explain what actually happens, the Buddha taught the idea of interdependence or what is also called “interdependent origination.” Interdependent origination explains the arising of one thing from another; how one thing depends upon another for its existence. For example, a flower comes from a seed. There is a seed which makes a shoot. The shoot sprouts leaves

which eventually become flowers. The flower will then create more seeds and so on. So there is a continuity, but apart from this continuity there are great differences between the seed and the flower in shape, color, nature, etc. So there is a continuity which is a process of dependence and a process of origination. Change takes place all the time within the context of this dependence. In the same way ignorance occurs, and because of ignorance certain actions and activities follow. And because of these actions eventually there will be some sort of rebirth. Because of the rebirth there is aging, sickness, death, and so on. All of these factors are interdependent. One is caused by the other. There is a continuum, but there is not one thing which carries on and one thing that is unchanging. The Buddha taught that what happens from one lifetime to another occurs because of interdependence, not a “self” which is an entity that goes on and on manifesting continuously.

To understand this form of rebirth, the fact that there have been so many different *Karmapas*⁹ does not mean that they are emanations of a self. First we must examine the deluded idea of self on the level of ordinary people. We think, “This is me, this is my one life and it has been one single life.” We think we have a self which is this life. However, when we examine this life, we find everything is changing; we do not have the same physical body; when we were a tiny baby we were only two feet tall, later growing to five feet tall. The same is true of our mind. When we were a baby, we could not even say our mother’s name and were very ignorant. When we grew up, we learned to read and write and our mind underwent a tremendous change. We take this “me” and “mine” as being ourselves. However, when we look at this carefully, apart from the continuity that took place from one step to the other, there is not a single thing that stayed the same. Nevertheless, we tend to think of “me” as though “me” had been the same all the time. That is an incorrect belief we have about ordinary people and about ourselves. The same is true of *tulkus* and the great *rinpoches*. Apart from the fact that there is a continuity of their

noble mind and their activity which benefits beings, there is no self, no constant entity which is continuously present. Because we are deluded, we think of them as being one fixed person.

The word *skandha* is a Sanskrit word for “aggregate” or “heap” and provides an image of a pile of different things. Because it is a whole heap, we can say, “This is one pile.” But when we examine the heap carefully, we discover it includes many different types of things. Yet from the gross point of view we globalize and think of a heap as just one entity and relate to it as if it were just one thing. So when we examine our own existence and what is taking place from one lifetime to another, we see millions of individual instances of many different things, so many different minutiae. Because there are so many different elements, our gross perception tends to label them as simply “I.” This process of contemplating the skandhas shows us how this delusion of self occurs. It is like a mountain which consists of many different pieces of dirt and rocks. We give this the name “mountain” even though it is made up of millions of different particles. Because we have developed the idea of “I,” we also develop desire and these desires eventually lead to the disturbing emotions that cause suffering. The liberation from suffering (enlightenment) consists in the realization that this “I” is a delusion, a mistake, and that there is no “I” or a permanent self. Once we have seen through that, there is no more “I” to want anything, no more “I” to dislike anything, no more “I” to possess the disturbing emotions, and therefore no more negative karma.

We shouldn’t take the continuity as being unchanging. When we have the delusion of a self, for instance, between being a baby and a grown person, many things change and are different, yet we have this deluded projection about self which appears to be the same. We might say that the “I” has been there all the time but this is not true because the continuum is not the same as an idea of self. It is not that there is a continuum which carries on in something, which would be another word for self. A continuum by its very continuity

implies change and difference. So a continuum is tracing the way one thing changes into another and then into something else. We follow through the connection of one thing to another. But it doesn't mean that because there is a continuity, there is something which is the same and present all the time. So with reincarnated lamas there is just this unbroken Buddha activity.

This also happens when we die. When we die, our body is no longer useful but our mind carries on. It is not as though there is a mind as a fixed entity that carries on and on. It is that there is a continuity; we can trace the change from one state of mind to another and that is what carries on. That mind carries on through future lives, but it is not as though there is a constant thing like a self or a continuum which is nothing more than a synonym for self.

To summarize, impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and absence of ego are the four main aspects of meditation which helps us to realize the truth of suffering. When we understand more about the emptiness of phenomena, we begin to see the absence of ego automatically and we will have less aggression, attachment, and ignorance. When these diminish, there will be less suffering.

Meditation on the Four Noble Truths

There is nothing wrong with worldly happiness and all the good and nice things in life *per se*. It is very good to be happy and content and to have happiness in life. The only problem comes when we are trying to train ourselves for something higher, deeper, and more beneficial; if we become too involved with happiness and the good things of life, then they will hold us back from our training and development. It is like a young child. If the child is playing, the child and parents are very happy. There is nothing at all wrong with that. But if the child is going to grow up, obviously the child has to learn his lessons and go to school. If the lessons are jeopardized because the child is playing all the time, he or she will never develop and go onto something useful and productive. Likewise, worldly things are not bad in themselves, but if we are aiming for something deeper and beneficial, we do not take too much time being involved with worldly things.

The realization of the truth is very slow because we are apathetic. The remedy to this apathy is to realize the Four Noble Truths completely, not superficially. When we clearly see the first truth of suffering and realize what it is and how much there is to it, we will really work to remove the causes and actually traverse the path. It is the wisdom of seeing things as they are which causes us to develop our practice. When the Buddhist teachings say that we need to leave samsara, they point to the urgency of getting out of samsara. It is not that they are saying we have to give up eating, wearing clothes, and other worldly things. Rather we should not greatly involved and attached to samsara.

The understanding of the second noble truth of universal origination involves two meditations. These two are realizing the existence of interdependent origination and realizing the complete manifestation of interdependent origination. For the first meditation one realizes that karma and the disturbing

emotions are the cause of all suffering and suffering doesn't come from outer conditions, but rather from one's previous karma. For the second meditation one realizes that karma comes from the disturbing emotions, so one realizes the universal origination of suffering. Then one sees how powerful karma is in one's life and this is the complete manifestation of origination.

The Third Noble Truth

To understand the third noble truth of the cessation of suffering, one meditates to appreciate what happens once all these difficulties and their causes have been removed. One meditates on the cessation from the view of taking away all these blocks and veils so that the good qualities will emerge. One meditates on how one can eliminate suffering and the cause of suffering. Through this one realizes the positive quality of this cessation which is the very best peace for oneself. Realizing cessation is possible and these positive qualities will emerge and inspire one to strive on the path and develop all the qualities of peace.

The Fourth Noble Truth

There are four main points to meditation on the fourth noble truth which is the path. One needs first to contemplate the presence and validity of the path to develop an intelligent awareness of the path itself and to realize that without the path of dharma one will never achieve complete liberation or freedom from one's problems. Next one needs to be very aware of the value of the path in relation to other activities. Third, by realizing its value, one needs to actually put the path into practice. Finally, one needs to contemplate how the path is a complete release from samsara. It is actually the path which leads one to freedom from all the problems of samsara.

The Practice of the Theravada Path

One of the key practices of the Theravada path is the following of the *Vinaya*¹⁰ which in Tibetan is *dulwa* which means “taming oneself.” The word is very appropriate if we consider, for example, the taming of an elephant. An elephant is very wild at first and if we want to ride it, to get it to do work, or lead it somewhere, we can’t do it. But by gradually taming the elephant we can ride it, we can get it to work, and we can lead it around. In fact, it becomes very docile and controllable. We can apply this analogy to ourselves. At first our mind, body, and speech are very coarse and wild. Before we begin to meditate even small physical irritations can cause us to flare up and to want to fight. Even minor verbal irritation upsets us and we begin to shout, scream, and abuse others. Small mental irritations make us think all sorts of nasty and aggressive things. So in the beginning, our mind is very wild and out of control. The Theravada practice is designed to train our mind so that eventually it becomes very docile and workable and we are able to cope properly with any situation.

The process of training is related to the commitments we make. We take certain vows and precepts to train ourselves. We do this because we have become used to doing unvirtuous actions and to get rid of that habit, we make certain promises or commitments to do virtuous actions and bind ourselves to that virtuous activity. This is a very practical way of training ourselves to refrain from unvirtuous activities and accustoming ourselves gradually to virtuous activities. At first glance we may think that the commitments and vows are really restrictive and difficult and this keeps us from doing beneficial actions. It seems like being put into a straightjacket or a prison. Actually, it is not like that at all. The Sanskrit word for this training which covers making vows and commitments is *shila* which means “coolness.” That was translated into Tibetan as *tsultrim* which means “keeping one’s discipline” in the way taught by the Buddha. This idea of coolness gives the impression of

relaxation and easiness. This is a very good word because we can see that when we maintain virtue, this virtue creates happiness and leads to a pleasant and good situation. And when we practice unvirtuous activities of the body, it causes problems, difficulties, and hardships. Likewise, when we practice improper speech, more and more problems arise. By maintaining good and pure speech, very pleasant results emerge. The same applies to the mind. When we keep the mind very pure, it brings much happiness. So when we think about it carefully, we can see that keeping the commitments, making promises, and restricting our activities to virtuous ones is, in fact, the key to happiness. This is not at all a restriction or a difficult situation because it is the key to happiness. This is why the Sanskrit word *shila* implies “calmness” or “pleasantness.”

In order to understand the full power of the meaning of “coolness” for “discipline,” we need to think about its origins. The word comes from India which is a very hot country in the summer. When we say “coolness” in the West it does not strike us as a particularly good quality because it gets cold here. In Tibet they didn’t translate it as “coolness” because Tibet is a very cold country. But in India coolness is a very valued quality. When the weather is very hot, it is very uncomfortable and one can’t do what one wants. When we find coolness in a hot place, we feel happy, comfortable, and in control. Without commitment to goodness, we have a lot of problems which feels very uncomfortable and the situation can feel out of control. When we have this commitment to virtue, it is the key to happiness and control in our life. So that word “coolness” really gives a very vivid insight into the whole nature of self-control and good conduct.

The Buddha has given us certain commitments and vows to develop our good qualities and to give up our negative actions. But if we can’t give up all negative actions completely, we shouldn’t become depressed and think that there is no way we can practice the dharma. The Buddha in his compassion has

given us many different kinds of commitments. We can take the vows of full ordination of a monk or nun¹¹ and commit ourselves to a life of virtue and refrain from unvirtuous actions. If we can't manage that, there is the level of novice ordination. Then there are the eight layman's vows called the *genyan* vows in Tibetan. We don't have to take all eight vows, but can take one, two, or however many we can manage to practice. Even if we can't manage these vows for our whole life, we can make them for periods of time. We can observe the eight precepts for one day or a set number of days such as while in retreat. So it is a very flexible situation that can be adopted by different persons according to their individual capacities.

The motivation of the Theravada practitioner is mainly concerned with working on his or her own happiness and liberation. At this level one is not especially concerned with helping others. Nevertheless, working principally for one's own emancipation is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a very good thing because if one is not able to help others, at least one is removing the suffering and its causes for oneself. There is nothing at all wrong with that. Of course, if one can work helping others, that is wonderful. Actually, wishing to help others is not easy until one has some degree of clarity and emancipation oneself. Therefore, working towards one's own purification is a very positive step on the journey towards eventually helping others. It is very good especially for individuals beginning the spiritual path, because it is much easier to think in terms of benefiting oneself. This is why the first wheel of dharma was the phase of the Buddha's teaching which focused on the path to self-liberation.

***The Ten Virtuous Deeds Promulgated
by
King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet***

Three virtuous deeds of the body:

1. Refraining from killing
2. Refraining from stealing
3. Refraining from sexual misconduct

Four virtuous deeds of speech

1. Refraining from lying
2. Refraining from slander
3. Refraining from harsh words
4. Refraining from senseless or idle talk

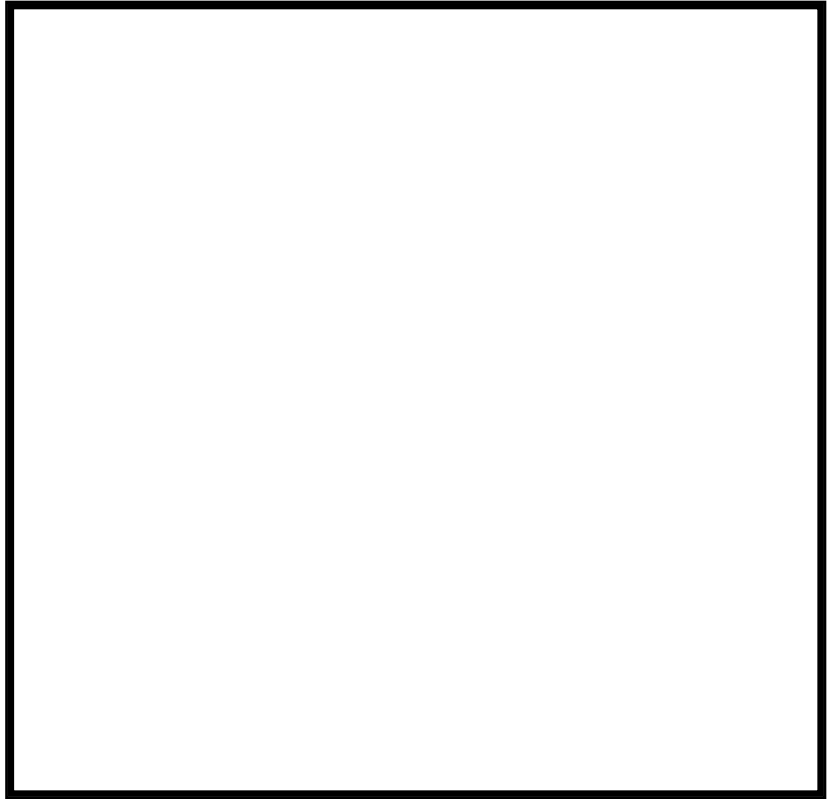
Three virtuous deeds of mind

1. Refraining from covetousness
2. Refraining from ill will
3. Refraining from wrong views.

King Songtsen Gampo was considered the first dharma king of Tibet and he invited Padmasambhava to Tibet to change this country into a Buddhist country. Songtsen Gampo established a set of Buddhist laws and asked that a set of precepts be established to guide the lay people. These are covered in much more detail in Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Ten Virtuous Actions*.

**The Second Vehicle of
Buddhist Practice**

The Mahayana Path



Tekpa chenpo (Mahayana)

by

Thrangu Rinpoche

Chapter 2

The Mahayana

The Buddha taught the Theravada path to beginning students because it was suitable for them. The second vehicle (Skt. *yana*) is the Mahayana which means the “greater vehicle.” It is called “great” because it involves very great motivation, a vast view, and enormous practice.

The attitude of the *bodhisattva* who practices the Mahayana is very great. First of all, he or she has an attitude of only wishing for good and virtuous things to come to others and that anything unvirtuous or harmful be eliminated. The Theravada practitioners have this good attitude, but they mainly desire the development of their own progress and to have no obstacles or negativity on their path to liberation. It is a healthy thing to wish good things and progress for oneself, but if one concentrates too much on that and tries to develop only self-interest there is the danger that it will eventually prevent reaching enlightenment. The next vehicle of the Mahayana prevents the obstacle of self-interest.

The attitude of the *bodhisattva*, a Mahayana practitioner, is not being concerned just for oneself, but feeling the same concern for everyone. The reason a *bodhisattva* has unbiased love and compassion is that when we identify with a certain group and concentrate only on that group’s concerns, there is the danger we might harm others outside the group. Therefore, the Mahayana path cultivates a completely unbiased love and compassion, caring equally for every being including nonhuman beings such as animals. Normally, we care for our

friends and relatives and helping them may set others against us. Or we care for our race and set ourselves against other races or cultures. Or we care for humans and subjugate animals in order to make life better for mankind. All of this is the usual way of biased thought.

The Mahayana approach is to care equally for any sentient being (which is any being who has a mind). This is because we realize that since beginningless time, each and every being has had the same basic wish to find happiness and to be free from suffering. In that respect, all beings are the same and therefore we try to help them equally and without any partiality.

The Four Immeasurables

The attitude of the bodhisattva is to want to help all beings find happiness and to relieve them of all their suffering. The bodhisattva doesn't believe there are some beings who want happiness and others who don't. The bodhisattva doesn't think that there are some who need to be freed from suffering and others who don't need to be freed from suffering. He or she realizes that absolutely all beings need help to attain happiness and all beings need to be liberated from suffering. So the concern is for each and every being. In his commentaries, *Patrul Rinpoche* stressed the need for meditating on impartiality from the beginning of Buddhist practice. Normally, we meditate on the *four immeasurables* as they appear in the prayers which is in the order of limitless love, limitless compassion, limitless joy, and limitless impartiality. *Patrul Rinpoche* stresses the need for meditating on impartiality first because this removes the danger of having partial or biased love, partial or biased compassion. When we begin on the path, there is a strong tendency to have stronger love towards those we like and lesser love towards those we don't like. Once we have developed wisdom with this meditation, it becomes true love which cares for each and

every person without any bias. This is the purest compassion because it is impartial and equal.

We meditate first to cultivate impartiality, then we go on to meditate on great love, then on great compassion, and finally on *bodhichitta*. The first immeasurable, impartiality, means not being influenced by attachment or aggression. Great love means wanting everyone to attain happiness. Great compassion means wanting to free everyone from suffering. Bodhichitta, however, is subtler as it is the wish to attain Buddhahood to help all beings. Its very nature is a loving and compassionate mind. What makes it subtle is that bodhichitta implies the development of wisdom (Skt. *prajna*). Without that wisdom, the love and compassion of the bodhisattva is incomplete love and incomplete compassion. With this incomplete love, we may really want to help others, but we may be ineffectual and may even harm the person we want to help. With incomplete compassion we really want to relieve the suffering of others and yet we don't know how to free them of their suffering. So, in the development of bodhichitta it is vital to develop our wisdom and understanding along with our love and compassion. This is the real meaning of bodhichitta and the reason why it is subtle and difficult to cultivate.

For example, suppose there was someone who was very hungry and we didn't have sufficient wisdom, we might think, "Oh, there's an easy solution, I can show him how to fish." We teach him how to fish and then in the short-term his hunger is alleviated and he can care for himself. However, we have shown him how to harm other beings¹² and so this act will create negative karma which will bring him nothing but trouble and difficulties in the future. So, even though our motivation was good and we exercised compassion, because of our ignorance, we weren't helping him at all, but made the situation worse. In other words, we need to act with love and compassion in a way that always brings good to all beings and takes into account the future implications of the act. This is the wisdom of the bodhisattva.

Another way of acting through love and compassion is not harming anyone. This is good in the short-term, but this doesn't result in lasting benefit. For example, we can give a poor person a gift of food and clothes. Although the motivation is good and it doesn't harm anyone, there is relatively little benefit because once the food or clothing are used up, the problem returns. The bodhisattva aims for is a very great and lasting benefit. So when a bodhisattva helps someone, he or she tries always to give that person the very best, which is to establish them on the very best path. If we can show someone how to enter the supreme path, then the benefit is great and will increase not just immediately, but throughout all time. This doesn't harm others and helps the person develop in every aspect. So the love, compassion, and care that the bodhisattva has brings everyone to the supreme path and is really what is meant by true love, compassion, and the activity of the bodhisattva.

The bodhisattva's pure motivation is extremely powerful and skillful. For instance, communism also has a view or philosophy, but spreading that philosophy involved great armies, vast amounts of wealth, and a great deal of fighting and violence. Even all those armies and military equipment didn't really convince people of the truth of communism. In contrast, the Buddha didn't spend millions to propagate his ideas or employ vast armies with sophisticated weapons to convince people of the validity of what he was saying. He just had a begging bowl and taught many people. Because of his powerful and pure motivation, his ideas touched millions and millions of people and his teachings are still spreading. When the Buddha taught the dharma, he did it with the greatest love for everyone without any bias. He did it without wishing to bring harm to a single sentient being. He did it with a very pure compassion and wisdom. After 2,500 years all of his teachings are still perfectly intact and are still spreading and touching others without any effort on the Buddha's part showing the power of his pure motivation.

The bodhisattva's motivation of the Mahayana is vast, far-reaching, and extremely powerful. Of all the things that one tries to awaken in the Mahayana this motivation is really the key. From the very beginning one tries to develop this very vast and powerful attitude in which one develops love and compassion along with wisdom that is unbiased and a genuine desire to free everyone from suffering. This approach is the very core of bodhichitta, the driving force or motivation. The opposite of this is to have a biased mind and this selfish attitude poisons the environment. Bodhichitta, on the other hand, is very beneficial for oneself and for all others. So, when someone has bodhichitta, whatever he or she does, is like medicine or *healing nectar* (Skt. *amrita*) which brings calmness, peace, and the coolness discussed before. It is very beneficial and is like a great and powerful medicine. It just flows out quite spontaneously and naturally from the presence of one's bodhichitta. Take the supreme example of bodhichitta: when the Buddha taught, he led a very simple life and everything happened spontaneously around him. These far-reaching effects were a completely natural outflow of this very therapeutic healing, coming from the very pure motivation which he had. This is very special. If one looks, for instance, at the Catholic church, one can see that it is a very powerful organization and a great deal of effort goes into spreading the doctrine as an organized business. There are missionaries and a definite effort to spread the philosophy and view. Even though there is all that effort and organization, it does not necessarily spread the view of Catholicism. With the Buddhist dharma, in contrast, there is the natural radiance of bodhichitta and the activity of the Buddha which through his very pure mind allows the dharma and its meaning to spread from one person to another in a very spontaneous and natural way.

The two main characteristics of the Buddha's activity are its spontaneity and its lasting power. One can see how various cultures of the past such as the Greek civilization influenced the world and one can see how that influence was very short-

lived. The activity of the Buddha, however, is spreading and increasing all the time without any break in continuity and is always effective wherever it is. The Buddha's activity is also always appropriate and fresh. In the first centuries after the Buddha's passing away, the Buddha's activity was very appropriate. Even 2,000 years later it is still very meaningful and appropriate.

The view or approach of a bodhisattva to the Mahayana teachings is rooted in the second turning of the wheel of dharma. This second main phase of Buddha's teachings is called "the second turning" or sometimes "the intermediate turning." The first turning was concerned with the Four Noble Truths and was the basis for the Theravada. The second turning was the main basis for the Mahayana. The main topic of the Buddha's teaching in this turning is what is called voidness or emptiness.¹³ The Buddha described the empty nature of both outer phenomena of the universe and inner phenomena in the mind of the perceiver. Then later on, in the third turning, the Buddha mainly taught about wisdom (Skt. *jñāna*).

When Thrangu Rinpoche was in Germany there was one person who said that he appreciated Rinpoche's teachings very much, but when it came to the teachings on emptiness, they somehow made him feel depressed and uncomfortable. He said that if Rinpoche taught more about the existence of something rather than nonexistence of something, it would probably make him feel better. Because of this discomfort, emptiness will be explained in terms of the simultaneity of emptiness and interdependence called interdependent origination.

Interdependent Origination

Properly speaking, all phenomena are empty. This emptiness, however, does not mean phenomena are completely nonexistent. It is not a blankness of everything. What it means is that all things depend upon one another for their manifestation because they are interrelated. What we have seen before is that we project a global idea of “I” onto what is in fact many, many different things; so that when we look for the “I” we cannot find it as a substantial entity. We find on closer examination a complete absence of “I,” an emptiness of “I.” Yet, we can see that in the relative sense because of the way we project this idea, there is a certain relative existence of the “I” in terms of these projections. So, sometimes we associate this idea of self with our body, sometimes with our consciousness, and sometimes we even associate “I” or “mine” with the country that we live in. Therefore, the idea of “I” is related to something, it is based on something, it depends on something like the body or the idea of a country. And yet, when we look for it, we can’t find it. It is empty.

When one studies emptiness, one examines how things appear, that is, how existence manifests and is dependent on everything being interdependent. All outer phenomena are related and rest upon one another. Yet, when one looks for the “things” being existent in themselves independently, one finds emptiness; they simply don’t exist.

For instance, if I take a two-inch and a four-inch stick of incense, the four-inch stick is the longer one and the two-inch stick is the shorter one. If I show this to a hundred people and ask, “Which one is the longer one?” they would all say that the four-inch stick was definitely the longer one. Then when I add a six-inch stick and remove the two-inch stick, the four-inch stick becomes the shorter one. If I ask a hundred people they will all say that the six-inch stick is the longer one and the four-inch stick is the shorter one. So I can’t really say this is long or this is short without seeing the interrelationship of the

two. There is the relative definition of things and that definition depends on other factors to which the thing is related. Things depend upon one another; they are interdependent; and this is the way all phenomena manifest to us. They don't have a meaning and significance by themselves; their significance emerges because of their relationship to other things.

There is an interdependence of all phenomena. That dependence applies to everything, but this dependence is particularly strong in terms of the labeling and recognizing the mind of the observer. If one takes away the observer with the ideas of long-short or large-small, then things by themselves don't have largeness or smallness. It is only when an observer is present and from this relative point of view decides that this is large, this is small, this is good, this is bad, this is beautiful, this is ugly, etc. Without the observing mind, these characteristics aren't present. So, the pleasantness or unpleasantness of phenomena depend upon the person relating to it. If someone is attached to an object thinking they want it, it becomes a nice and desirable thing. If it is something they don't like, it becomes distasteful, something to get rid of. All of this depends upon the observer's mind; interdependence takes place mainly between the defining mind and the apparent world.

Thus, the way things are defined depends on the individual who is observing and defining. For instance, if two tigers see each other, they find each other quite attractive. They think, "Oh, how nice" when they see each other. However, when a man sees a tiger, he thinks, "Oh, this is terrible!" not "Oh, what an attractive thing." Then the other way around, if two people meet each other they think, "Oh, how nice. That's my friend." Yet when a tiger sees someone, he doesn't think, "Oh, that's nice. It's a human." He thinks, "Yum, food!" So we see from these different relationships that the quality of nice, attractive, food, or frightening is not contained within the object itself, but depends upon who is relating to that object and the way we label, define, and conceive of that object. We tend to label and

define everything and we conceive of objects as real even though our concept is based on a relative, dependent process; things just manifest to us and because of this they have reality for us.

It should be obvious that the conventional existence of things depends upon the mind of the observer. Because of this, the Buddha gave teachings on the simultaneity of emptiness and interdependence and showed how these affect us. Interdependence, relative existence, and emptiness go hand in hand; the two are simultaneous and in combination. As we have seen in the example of the tigers and people, it is not that there is an absolute quality permanently engraved into the object; it is a relative quality that is there because of the observer. Because of interdependence in the relative world, there is this manifestation of these various relative qualities. Yet, when we examine them closely, there is nothing of an absolute value to be found in them. If we look for the absolute quality of beauty, edibility, or as we saw with the sticks, the absolute quality of longness-shortness, bigness-smallness, etc. these qualities cannot be found.

On the relative level, things continue to manifest to us, even though on the ultimate level they are empty. This means that suffering and all things happen on a conventional level. Yet, when we really search, we can never find the suffering, only the emptiness of suffering. So, in our relative life, we have all these various experiences which are interdependent. In this deluded existence we produce the various disturbing emotions; sometimes we are attached to things, sometimes we become aggressive towards various people; sometimes we become jealous or proud. The way to overcome these disturbing emotions is not to work with the outer phenomena, but to work with the mind which experiences these things. So, for instance, we have an enemy; we can't just get rid of the enemy because, if we were to kill the enemy, then his or her mother, father, brothers or sisters would end up being our enemies. So destroying the outer enemy is not very practical.

Whereas if we can work with our mind which relates to that person as an enemy and we can change that relationship to love and compassion and patience with what is taking place, the situation of an enemy is no longer there because the interdependence between us and “enemy” has been changed. To help us learn how to undergo this sort of transformation the Buddha taught the simultaneity of emptiness and interdependence.

Conventional and Ultimate Truth

We may wonder if realizing the absolute or ultimate truth doesn't make everyday life and ordinary things meaningless. It does not because when we gain realization into the ultimate nature of phenomena, everyday life does not contradict this understanding, but is a part of it. This is called the realization of the two truths. This means that we study the ultimate level the way things (or phenomena) really are and on the conventional level we study the way things occur according to the laws of interdependence. The conventional world has its relative truth and the ultimate also has its truth. If it weren't like that, ultimate truth would be called “the truth” and conventional truth would be called “lies.” But it is called the ultimate truth and the conventional truth because it is understanding the true nature of phenomena when we look at the ultimate level or understanding the way phenomena manifest when we look at the conventional level.

When we realize both of these truths together, it helps us to live in the relative and it is of great practical use. For instance, if someone becomes angry and aggressive towards us, normally we become excited and flare up and fight back. If we realize that what is taking place is a relative and dependent situation, and we are aware of the two truths, then we don't need to strike back. Because we don't strike back, we don't harm ourselves by generating negative karma and we don't harm the other person. So the two truths are useful. We can see

the two things happening: the relative situation emerging and the value of the ground of ultimate truth.

It is the same with desire. Normally we are subject to desire and wanting things. If we can't get them, we become upset thinking, "I must have that. I can't carry on without it." or "I need it." And if we don't get it, our life becomes very miserable. Or if we have something like a precious statue or vase and one day it gets scratched or breaks, we become upset and feel, "Now it is ruined. I loved that thing." However, when we understand relative and ultimate truth, we realize there is something useful to be learned if we get it or don't get it. Therefore we develop equanimity. We don't build a situation of desire or become heart-broken if something gets scratched or spoiled. So understanding the two truths enables us to live very skillfully and once we have that deep realization, then we still go on trying to make the relative world more beneficial. It all becomes like a play or a dream. We are still working to make a beneficial situation, but because there is no longer any grasping or attachment, we work in a more relaxed way.

We may think wanting to practice the dharma is also grasping. But there is a difference between desire and desire for good which is often called "aspiration." In Tibetan these are two different words. Desire (Tib. *chagpa*) means wanting things for oneself. It has the feeling of attachment, involvement, grasping, and self-interest. Aspiration (Tib. *möpa*) has the meaning of concern with positive things, of helping others, and of seeing what is necessary and wishing to do what is necessary and useful. As our wisdom and insight grows, hopefully, our desires will decrease. Our aspiration will increase because of the increase of wisdom and insight. An example of this might be that we fall asleep and begin to dream of being attacked by a tiger. We are full of fear and if there is someone nearby who is clairvoyant, he or she would see what we are dreaming and would know we were dreaming of a tiger. So the clairvoyant wakes us up and says, "There is no need to be frightened of the tiger. It's just a dream. It is not really

there.” When we see the true nature of things (ultimate truth), our aspiration grows and we want to do what is beneficial and useful. We are like the clairvoyant person and aspire to help relieve the suffering we see in others.

The effect of attachment can be seen in the behavior of couples. If they are not very involved with each other and just like each other, then they can have a sweet and smooth relationship. But when they have great attachment and involvement in each other, then it only takes one of them to go somewhere for a few minutes or to talk to someone else to cause the other partner to ask, “What did you say? What did you do? Where did you go?” One can see that great involvement in the situation causes a lot of difficulties. When one develops wisdom, the attachment decreases and aspiration increases.

At Namo Buddha in Nepal (where Thrangu Rinpoche has his three-year retreat center) the Buddha in a former life gave his body to the tigress and her cubs who were starving. There was a great benefit to him when he saw the tigress and her cubs before him, because at that instant he realized that the thousands and thousands of previous physical lives had not really served much benefit to beings. Each time that he died his body was burned and buried, but it had not been of much use to anyone. He could see that there was the opportunity to actually use the substance of his body for some real benefit, to save lives by feeding the tigress and her cubs. Because he had this blend of compassion and wisdom, he knew that by giving so totally he would develop and perfect the *perfection* (Skt. *paramita*) of generosity and through its karmic power would give tremendous impetus to his development of wisdom in the future. The Buddha could then see not only the immediate benefit of giving himself to the tigress, but also see how this act would bring very great benefit in the future.

Luminous Clarity

The motivation and attitude of the bodhisattva and the Mahayana practitioner are composed of two main elements: the understanding of emptiness and the understanding of the *dharmadhatu* aspect. These are the main topics of Buddha's second turning of the wheel of dharma. With this view one sees how everything is empty, but at the same time within that emptiness everything takes place infallibly according to the process of interdependence. The second main aspect of the view of the bodhisattva is what is called the "luminous clarity" or the "wisdom" aspect. This is the main topic of the last turning of the wheel of dharma. This emptiness is not a great blank or voidness. If it were just that, it would be the very opposite of the idea of manifestation. If there is just emptiness, then there can be no manifestation because the two are incompatible with each other. To think of emptiness just in terms of voidness is not correct because emptiness is the non-presence of a thing, it is its true essence. Nevertheless, through a process of interdependence on a conventional level things do manifest: they take place simultaneously with emptiness. So, we can't think of emptiness in terms of just voidness because there is manifestation, yet when we look for the essence of the emptiness, we can't find it. So this emptiness has the nature of *luminous clarity* (Tib. *salwa*). The Tibetan word *salwa* is associated with the brightness of sunlight or a very powerful light. Once there is that brightness, everything can be seen and distinguished very clearly. So the nature of emptiness is luminous clarity because it has the ability to let things manifest very precisely from within it. This luminous clarity is synonymous with the wisdom aspect of emptiness because wisdom sees everything clearly. But that wisdom does not have a solid existence; therefore it is not an objective reality that we can feel an aversion or an attraction towards it. The very nature of this wisdom is emptiness. That is why we speak of the union of wisdom and emptiness. When we look at the very essence of

emptiness, we find it contains this very wisdom, this clarity, that understands everything. By analyzing that wisdom we discover no objective existence. So its very nature is emptiness; at one and the same time there is wisdom and there is emptiness.

Buddha-nature

The union of wisdom and emptiness is the essence of Buddhahood or what is called *Buddha-nature* (Skt. *tathagatagarba*) which contains the very seed, the potential of Buddhahood.¹⁴ It resides in each and every being and because of this essential nature, this heart nature, there is the possibility of reaching Buddhahood. Even though it is in everyone, it is not obvious nor does it manifest because it is obscured by the various thoughts and disturbing emotions which block realization.

That Buddha-nature is present in each and every being but does not always manifest. This is exemplified in the *Uttaratantra* by an image of a lotus flower, which is ugly when it is a bud. But inside it there is a small and perfect Buddha statue. At first one only sees this homely flower. Yet, when the flower blossoms one can see the form of the Buddha, which has always been there. Similarly, full Buddha-nature is in everyone's mind, yet its radiance and presence is covered up.

Another example given in the *Uttaratantra* is of honey surrounded by many bees. Honey is quite sweet and tasty but as long as it is surrounded by bees, one can't taste that sweetness. The example shows again that there is something at the very heart, yet because of these swarms of bees which represent our disturbing emotions, one can't gain access to something which has been there all the time.

The third example is of grains of rice inside their husks. To get the nutritional value from the grains one has to remove the shell and husk. Whether one husks the grain or not, there is always that same grain inside and as far as the grain is

concerned there is no difference. But if one wants to have access to the nutritive value, one must remove the shell.

The example of the statue of the Buddha inside the lotus shows how Buddha-nature is inside beings but is covered up by desires, attachments, and involvements. One has many different disturbing emotions. The first main disturbing emotion of attachment is represented by the lotus because when one finds something very attractive, one wants to be involved with it. The lotus flower at one stage is very beautiful and has a nice shape and color which is associated with beauty and attractiveness. Actually, when one considers it, the lotus has a very limited use apart from its beauty. Also that beauty changes—one day it very beautiful, the following days it wilts, fades and rots and the beauty is gone. This is the very nature of desire—at one point things seem very attractive but very quickly one realizes that they are not so useful or lasting as they seemed. In the example of the lotus it is not until the petals of the flower open and fall away that one can see the form of the Buddha that was there all the time. And it is the same with desires—until one's desires have been eliminated, one cannot see the Buddha-nature which has been inside sentient beings all the time.

The second example of honey points to the covering or blocking presence of the second disturbing emotion of aggression or anger which is characterized by bees. Honey itself is very sweet and tasty. This is like Buddha-nature which is very useful and beneficial for everyone. Yet, around the honey are all those bees whose nature is the very opposite. The bees sting and are very aggressive. As long as the bees are there, the situation is very difficult. So it is with the nature of aggression and anger which is also very unpleasant; it stings and hurts. The honey is there all the time and one can't get to the honey because the bees are all around it. If one can find a way of gradually getting rid of the bees, one can get the honey. Likewise, when one eliminates anger and aggression, one can develop this really beneficial Buddha-nature.

The third example of grains of rice inside their husks is used to point to the nature of the third main disturbing emotion which is ignorance or confusion. The husk is very tough and difficult to separate from the grain which makes it a good example of confusion which is also thick, strong, and difficult to get rid of. This confusion prevents us from having access to Buddha-nature.

Generally speaking, beings have a great deal of ignorance. Compared to animals, of course, humans are more clever in many respects and have more wisdom. But the wisdom of humans is quite limited. For instance, humans like ourselves can't see what is happening beyond the walls of this room; they can't see what is happening in the rest of the world. Knowledge stops where the wall is. Even though humans can see other people inside the walls, they have no idea apart from a few vague indications what's happening inside of people's mind because human perception doesn't stretch that far. Even when we think we perceive other's thoughts, we often make mistakes. If we have a friend, for instance, the friend goes out and we may start thinking, "I wonder what he is saying about me" and we develop a whole train of thought and become convinced that he is saying bad things about us. By the time he comes back there can even be a fight just because we have guessed the person's intentions wrongly. Or we may think an adversary is changing his intentions towards us by acting in an open way which can also cause a lot of trouble if the enemy in fact is still an enemy. It is hard for us to see things as they really are.

When we learn about the Buddha's teachings, we learn about the nature of desire, the nature of aversion, and so on. It takes a long time for us to understand what is really being taught. Even though we may know about the shortcomings of desire, yet due to our habitual patterns it takes a long time to act in a way which corresponds to our knowledge. The perception of the deeper aspects of truth is very hard for us to quickly understand because ignorance is so pervasive. That is why it is

compared to the husk of a grain: It is tough, hard, and takes a lot of effort to remove.

These three examples show how Buddha-nature is like a precious essence or jewel inside us, which is covered up by desire, aggression, and ignorance. The Buddha taught the dharma to show us how to have access to this precious Buddha-nature.

There is another example in the *Uttaratantra* which illustrates this. There's a very precious statue made of gold which ages ago had fallen and became covered with dirt. Because no one knows it's there, for generations and generations people leave their rubbish there and it becomes more and more covered because no one realizes it is underground. One day a man who is clairvoyant comes along and sees this precious golden statue under the ground. He then tells someone, "Do you know that there is a precious and beautiful golden statue there under the ground. All you need to do is dig it up, clean it, and you will own this extremely valuable thing." Someone with sense would heed the man, take the statue out of the ground, clean it, and possess what has been there for such a long time. This example is very vivid: Since the beginning of time this precious Buddha-nature has been in all beings, yet it has been covered with the dirt of the disturbing emotions. Because one doesn't realize one has this precious nature within, disturbing emotions build up. But then the Buddha who is like the man with clairvoyance tells us, "You know, there is Buddha-nature within you. All you need to do is uncover and clean it so all the exceptional qualities it has will manifest." Those who heed the Buddha's teachings can discover this incomparable thing which has been within us all the time and which we never knew was there until we were told. For that essence to be revealed we need to meditate on the truth, on the essence of phenomena, the way things really are. If we do that, we clean away all the delusions and disturbing emotions which have been covering up that essence. So we meditate on the essence of everything which is emptiness.

Through meditation we will discover this emptiness has within it wisdom and clarity. Through the process of becoming used to the emptiness and luminous clarity which is the universal essence or *dharmata* we will automatically eliminate all of the delusions which have been blocking that vision. Once we see the truth of phenomena, all the deluded aspects can't exist at the same time. So to clear away the obscurations and blockages to Buddha-nature, we need first to know about the essence of emptiness and clarity. Once we know it exists, we meditate on it to become closer and closer to Buddha-nature.

The Six Paramitas

The practice of the Mahayana of the bodhisattva is mainly concerned with the six perfections or *paramitas*. There are in fact ten¹⁵ paramitas but six of these are most commonly spoken of. So we will discuss the six paramitas which constitute the bodhisattva's practice.

The Buddha said that when we do dharma practice, it should be done in a genuine and heartfelt way. This means that when we practice dharma, we must not just do it as an outer show or pretense or like a theatrical performance where actors dress up as kings and ministers even though they are not really kings and ministers. We must practice dharma wholeheartedly and very properly with our body, speech, and mind. When we perform virtuous actions with our body, our mind should be there also working for dharma. When we say things, our mind should mean it as well. Practicing the dharma wholeheartedly is very important. If we do a prostration, for instance, our mind should also be filled with faith, devotion, and confidence to make that prostration meaningful. But if we just prostrate with the body and the mind is not involved with it, then it is more like theater with us just going through the movements, but the power is not there. It is the same when we recite mantras. If we recite a mantra and at the same time our mind is visualizing, we are filled with certainty, confidence, and faith; then all the

power of the mind will be there and it will be a very good practice. But if we just recite the mantras and our mind is elsewhere, then it is just a show and the power is not there. It is not necessarily a bad thing to just do a prostration or a mantra mouthing the words. It just means the power is not there; just as it is not necessarily a bad thing that people pretend to be king and ministers in the theater. So, if we really want to get everything possible out of practice, we need to do it very sincerely and wholeheartedly with our body, speech, and mind.

With this wholehearted approach the bodhisattva's practice is the practice of the six paramitas. The first is generosity which means giving. There is giving to those who are worse off than us such as the poor, needy, and hungry. Then there is giving to those who are better off than us which means offering them the three jewels. These are the two main areas of generosity of the bodhisattva. When giving to those who are worse off, what is important is compassion and when giving to those who are better off what is important is faith, devotion, and confidence. So when we give to the poor, it relieves their poverty and hunger temporarily because of our compassion. When we make offerings to the three jewels, we make an expression of devotion. If we never give to those worse off, then compassion isn't there and it is not complete. In the same way, if we don't make offerings to the three jewels, then our faith, confidence and appreciation in the meaning of the three jewels isn't quite right either. So offerings are a very important sign of what is going on in terms of compassion and devotion. Beside cultivating love, compassion, and devotion, the bodhisattva also has to actually practice the paramita of generosity.

The second paramita is moral or virtuous conduct. The very essence of virtuous conduct is that we do everything with love and compassion so we do not directly harm other beings. If we have love and compassion and yet harms other beings, it is a sign that our love and compassion isn't really there. So, if we are loving and compassionate, we must really never harm other beings. This is the bodhisattva's experience to love and

compassion. Therefore virtuous conduct is mainly concerned with the discipline of practicing right conduct with our body and speech so that we don't hurt others directly or indirectly.

Generosity and virtuous conduct depend mainly on ourself. If we make an effort to be loving and compassionate, it is relatively easy to develop generosity. Also, if we are loving and compassionate, it is relatively easy to maintain high moral conduct because this depends mainly on working with ourself.

The third paramita deals with something more difficult. It deals with how we react to situations arising from others, particularly what we do in the face of physical and verbal aggression from others. This is the paramita of forbearance, often called patience, which is remaining loving and compassionate in the face of aggression. The training of patience is the training of keeping our love and compassion in the face of those difficulties which come from other people. So if our love and compassion is incredibly stable, when others hit us, no matter how much they hurt us physically, we never respond in a like manner. Our only response is one of love, compassion, and understanding. In order to practice generosity, virtuous conduct, and patience in the face of difficulties, we need the fourth paramita of diligence to implement the first three paramitas and make them increase and become even more powerful factors in our life.

Diligence doesn't mean some terrible drudge or difficult effort. Rather it is very joyful, meaningful, and vital. If we really think something has benefit, we value it, and we will do it very joyfully and out of this there is an automatic flow of diligence and industry. If we think something is not very important, then we will think it is a drag and a bore and we will do a little bit and then become lazy and stop. Later we may try to do a little bit more and stop again because of laziness.

Diligence means to practice without falling under the influence of laziness and practicing because we realize the tremendous value of that practice. Once we have gained an insight into its value, effortlessly there will be joy and

keenness to get on with it. Then automatically we will put lots and lots of effort into it to make it a very productive thing. We will become diligent thus increasing the preceding paramitas.

The fifth paramita is meditative concentration. The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom*. This is the active word and the word is derived from the root (Tib. *khom*) which means “to accustom oneself to something.” So to meditate means to commit and to accustom oneself to meditation. It really means training the mind to settle. Even though we say “my mind,” the mind which belongs to us is not under our control. Because we have not worked on it very much, our mind tends to be very distracted; it switches from one thing to another all the time. For instance, we may decide, “I am not going to get angry anymore.” Even though we decide this in one moment, we don’t have control over our mind and so we fall under the influence of anger a little later. We may promise not to be subject to desires any more and then we lose control and our mind is suddenly full of desires. So, we think “my mind is under my control,” but when we look at it carefully there is not that much control there. It is not like our hand. If we want the hand to go somewhere, we can put it there. If we want it to come back, we can bring it back. But the mind is not nearly so tamed and doesn’t respond to those commands so well. This is mainly because we haven’t really done much work in bringing it under control. The word “meditation” has this implication of training or habituating our mind so that it does what we want. We habituate our mind by meditating again and again. This is the nature of meditation and the main point of the fifth paramita is mental stability through meditation.

The sixth paramita is wisdom or *prajna* in Sanskrit. How much happiness we get out of worldly things depends on how much understanding and wisdom we have. So wisdom is the very root of happiness and joy and determines the value of all other things. In the ultimate sense the benefit that we can get depends very much on our wisdom and understanding. Also the ability to help others depends on the degree of our wisdom.

Developing ourselves also depends on the degree to which we have cultivated wisdom. For all these reasons wisdom and understanding are the very root of happiness and out of them joy emerges. How then do we cultivate this wisdom? For a Buddhist it is cultivated by the three main approaches of studying, contemplating, and meditating.

The Three Knowledges

The first knowledge or *prajna* in Sanskrit is studying, an act which does not have direct access to wisdom. We don't naturally know how to develop wisdom, so we turn to the teachings of the Buddha. By studying the teachings, we begin to grasp the ways to the development of wisdom. Now study in itself will not bring the growth of much wisdom. We need to go on to the second *prajna* which is contemplation of the teachings in which we think again and again about the meaning of what we have studied to really get to the heart of it. Even this won't bring about the highest, deepest, or ultimate benefit; we need to take the third *prajna* which is to meditate. It is through meditation that we actually attain the ultimate emergence of wisdom. Of the three main modes of developing wisdom, by far the most important one is the wisdom that emerges from our meditation.

All beings have already within them Buddha-nature or this Buddha-potential which has the essence of luminous clarity and wisdom. This is the very highest wisdom, the power to know everything very clearly and directly. All the power of wisdom is already there, but it is still obscured. Until we have purified the obscurations covering it, we can't use that wisdom because we don't have access to the great clarity within us. We see this even when we try to analyze a simple object. Between us and the thing we are trying to understand there is this intermediate space full of thoughts. We interact with things through a great layer of intellectual activity or subtle subconscious thoughts. It is therefore very hard to actually

know something directly because this constant interference of thought takes place. If we study for even a few minutes a great number of thoughts just pop up in our mind. From this we can begin to understand what an obstacle thoughts present to our actual development and understanding.

When we meditate, the purpose of meditation is for our mind to become stable and no longer distracted by the influence of thoughts. Our mind becomes calm and under control. Once the mind is calm, we can have a much more direct and immediate contact with reality and develop wisdom more rapidly. This is why the wisdom which develops in meditation is important.

The Fruition

So far we have examined the view, the meditation, and the practice in the Mahayana. Now we will move on to fruition which is Buddhahood. The word for “Buddha” in Tibetan has two syllables, *sang gay*. These show the two main qualities or principle aspects of this highest goal of Buddhahood. The first is the aspect of purity which means one is free from all the impurities of the disturbing emotions, from ignorance, and from all the obscurations. The syllable *sang* means “awakened,” “awakened from that sleep of ignorance,” or “purified from that ignorance.” The second syllable *gay* means “blossomed” because being free from impurities, all of the deep wisdom of the Buddha becomes present and this clarity and knowledge has completely blossomed and is completely free from obscurations. So Buddhahood is the complete blossoming of the highest wisdom and purity.

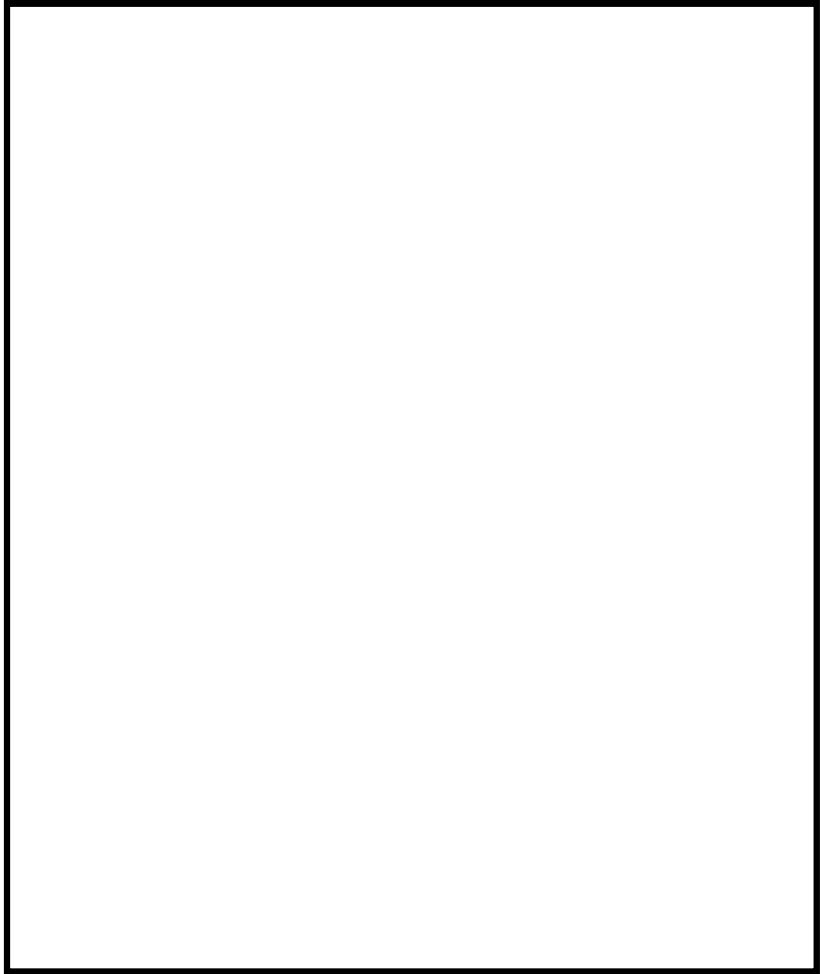
The teachings of the Buddha can be divided into three main levels or *yanas* which are the Hinayana (Theravada), the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. Another way of analyzing them is to look at them in terms of the *sutra* and the *tantra* level of teaching. The Sanskrit word *sutra* was translated into Tibetan as *do* which means “teachings” or “explanation.” Generally,

the sutra level of teachings contains all of the explanations, all the ways of presenting the vast meaning that the Buddha gave in his life of teachings. So the sutra tradition is a way of presentation of the Buddha's teachings.

The other aspect is the tantra. When the Sanskrit word "tantra" was translated into Tibetan, it became *gyu*, which means "continuum." Sometimes it is called *mantra* which in Tibetan is *ngak*. This word "continuum" shows that there is this presence of Buddha-nature in all sentient beings. They have had this essence from the very beginning of existence and will possess until they reach Buddhahood. So, by gradually working on the path, step by step, one develops one's full potential and reaches Buddhahood. This constant or continuous presence within us is what is worked with in the tantric teachings. These are teachings related to the Vajrayana which will be discussed next.

**The Third Vehicle
of Buddhist Practice**

The Vajrayana



Dorje tekpa (Vajrayana)

by

Thrangu Rinpoche

Chapter 3

The Vajrayana

The word *vajra* means “immutability” or “indestructibility.” On the conventional level there are all the samsaric phenomena which are impermanent and change from one thing into another. On the ultimate level the essence is always there and never changes and is not affected by one’s relative viewpoint. The main concern of the tantric teachings then is working on this changeless, immutable essence. That is why it is called the Vajrayana or “the vehicle of the changeless.”

There are two vehicles: the *sutrayana* and the Vajrayana. The *sutrayana* or the “sutra vehicle” is more related to cause, than result. It is called “the cause which is the vehicle with characteristics” because by developing this sutra level, one learns all that is necessary to create the conditions to achieve the effect or result. The actual result is the Vajrayana. To attain the result, one needs to train in the *sutrayana*. The sutras show the nature of phenomena. They show what is virtuous and what is not; they show the value of practicing certain things and giving up other things; they show the nature of cause and effect (karma); and what one is trying to develop and what one is trying to eliminate in meditation. We need to train in the sutras first to understand how the relative level works. So that is why it is called “the causal condition with characteristics.” Sometimes it is also called “the vast aspect” of practice because it touches upon so many different things.

The sutras are mainly concerned with the development of the various causal conditions for realization. In the tantric approach, one goes directly to the very elements that bring results in one's practice. This result aspect is called the "Vajrayana" or "the quintessential mantra."

The problem with the word "tantra" is that it is not only used by Buddhists but also by Hindus. Apart from having the same name, there is little correspondence between the Buddhist and Hindu tantras except that both have their origins in India and used Sanskrit as their main language. In many Western books there is a tendency to suggest that the Buddhist tantra is related to Hindu tantra. There are, however, no similarities in philosophy, in practice, in point of view, in origin, or in teachers. So Buddhism and Hinduism are different. The Hindu tantra, for instance, is based on the idea of an *atma* or a "soul" or a "higher self." One practices various yogic meditations using subtle channels, energies, and drops¹⁶ (Skt. *nadi*, *bindu*, and *prana*) with the idea of relating them to the *atma*. The Buddhist philosophy, whether on the sutra or tantra level, involves trying to understand the absence of self or higher self. So from the beginning these two approaches are very different.

When the dharma teachings went to Tibet, there was the simultaneous development of the sutra and the tantra approach. The sutras were studied mainly as a way to understand basic dharma. The tantras were applied principally as a way of meditating. So first one would study the sutras to find out the way that things were and gain a conviction in the meaning of Buddha's teachings establishing a sound theoretical basis in them. When it came to actually meditating, there was a great emphasis on the tantra or Vajrayana techniques in Tibet. So in Tibet there was the sutrayana level of meditation called *je gom* which is usually translated as "analytical meditation" in which one gradually works through the analysis of various phenomena understanding the various objects of meditation, and develops wisdom, which emerges through analysis. The

meditation related to the Vajrayana is called *jo gom* which is usually translated as “placement meditation.” In this meditation one concentrates not on the analysis of external objects, but goes directly to resting deeply in the mind, and by doing this, one quickly experiences the deeper aspects of meditation.

The reason the Vajrayana was favored in Tibet was that it causes a much more rapid and direct way of reaching the goal of enlightenment. The analytical sutrayana approach tends to take much more time although both approaches lead to the same result. Analytical meditation is mainly based on the development of wisdom. Vajrayana meditation is mainly based on faith and confidence. To develop sutrayana meditation one needs wisdom; to gain the results of Vajrayana meditation one needs faith. Generally, the sutrayana was studied at the same time that one was meditating on the Vajrayana level so these two methods could reinforce each other. If a person follows only the sutra approach, the Mahayana path can take a long time. For example, to develop the paramita of generosity one must develop one’s generosity to such a point that one would give up even one’s arms, legs, or even the whole body. The cultivation of all these paramitas is a very large task. Compared to this, the Vajrayana is a more simple and easy task. When properly practiced, it enables one to achieve the goal of Buddhahood through *skillful means* in a single lifetime.

The Vajrayana has several names. Sometimes it is called in Tibetan *dorje tekpa* or “the Vajrayana” where *dorje* is “vajra” and *tepa* is “yana.” Another word used for the Vajrayana is the Tibetan word *sang gnak* which is often inappropriately translated as the “secret mantrayana.” The actual meaning of the Tibetan syllable *gnak* or “mantra” here is being able to achieve the goal very quickly or quickly getting the results one wants. The syllable *sang* in the word is sometimes translated as “secret,” but it really means “very vital” or something which is “quintessential” or “necessary and vital.” For example, a machine has many vital parts which allow it to work. These parts are called the *sang* in Tibetan meaning the very core, or

the very essence of the machine. So *dorje tegpa* actually means a very “indestructible vehicle” which contains the vital thing which enables one to reach the goal very quickly. When this word is translated as “secret” it gives the incorrect impression of something which needs to be covered up. This is incorrect because the word *sang gnak* doesn’t mean “a secret,” but it means “the vital essence.”

The Importance of the Guru

In the Vajrayana the skillful means to achieve the goal is divided into the *creation stage* (Tib. *che rim*) and the *completion stage* (Tib. *dzo rim*) of meditation. In the creation stage we are learning how to transform our perception into pure appearances. To achieve this purity, we meditate basically on the three roots. These are the *gurus* who are the root of the blessings and the transmission of abilities, the *yidams* who are the root of the *spiritual powers (siddhis)*, and the protectors who are the *dakas* and *dakinis* who are the source of all activities to be accomplished. By meditating on these, we are able to touch the level of the pure dimension in our meditation. In the Vajrayana path our wishes are very immediate. When we try to attain the blessing or the power of realization, we find the source of that blessing is the Buddha. But the Buddha lived 2,500 years ago so it’s hard to have much confidence that the blessing will cover such a distance in time between us and the Buddha. Nevertheless, this is not important because our own *root guru* and the gurus of the lineage have this very same *blessing*, this power of dharma, in exactly the same amount as the Buddha. The Buddha transmitted this power of realization or blessing to his students. They perfected it and it has been handed down absolutely perfectly and unspoiled to the present day so there is absolutely no difference between receiving it from them and having received it 2,500 years ago from the Buddha. This is the gift of the gurus of the lineage. We receive

this by opening ourselves to the blessings and transmissions through *guru yoga* practice to the gurus of the lineage.

To be open enough to receive the blessings and transmissions, we need to do *guru yoga* practice and to think of our guru as being exactly the same as the Buddha. Even more than that, if we think he or she is even better than the Buddha, we will be able to receive the fullness of the dharma and the blessing it contains. It might not be apparent that our guru is identical to the Buddha. But the guru has all the transmissions and by receiving the essence of the teachings from the guru, we will be able to develop the practices just as if we had studied with the Buddha himself. So there is no difference between studying under our own guru or studying with the Buddha. The guru is even better than the Buddha. We are not able to make a connection with the historical Buddha by meeting him but we are able to establish this connection with our own guru. In the Vajrayana we really need to believe that our guru is exactly the same as the Buddha and if we believe that, we can open ourselves enough to receive all of the guru's teachings. If we don't have that confidence, then we are going to doubt the guru's abilities and once we doubt these teachings, we can't put them into practice. If we can't put them into practice, we can't get the full results from them.

The root guru and the gurus of the lineage are the source of the blessing or the transmission of realization. The most important thing in receiving these blessings is our faith, devotion, and confidence in the gurus and their teachings. For example, imagine that there is a very large sparkling diamond. Just seeing it immediately starts us thinking about how we can get it. We really want it and appreciate it and will work very hard and do lots of things to obtain it. If it were, however, just brass or copper, we are not going to strive to get it in the same way. If it were just trash, rather than striving for it, we will try to get rid of it. So how we relate to something, how much we want to have it, depends on our attitude towards it. So the vital teachings and transmissions the guru holds are valuable only if

we have great faith, confidence, and devotion in them. With these qualities we will work hard to develop our abilities.

Meditation on Yidams

When we do guru yoga we meditate on those gurus in an outer¹⁷ way to gain this blessing. Actually the word for “blessing” in Tibetan is *jinlap*. It has the meaning of “the power of dharma,” which gives insight, the idea of the very pith or potency of dharma. So this word for “blessing” has the meaning of a “transmission” of dharma. The source of that transmission or power comes from the guru and we meditate on the guru through guru yoga. In particular, Kagyus meditate on Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa and the Karmapas.¹⁸ They meditate on them externally to gain this closeness and receive this blessing or transmission from them.

We also meditate on the yidams who are the source of our accomplishment. The word “accomplishment” is *siddhi* in Sanskrit and *ngödrub* in Tibetan. The Tibetan *ngödrub* means to “actually complete something.” What we accomplish is the fruition of our dharma practice. In the Vajrayana there are two kinds of accomplishment: the general and the supreme accomplishment. The supreme accomplishment is the achievement of Buddhahood by meditating on the yidam.

On the path we progress from stage to stage and develop the miraculous powers and the very deep transcendent insights which come from the yidam. This general accomplishment comes from the development of dharma. In the beginning we study the dharma. In the intermediate phase we reflect very deeply and develop a much deeper understanding of what we have studied. Eventually, through meditation, we enter into the real heart of the meaning of dharma. It is through this process of the development of dharma that Buddhahood emerges. In this way, all the general and extraordinary accomplishments emerge.

The Buddha taught 84,000 aspects of the vast dharma. It would be difficult to master all of these. Fortunately, we don't need to master all 84,000 aspects to attain Buddhahood. In fact, just fully mastering one aspect of what Buddha taught will lead to Buddhahood. We can practice meditation on a yidam and gain Buddhahood. Yidam practice is a very powerful practice that combines the essence of the dharma. So if we properly do the creation stage and the completion stage of meditation on a particular yidam, we can traverse the whole path of dharma and gain all its benefits.

The Tibetan word *yidam* means “to commit oneself” or “to set one's mind on something.” The syllable *yi* means “mind” and the syllable *dam* means “to commit.” So in yidam practice one becomes determined to meditate on one of these yidams and to follow this practice all the way through until the attainment of enlightenment. So one vows, “through this yidam practice I will attain the very highest state, the supreme accomplishment of Buddhahood.” One sets one's mind very determinedly on the decision to gain all the beneficial powers by the practice of yidam meditation. These yidams are the transcendental aspects of one's mind's commitment so this is what yidam deities lead us to see.¹⁹

There are many different forms of yidams. There are yidams associated in particular with the development of skillful means—the male aspect—and yidams in particular associated with the development of wisdom—the female aspect. There are yidams which are peaceful in their appearance that help develop peace and great calmness. Then there are yidams which are wrathful which help develop the dynamism of activity in order to accomplish all the good activities one wishes to do. There are yidams of different colors related to the kind of activity that one wants to develop. For instance, for peaceful activity, there is the white yidam *Chenrezig* which is a male form of the yidam who represents skillful means. *Tara* on the other hand, is a female form or wisdom aspect of peaceful activity. *Vajrasattva* is another example of the

peaceful form, while *Vajrayogini* is an example of the female wrathful form. So there are many, many different forms and appearances of the yidam. There are so many different forms because the practitioner's aspirations and abilities are so very different from one another that one yidam doesn't suit everyone. So these yidams correspond to the various needs of the different students at various stages of practice.

Most people have an impure perception. We therefore meditate on yidams to help eliminate the various impure mental habits and conditioning that we have built up over many lifetimes. We meditate on the yidams in the creation stage to carry out this purification. So in yidam practice there is the stage of disassociating ourselves mentally from impure images by letting our awareness dissolve into emptiness. From that emptiness we begin to associate with the yidam who is the manifestation of the pure qualities. So through meditation on the yidam, we condition ourselves to purity and help free ourselves from our impure conditioning.

The concepts of birth and death (that is, arising, generation, and dissolution) are purified by meditation on the yidam. In the initial stage of meditation we let everything dissolve into emptiness to purify our concepts of death. For birth, we meditate, for example, on the emergence from emptiness of the seed syllable of TAM and then meditate on the gradual emergence of the various details of visualization. This purifies the various ideas and concepts of birth. We also have ideas about our own inferiority and this tendency holds us back. To purify this hesitancy, we meditate on the yidam in space so the wisdom aspect charged with the real presence, materializes in space before us. We identify with that wisdom aspect to overcome this identification with the weak or inferior side of our nature.

There are many different styles of meditating on the yidams. Sometimes we visualize them above our head. Sometimes we visualize that we have become completely transformed into their form. And sometimes we visualize them

in space in front of us. Generally speaking, there are many different styles of visualization because there are different needs, aspirations, and stages of development of meditators. Even though there are many different ways of meditating on the yidams, the dominant way of visualizing the yidam is to visualize oneself as being transformed into the yidam. This eliminates previous impure conditioning and helps us to learn how to relate to the purity that the yidams represent. For example, we visualize a peaceful yidam as being extremely beautiful and inspiring and adorned with beautiful clothes and precious ornaments and so on. In the same way, we visualize wrathful yidams as really terrifying. If we only pretend to visualize, it becomes fabricated and we don't get the full benefit of the practice. Whereas, if we meditate with great conviction, relating to and identifying with these various forms; this will actually bring about a change in our meditation developing it and making it much more stable.

There are many reasons why we meditate on yidams. We identify with these pure forms to free ourselves from the conditioning and impurity which has been built up in the past. We visualize the real presence of the deity to develop confidence in the existence of this purity. If we practice *Shamatha* meditation by itself, we find it quite difficult to attain peace and insight without a lot of effort. However, visualizing and identifying with the yidams is a very useful way of developing our *Shamatha* meditation. If we just try to rest our mind, it is very hard to calm it down. Whereas if we try to visualize the appearance, the face, the hands, the clothing of the yidams, we find it is easier to do. Through accustoming ourselves to yidam meditation, the power of *Shamatha* meditation will develop quite quickly.

With all meditation if one is too tense and tries too hard, one won't achieve very much. On the other extreme, if one is too relaxed, one won't receive much benefit either. This is also true with yidam meditation. If one is too tense, one won't be able to visualize very clearly in the creation stage. If one is too

relaxed, the yidam won't appear either. However, with the development of one's power to visualize a deity, one's Shamatha meditation will increase. They help each other: Shamatha meditation helps the visualization and the visualization helps the Shamatha. Also in the different stages of yidam meditation there is usually a period of time when one just rests in the peace of Shamatha meditation.

When doing yidam practice, one usually recites a mantra. Sometimes one recites the mantra at the same time as visualizing the yidam and sometimes one just recites the mantra, and at other times one just rests in meditation. There are various ways of doing yidam practice but the overall idea is to employ the body, speech, and mind at the same time. For the body aspect, one sits properly; for speech one recites the mantra, and with mind one visualizes the deity or rests in placement meditation. The mantra recitation is also beneficial because even the sound of the actual mantra supports the development of meditation because it has its own power. Great benefit also comes to the mind and the development of one's power of absorption by meditating in the creation stage of yidam practice. The actual methods for doing these practices are explained in the instructions for practicing the *sadhanas* such as the Medicine Buddha sadhana, the Tara sadhana, or the Chenrezig sadhana. The main idea is that the yidams are the root of the accomplishment of dharma.

The Sangha and Dharma Protectors

Generally speaking, our friends and helpers on the path of dharma are the *sangha*. The sangha are our dharma friends because they tell us of the good qualities we can develop and show us what obstacles might arise and how to avoid them. They can even help us foresee the obstacles which may arise and help us steer clear of them. They also give us support and guidance in the areas of increasing beneficial activities and eliminating harmful activities. In the past there have been

many Buddhas and bodhisattvas who have been very great friends of beings. Meditating on the protectors in the creation stage of meditation is a way of connecting with their power which helps us remove the various difficulties within and without us. So we pray to them for their help and that help materializes through the wisdom aspect. These Buddhas and bodhisattvas appear in the form of the various dharma protectors. They are called *dharma protectors* and we should never make the mistake of thinking that they are our personal protectors. We should not relate to them to increase our personal interests or to harm other people. The dharma protectors serve entirely to increase all favorable conditions for our dharma practice and to help us remove the various obstacles which can arise in our dharma practice. It is very important that we really believe that they are really there and that we have confidence in their power to help. If we do not have this complete confidence, we will receive little benefit from them. The protectors can remove the obstacles; they can really help us achieve our dharma goals. In Vajrayana practices we can make offerings of *torma* to the protectors and this helps increase our confidence in the protector's help. If we do these things properly and have great faith and confidence in their helping power, the help will really materialize and we will benefit from it. In this way the protectors are the root of activity in the dharma.

The Completion Stage of Meditation

Meditation in the Vajrayana is divided mainly into the creation stage and the completion stage. Previously, the creation stage or the visualizing stage of practice was discussed. Now the completion stage of Vajrayana meditation will be discussed.

The main focus in Vajrayana meditation is working with our mind. It is said that what manifests, what appears to us, is the mind. If we can understand this, we can understand how even the things in the external world—trees, mountains, rocks,

flowers, etc.—are creations and experiences of the mind. If we can analyze this carefully enough, we can understand this. Whether these external things are or are not the projections or creations of the mind is not too important because happiness, suffering, and our relationships with the world are very definitely related to our mind. Whether we are attached to things or whether we are repelled by things depends on our mind. Whether we are enjoying what is taking place or not depends on our mind. That's obvious. If two people see the same movie, for example, one may think it is the greatest movie ever made and the other the worst. The movie obviously is the same, but how we feel depends upon our mind. All of our relationships are determined by our mind and our attitude. Also all the disturbing emotions and all the products of these disturbing emotions are rooted in our mind. Also, all the good qualities of the path emerge from what we do with our mind. For this reason we work principally on the mind in the Vajrayana.

The Four Foundation Practices

Besides *tranquillity meditation* (Skt. *Shamatha*) and *insight meditation* (Skt. *Vipashyana*) meditation there are the four ordinary foundations or preliminaries. It is said that the foundations are even more profound than the actual practice itself and the amount of benefit and development that emerges in the main practices is related entirely to how well one has prepared oneself through the foundations. There are two kinds of foundations: the *four ordinary foundations*²⁰ or four thoughts that turn the mind and the four special foundations or the *four preliminary practices*. These foundations are designed to orient the mind totally towards practice and to ensure that we will later practice with the greatest diligence and enthusiasm. For this reason the foundations, which are the

steering force of the practice, are said to be even more important than the actual practice itself.

Meditating Directly on Mind

There are two traditions of tranquillity meditation: the sutra approach which contains the vast dharma teachings and the profound tantric approach. At the level of the sutra teachings we learn to understand all the projections and creations of our mind. These vast teachings teach us how to understand and develop the view that the external world of phenomena and internal world of mind are empty. We begin to understand the emptiness of phenomena through these teachings.

The profound approach of the Vajrayana is not so much concerned with establishing the relationship between outer world and inner mind. Instead the main focus in the Vajrayana is working directly on the mind.²¹ Whether outer phenomena are projections or not or whether the outer world is empty or not empty is not so important at this stage. When we work with mind, we are trying to discover the very essence, the very nature of mind. When we are progressing towards enlightenment, we are not creating new qualities in the mind or taking the mind from one stage to another. Rather we are discovering its true nature which has been invisible to us because it's clouded by delusions created by mistaken perceptions. So the whole point is to cast aside mistaken perceptions and discover the actual nature of what is already there.

The reason the Vajrayana teachings are called “that which explains directly” or “that which points to meditation” or “that which points to mind itself” is that these teachings are concerned with showing how to meditate and uncover the inner mind. The example that is often employed to demonstrate this process is the example of the rope that is mistaken for a snake. When we see a rope in a dark room and mistake it for a snake, we have a sudden fear and panic because of this delusion or a

mistaken perception. The most useful thing to do in this case is not to create anything new or jump at some new remedy to eliminate the “snake,” but simply to realize that the “snake” is actually a rope. Once we see that it is just a rope, all the fear and delusions automatically disappear. There is no need to do anything about the delusions once the actual nature of what is there is realized.

Similarly, when we do Vajrayana meditation on the actual nature of phenomena, we are not so much concerned with fabricating something or being concerned with various outer delusions. We try instead to find the very nature of what is there. The mind is turned inward to consider how it is operating. It is the mind which looks at the mind itself. Through this process we begin to understand the very nature of the mind and we taste the very essence of how the mind becomes deluded and lost in various phenomena.

It is important to know how to actually meditate on the essence of mind. The actual essence, the deepest nature of the mind, is the empty aspect of mind called the dharmadhatu. Besides the dharmadhatu aspect there is the aspect of luminous clarity, the essence of Buddhahood and wisdom. This is the true nature of the mind that is eventually discovered.

In the beginning of our meditating we cannot see mind’s nature directly and its nature is not at all evident. When first examining the mind for its nature, we come to the conclusion that the mind is constantly in the throes of wanting and not wanting, of being happy and unhappy. The relationship between this first look at the mind and the true nature of the mind is the relationship between something which is very changeable or fleeting and something which is deeper and more lasting. When the mind is in the throes of happiness and sadness, wanting and rejecting, it is like water full of mud that has been stirred up. When we examine it, we only see the agitation, the cloudiness, and the dirtiness of the water. However, if we let the water settle without agitating it, the very nature of water which is clear and calm emerges. If left alone,

it settles to become clear and calm. Similarly, when the mind is stirred up by these fleeting and changing thoughts of desire and emotion, it is not very clear. It is very cloudy. But if we can clear away this agitation by letting the mind rest in meditation, the actual nature of the mind which is very lucid and transparent and calm and peaceful emerges.

The Body in Meditation

We meditate so that we can actually perceive the essence of mind. The essence is constantly there, whether we are walking, sitting, sleeping, and whether we are deluded or not deluded. We could theoretically meditate on the mind on all occasions, but for beginners that is not at all easy. To help beginners eventually become more fully aware of this essence, it is extremely important to set our body in a good posture while meditating and to learn to control our mind. Through this we will eventually be able to perceive the essence of mind.

Traditional teachings present five or seven points of posture for the body and five main points of mental stability for the mind to observe. Overall, we should be neither too tense nor too relaxed so we will eventually be able to follow a path which leads to the perception of that essence. When we meditate, we sit very erect and properly. When our body is straight, the different subtle channels in our body will also be straight. When the channels are straight, then the energies which move through these channels also move in unobstructed lines. When these energies move correctly, the mind becomes much more stable.

There are five main points of meditation in relation to posture. Firstly we keep the spine straight. This actually is a way to relax and bring well-being into our meditation. If the back is bent by leaning backwards or slanting to the right, left, or forward, we have to make an effort to maintain it and it's not so easy to be relaxed. If the spine is straight (by this we mean erect because the spine is slightly curved), then we don't

have to expend effort and meditation becomes naturally comfortable accompanied by a state of well-being.

Secondly, we have the legs crossed when we meditate. Were we to meditate standing up, it would be quite uncomfortable. Were we to meditate lying down, we would become too sluggish. Sitting cross-legged, however, keeps the mind and meditation very stable making a very comfortable and lasting position. That's why we sit cross-legged.

Third, the hands are placed on top of each other in the lap. If the arms were outstretched in all sorts of funny positions, this would give rise to many kinds of feelings and not be very comfortable. Just letting the hands rest in the meditation posture with the palms on top of each other is very relaxed and this doesn't give rise to various feelings.

The fourth point concerns the breath. The breath should not be artificial. Artificial breathing requires effort and making this effort never allows the mind to rest in stability. For that reason we relax, letting the breath be natural, letting it come and go without any effort.

The fifth point concerns where we look with our eyes. Our mind and thoughts tend to change a lot. This is related to the eyes so that what we do with our eyes is quite important. There are different ways of meditating. The *tirthikas* (the non-Buddhists or Hindus) believe that Indra, Brahma, and the gods are in the heavens and they will often look upwards in meditation. In the Buddhist system, the Theravada practitioners will most often meditate with the eyes looking downward because if one looks around one, the objects in view give rise to feelings which are usually associated with the disturbing emotions. So they look downward in order not to be aware of these things.

In the Vajrayana we look neither up nor down or away from things, but look straight ahead. If the eyes are tightly closed, we get a sense of darkness but this doesn't allow much clarity of mind. If, on the other hand, the eyes are too widely open and staring, it is very uncomfortable and takes a lot of

effort to maintain. So the eyes are naturally opened; not too closed, not too wide open and looking straight forward. No matter what appears within the field of vision, we meditate with a relaxed mind and don't follow after the various impressions which go through our consciousness. No matter what visual impressions manifest, we don't bother with them because the mind is very relaxed and not conditioned by visual impressions.

The Mind in Meditation

Once we have learned to sit correctly and place the body correctly, we go on to stabilize the mind. Since the main qualities of meditation are dependent upon the connection we have with our guru, the first thing we do is to consider the guru as the very essence of all the Buddhas, the essence of all the gurus of the lineage, and has the transmission of the lineage. The guru is the very essence of all these beings condensed into just one person. To do this we visualize our own guru in the form of Buddha Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*) and visualize him or her above our head or in space before us. It makes no difference whether Vajradhara is visualized in space before us or on top of our head. We meditate on the fact that the guru's presence is the essence of all the gurus and that he or she is in the form of the Buddha Vajradhara. We meditate and pray to the guru one-pointedly and at the end we visualize the guru melting into light and this light is absorbed into ourselves. Through the fusion of the guru and ourself, a connection is made in which we obtain both the blessing or the transmission of the essence of the dharma and the seed of accomplishment.

When we have done that, we rest our mind in a completely unfabricated state. First of all, we don't bother remembering things from the past. This means we don't think that yesterday, last month, or last year when we did such and such and we don't bother to recall what it was like when we were young. We don't think, "Oh, this person said that" or "I've had this

sort of feeling” or “This happened to me.” We simply don’t bother about our memories and all the data from the past. So when we sit down to meditate we think, “Now I am going to meditate,” and we decide not to be carried away with thoughts and memories.

We also don’t think about the future. Many people worry a bit and feel quite uncomfortable when they receive this instruction and ask, “If I don’t think about the future, it is going to be really difficult to make any plans and work out what I am going to do.” They have not quite understood that there are two stages in our practice. There is meditation and post-meditation. These instructions of not remembering and not planning are concerned with what we do only when we are actually practicing meditation. In between these periods it is quite all right to plan and work out what to do in daily living. So, if we are thinking, “I’m going to build a house” or “I’m going to write a letter” or something like that, then the postmeditation phase is the time to sort all this out. If we are full of such thoughts while meditating, the presence of these thoughts and the agitation it creates will prevent us from getting a taste for meditation and developing our meditation further.

So far the obvious level of remembering the past and planning for the future has been explained. But there is also a more subtle level of the present in which we do not remember or are not mindful. “Not remembering” means not holding or chewing over the thoughts which have just occurred or thinking of things which have just happened in previous instances of meditation. We don’t think, “Oh, I just thought this” or “This idea just came up” and then begin to contemplate these thoughts. We just leave the mind very relaxed. No matter what thoughts, concepts, or emotions come up we don’t bother to consider or analyze them. On the more subtle level of planning the future we don’t hope for an experience in meditation and think, “Now I am meditating. This sort of experience will come.” Once again we just leave the mind very

relaxed without planning, hoping, or contriving the meditation. Even in the present time we don't think, "Now I am meditating and now I am having a thought," and so on.

The reason we don't become involved with thoughts is that if we do pay attention to them, we become involved in a never-ending process of tracing thoughts with "Oh, now I am thinking this. Now I am thinking that thought. Now this thought is occurring. Oh, yes, this thought is nice." This constant recording of what is taking place will go on and on and we will be caught up in the flow of constant observation of what is happening in the mind. That is why we should leave the thoughts completely alone and not pay any attention to them.

It is not good to think of the future on a subtle level. Trying too hard to contrive meditation by thinking, "Oh, now I am thinking this and it ought to be like that," or "Oh, now I am meditating well and must keep it up," or "This isn't so good. I must adjust it so its more like that." is not a useful thing. The Buddha said that if one tries too hard and tries to fabricate the meditation too much, this actually becomes a distraction which troubles the mind. With distraction we never develop stability of mind. For example, if we keep stirring muddy water, it never becomes clear. The water becomes clear by just leaving it. We can't make the clarity by stirring or doing something to it. We need to leave it alone to be calm. There's a quotation which says,

If one doesn't trouble the water, it is clear.

If one doesn't fabricate the mind, then it is content.

Our mind's experience is a succession of instants. One instant follows another like a rosary; mental activity is a succession of different experiences one after another. In these instants thoughts can arise or not arise. In meditation when one relaxes in the actual instant without confusing it with the instant that has passed or a future one, there is only the freshness of the

moment. We do this without the idea of “this is such and such a thought.” We may think that this will create a state of annihilation in the mind. But it doesn’t and if we can rest in that freshness, it leads to great luminous clarity. So in the first instant we rest in the freshness and then, without any analysis, we rest in the second instant; whatever is there is also completely fresh and so on. If we can manage to stay within the present instant relaxed and fresh, then great peace and tranquillity of mind will automatically emerge. If we are tense or thinking, “Oh, now I have this thought. I must change it,” or “I am meditating” then we are not in relaxed meditation. The thing to do is to be relaxed in the freshness of the moment. While being relaxed, we are very attentive with mindfulness and awareness. This means we are aware and mindful of what is happening in a very bright and alert way, like a very good spy. A good spy knows what he is doing, that he is writing a letter now and then is going to go there and so on. So we have this relaxed, but incredibly alert, mindfulness while being in the freshness of the present moment.

When we meditate, we actually practice both aspects of relaxation in meditation: mindfulness and awareness. When meditation is very comfortable and we aren’t troubled by many thoughts, we can just relax in the freshness of the moment. If many thoughts and distractions arise, that is the time to be very mindful and aware of what is taking place. Because of an incredible awareness and sharpness of mind, the thoughts will eventually subside and clarity of mind will increase. So, when a large number of thoughts subside through our alertness and awareness and we become very comfortable, then we can turn down the sharpness and awareness and be more relaxed. Relaxed, however, doesn’t mean being carried away by our thoughts because that would be the same as not meditating. Relaxed means to be comfortable in this freshness of this instant of the present time.

At first we do short periods of meditation to be very relaxed in the freshness of the present and try to be very alert

about what is taking place. That very alertness doesn't mean we see the thoughts and think, "Oh, these thoughts are a bad thing." It is said that this clarity of mind is unbroken; it is there continuously. By meditating in this way, we will come closer and closer to the inherent clarity of the essence of mind.

Shamatha meditation, the meditation which brings this calmness and peace of mind, is done either "with a support" or "without a support." "With a support" means meditating on something like a Buddha statue, on the breath, or a visualization. This is an easier way to meditate, but we gradually need to develop concentration that has no support. Shamatha "without a support" means settling the mind without settling on something. Usually, we meditate without support doing Shamatha meditation which is mainly focused on the freshness of whatever is happening in the present moment.

Analytical and Placement Meditation

Generally speaking there are two main approaches to meditation. First there is the "analytical meditation" of the great scholars, the great *panditas*. With this meditation one is very aware and investigates everything that is there. One examines the various objects to find out their substance, to find out if they exist, if they don't exist, to look at the nature of the external world, to look at the mind, and so on. One examines everything very minutely and carefully using meditation as a means of seeing things more and more sharply and precisely. Through this meditation a great deal of mental clarity and sharpness emerges, but not the calm abiding of the mind. So the first main approach is called the "analytical meditation of the great panditas."

The other main approach is called "placement meditation" of the yogi. The word in Sanskrit is *kusulu* and this means "those who don't contrive or fabricate anything" or "those who are very simple and natural." We would call them "yogis" these days. In this meditation we don't analyze everything that

is taking place. We learn instead how to put the mind to rest, how to rest within the mind's very essence, and then how to develop the actual power of meditation through direct experience. We do not get caught up with thoughts of the past or future and learn to remain in the freshness of the very instant. We then learn to actually lengthen this meditation so that we can rest moment after moment in the freshness. Through the actual experience of this we learn instinctively what is to be done in meditation and what is to be avoided.

To develop meditation we need to actually meditate. To gain a genuine experience of meditation we first go to a place which is favorable for meditation; a nice, calm, and isolated place. We then do many short sessions by meditating very concentrated for a short while. We don't think of the past or future, but try to experience that freshness of the present doing this again and again and again with many short clear sessions. Gradually we extend the time of each session so that we can have that freshness and sharpness of meditation for longer and longer periods.

The great meditators of the past have employed several different terms for this fresh state of meditation. They have used different terms which seem to be meaningful to them. One term is to meditate in that "freshness." This gives the idea of not being caught up in the past or future but being in the instant, fresh in the next instant, fresh in the instant after. Another term which means the same thing is the "natural awareness" of meditation. The word "natural" means unfabricated. This means that whatever is happening in that instant, we need not think about it or play with it. All mental analyses are "unnatural" in that they are fabrications which occur when we think a lot about what is going on and try to change it. This word "natural" is the opposite of "fabrication." Freshness and natural awareness apply more to the relaxation of meditation. If we have a sheaf of wheat and bind it with a rope, then it is bound very tightly. If we cut the rope, then the wheat falls down loosely and naturally. So there is another

term “loose” in meditation, but this word “loose” means more in Tibetan than in English. The idea of “loose” is the idea of taking away the tension and letting something be relaxed in the natural way rather than holding it together artificially. The Tibetan word for “freshness” is *sang pa*. The Tibetan word for “natural awareness” is *nyu ma* or *nyu me she pa*. The Tibetan word for “looseness” is *loe pa*. Then there is a fourth term which is *rig ki* which in Tibetan means something like “sharp.” “Sharpness” is used in relation to meditation because there is this very attentive sharpness that we apply to mindfulness and awareness. In summary, these four terms are very meaningful and have been applied by the great masters to meditation. As we meditate, we will encounter these four things and the significance of the meaning of these words then strikes home.

Insight (Vipashyana) Meditation

Previously, we mentioned that Buddhism and Hinduism have similar names for different things. The Buddhists talk of Vipashyana or insight meditation. The Hindus also use this term because both religions had their roots in India and taught in the Sanskrit language. Even though the terms are the same for Buddhists and Hindus, Vipashyana meditation in the Buddhist tradition is different from the Vipashyana meditation of the Hindu tradition. In fact, there are also some different ways of defining Vipashyana meditation within the different schools of Buddhism.

In the Theravada tradition of Buddhism there are two main stages of meditation: Shamatha and Vipashyana. But this is not quite the same thing as Shamatha and Vipashyana in the Vajrayana. Shamatha in the Theravada tradition is also different from Shamatha in the Vajrayana tradition. To define these terms more accurately, when Shamatha was translated into Tibetan it became *shenay*. The first syllable *she* means “calm” and syllable *nay* means “stability.” So the first syllable is “calmness” and this means that one establishes a state of

mind which is not troubled by many thoughts. By getting rid of all the problems associated with thoughts, a natural peace and calmness comes to the mind. Then, when that peace or absence of thoughts is there, the mind becomes very stable. So to translate *shinay* meditation literally would be “calm stability meditation.” Vipashyana when it was translated into Tibetan became *lhag tong*. *Tong* means “to see” and means to have insight. From the sutra point of view this means that one gains insight into the dharmata or the universal essence. In the Vajrayana context it is translated in terms of “seeing the very essence of mind,” or seeing the very nature of mind. So there is the insight, but this insight gains something which is *tong*. The *lhag* means “superior” because when one has insight, there is no more confusion of “Is it like this? Is it like that? Is its nature such and such?” One sees directly beyond any shadow of doubt so it literally means “superlative seeing.”

We are trying to gain Vipashyana insight into the very essence of phenomena in both the sutra and the Vajrayana approach. In the sutra approach we are trying to gain insight into external phenomena. In the Vajrayana approach we are trying to gain insight into the very essence of the mind. They are the same in nature because in both cases we are trying to penetrate to the very heart of phenomena, the very essence of what is there. If we discover the nature of phenomena, then we discover the nature of the mind as well. So Shamatha and Vipashyana are the same in their nature and purpose.

Where Shamatha and Vipashyana differ is in the means they employ to reach the goal. In the sutrayana one tackles all the various phenomena and tries to understand their essence by analysis. In the Vajrayana one knows it would be a difficult and lengthy task to work through the essence of all external phenomena and all the internal phenomena of the mind. Instead if we discover the universal essence in one thing completely, then we will realize the essence of everything else. It is therefore more convenient to meditate on our own mind and discover the very essence of this mind. Discovering the essence

of mind will automatically reveal the very essence of everything else in the external world. So this method is more rapid and focused. In this regard Gampopa says:

*The view is the view of the mind itself.
If one looks and asks, "Where is the mind?"
One is never going to discover it.*

Gampopa compared this to a traditional story of a man called Jig. This man was very strong physically but not too intelligent. He was unusual because he had a jewel in his forehead and rather floppy skin on his head. One day, when he was tired, the loose skin on his forehead flopped forward and covered up this jewel. In his tiredness and not being too bright, he thought, "Oh, it is gone!" He became very worried and started looking for the jewel everywhere and just couldn't find it. He was very distressed and, of course, all the time it was in his forehead. It is like that: If we want to find the essence, then we turn to our own mind. That's where it is. If we look anywhere else and try to approach the essence through anything other than our mind, it will be very hard to discover.

Seeing Mind Directly

Usually a way of analyzing what one does is based on the view that one has, the meditation one does, and the practice that goes with this view. As far as the view is concerned, the sutra approach and the Vajrayana approach are a bit different. The sutra approach is called “the analytical approach” or “the approach of analyzing the mind.” Through analysis and inspection one comes to the conclusion that mind’s essence is empty, its quality is clarity, and that Buddha-essence exists in all beings. But this is derived mainly through the process of deduction.

The Vajrayana view is based on the mind itself. Rather than being deductive it is called “the direct experience.” So we have the immediate experience of the mind. We discover the mind as it is. Because of that immediate and real experience, the view of how the mind is will naturally arise. We begin by doing Shamatha meditation. This calm stability of Shamatha helps one gain the very direct experience of the mind. We look at the arising, the abiding, and the departing of the things which take place in the mind.

First we examine arising. When something happens, a thought for instance, we try to discover where it comes from. It is different from the analytic approach because in the analytic approach if we have a happy thought, we then deduce that some pleasant object or action produced this happy thought. We would see a causal relationship of thought and object. In the Vajrayana, however, we are looking at the thought itself, looking for where has that thought actually come from? We try to see very clearly what source it emerged from. Second, we examine the actual thought the instant it is there; we try to find out where it actually is; where it is dwelling. And third, as the thought fades, we try to see very clearly where that thought has gone? Where has it departed to? By being aware of the arising, the abiding, and the departure of thoughts, we begin to see that

there is no place, no thought bank that thoughts emerge from. There is also no actual place where they are located nor where we can find them. Finally, we discover there is no place that they go to afterwards. So all we find is emptiness in these three moments of thought.

By the repeated examination of thoughts, we gain stability of mind and begin to understand the essence of this mind itself. Once we become familiar with the nature of mind, we see that it is the same whether we are thinking or not thinking. We discover that the essence of the mind itself is very stable. Through this direct approach, we don't need other techniques to bring stability to the mind because, by discovering the nature of the mind, there will quite naturally be a stability, a calm, and peace. We discover that even the very essence of thoughts is peace. We don't need to eliminate or suppress thoughts. Instead we gain the actual experience without philosophizing about emptiness. We don't need to know that everything is emptiness, because emptiness is the nature of mind. The very nature of what is happening in our experience is emptiness without any need to think, "Is it?" or "Isn't it?" or having to put any labels onto it. It is obviously empty because we actually experience it. The same is true with the luminous clarity; we don't need to analyze clarity or think, "Is this the clarity and the wisdom aspect?" because we arrive at a state where everything is apparent. We no longer need to add any terms or ideas or philosophy since the actual experience is there.

For instance, before we began our meditation practice, our anger was very powerful and overtook us and seemed very strong and important. Then we learned to look at our mind and to look at how we become angry and where the anger came from. Then we looked at the anger which seemed so real to find its essence. We saw there was nothing there to be found when looking at it straight on.

When we meditate, we sometimes develop a very stable and calm state and think, "Oh yes, my meditation is really

working.” Sometimes we have many thoughts and think, “Now there are too many thoughts.” But when we look at the stable mind and the busy, thinking mind, we do not find a difference between these states from the essence of mind. This contrasts with our normal conception of mind. Sometimes we think, “Now I’m in meditation” and another time we think, “Now I’m thinking” and still another time “Now I’m happy” or “Now I’m sad” or “Now I’m getting angry and upset.” It seems there is a tremendous amount of change in the mind, but when we learn to be aware of the nature of the mind, we find this nature is identical in all these reflections.

To improve our meditation and make it a continuous living experience, we need faith and devotion. It is said in the Kagyu lineage prayer that: “Devotion is the head of meditation.” We pray to open ourselves to have confidence in our guru, in the gurus of the transmission, and all the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and yidams. It is by making this connection with them, with full devotion towards them, and having that confidence in them, that produces this deep meditation. Once our meditation is more and more stable, things become clearer and clearer and all the various good qualities emerge. That is why we do the various sadhanas and devotional practices.

When meditation progresses and becomes part of us, we can find peace. Then when thoughts of aggression and aversion begin to arise, we find peace by meditating on their essence. When thoughts of desire or attraction emerge, then by being aware of the essence of these thoughts we find peace. When feelings of suffering start to emerge, we are able to go to their essence and experience calm and peace. When thoughts of happiness that stimulate pride and artificial joy emerge, by going to the essence, we again find peace. Through this very deep awareness of the essence of phenomena a peacefulness permeates our mind.

The Main Obstacles to Meditation

The two main obstacles to meditation are sluggishness and excitement. Sluggishness is when our meditation becomes very heavy, very unclear, very thick, and full of torpor. This drowsiness feels heavy and there is a lack of clarity. That's the first obstacle to meditation. The second obstacle is excitement when our mind is overstimulated. We have many thoughts of the past or the present current of thoughts are so strong that our mind just can't settle down.

In more detail, there are six difficulties or obstacles to meditation. First is too much wanting, too much desire. This occurs when we are thinking, "Oh, I want to be happy, I must be happy. I want to go and amuse myself and go and see this or that particular event." Or we feel we ought to be a certain way or we feel a great pull towards something. By itself this is not always an obstacle to meditation. But when it becomes so strong that our mind keeps going back to that thing over and over, it is detrimental for meditation. For example, we may think "I want a nice house" and then think of what the house is going to look like, how it is going to be built, and so on.

The second obstacle is having an aggressive mind. This occurs when we think about hurting other people, how we want to fight back with someone who has harmed us. We want to say something that will really put them in their place. These thoughts aren't necessarily an obstacle but when they become so dominant and the mind is so drawn into them, we can't achieving stability in meditation, then this becomes a fault.

Obviously, these obstacles are things we need to eliminate in ourselves. This is why we do the Kagyu Lineage prayer at the beginning of each meditation session. The prayer says "weariness of samsara is the foot of meditation." The actual word in Tibetan for "weariness" is *shenlok* which means "to turn one's back on craving" or "to turn away from wanting and craving." We need a strong foundation for our meditation, this

we need to turn away from the powerful pull of desire which dominates our mind.

Some people when they encounter the expression *shenlok* (it usually has the feeling of disgust with samsara) think that to be a Buddhist one has to wear torn clothes, eat the simplest food, live in a rundown house, and choose an impoverished country to live in. To be a Buddhist doesn't mean that one wears rags, eats terrible food, and so on. It means that one doesn't have powerful desires that leads to "I really must have that thing. I can't live without it. I deserve this and living without it isn't right." It means one doesn't think, "This is too important to me. I can't give it away because it means too much to me." When desire is that strong, it presents an obstacle to one's practice. *Shenlok* or "disgust with samsara" literally means "turning away from desire." It means detaching oneself from those desires and involvements which represent obstacles because one can't let go. Buddha himself said:

*If one doesn't have desire, then it is perfectly all right
to own a house of a thousand stories.*

*If one has desire, then one needs to give up attachment
to even a miserable mud hut.*

*If one doesn't have desire, then it is all right to possess a
thousand measures of gold.*

*If one has desire, then one needs to give up one's
attachment to even a single copper penny.*

So, the main point is not attachment to the objects themselves, but one's attitude towards these objects.

The third obstacle to meditation is mental obscurity which occurs when our mind is not clear, when it is heavy and thick. The fourth obstacle to meditation occurs when that obscurity becomes sleep. We are so sluggish that we fall asleep. The fifth obstacle is excitement or overstimulation which occurs when we are too excited by the power of thoughts. The sixth obstacle

is regret which occurs when we feel sorry about something that has happened and keep going back to it during meditation.

From time to time one of these obstacles comes up in our practice. When they pop up, we must first of all recognize them for what they are and then decide not to be swayed from doing meditation by them because meditation will allow us to go beyond them. For instance, if we have this sadness or regret for something in the past, then we recognize it in our meditation and think, “Oh yes, today I’m being overwhelmed by regret. I must go beyond regret through meditation.” We use meditation to help get rid of this unnecessary regret. If we are aggressive, we must think, “Yes, today I have a lot of aggression. I must meditate in order to get over that aggression by using meditation to help eliminate aggression.” If we feel the great attraction of desire and involvement with a project, then we think, “Today I will meditate to remove that particular obstacle.” Approaching it this way will allow us to work with it and diminish its power over our meditation.

These are the six main obstacles of meditation. The most important ones are sluggishness and excitement. In order to cope with these two main obstacles, we can employ visualization. When we are very sluggish, dull, thick and heavy, we can recall the qualities of the Buddha, the three jewels, the dharma, and the qualities of samadhi and meditation. This should perk us up a bit. We can also visualize a white drop of light in our heart moving up to the crown of the head and staying there for a while. This will help with sluggishness. When the problem is excitement, we need to tone down the mind a little. We remember all of the drawbacks of samsara, all the suffering it involves, and all of the problems caused by the disturbing emotions. We can also visualize a black drop in our heart that slowly sinks down into the seat on which we are sitting. It is said that those two techniques will help with the problems of sluggishness and excitement.

What Helps in Meditation

When we start meditation, it is important to do many short sessions rather than a few long sessions of meditation. So we try to meditate very sharply for a short while and then stop. Then we have a break and do another meditation session. Each time is short, sharp, and clear and it feels like a pleasant experience. If one tries to meditate too long, it becomes exhausting and the association of tiredness with meditation is not going to help. That's one of the reasons for doing short sessions at first. Also, thinking of meditation as a pleasant experience makes us very keen to do it again. If we see the benefits of sitting just for a little while and having this moment of clarity and precision, then we appreciate it and want to do it again and again to perfect it. Once we are used to it, we should start increasing the length of the sessions slowly so that we increase the amount of clarity. When we have the taste of meditation and begin to understand what meditation is, we need to increase and develop that meditation. We need to develop it constantly going from one degree of stability to an even greater degree of stability. Three things which help us do this are called "integrating disturbing emotions into the path," "integrating happiness and sadness into the path," and "integrating sickness into the path."

"Integrating the disturbing emotions onto the path" is turning desires, aggression, stupidity, pride, jealousy and so on into good qualities. Of these aggression or anger is by far the most powerful defilement. We think anger is so unbearable that we feel we have to explode, hit someone, or shout at somebody. If we are under the influence of anger, in our meditation we try to look at it directly and find out where it is at the time the actual anger arises. "Where is the anger coming from? Where is it welling up from? Where is this actual instant?" and "Where does it go?" If we face it directly, it cannot actually be grasped. We feel angry, but when we look for it, we cannot find out where it resides. If we try to stay within this realm of nonexistence, this realm of not meeting the

anger itself, the anger should be reduced a little bit. By learning to stay within this nonexistence of the arising, abiding, and departing of the anger, then gradually over a period of time we will really eliminate the influence of anger from our life.

This same approach works not only with aggression, but also with desire, pride, jealousy—all of the disturbing emotions. Each time we look for the defilement, we find only emptiness and experience this emptiness through direct experience discovering its essence. In the sutra approach, we develop an understanding of emptiness mainly through a process of deduction and investigation based on logic, clues, and logical reasoning. We eventually come to the conclusion of the emptiness of emotions based on the investigation of such facts as what we did when we examined the long and short sticks. Through these kinds of exercises the nature of emptiness is slowly understood in the sutra approach.

The tantric approach is much more vivid, immediate, and real. When anger arises, for instance, the anger is truly there. It is very strong and potent at the time. Rather than analyzing and thinking about it, we look at it straight in the face and try to find out, “Where are you? Where are you coming from?” We look directly rather than using deductive reasoning. The result is the emptiness of the anger is experienced. This way of tackling the emotions and disturbing emotions is often described in the *spiritual songs* (Skt. *dohas*) of the siddhas. They tell how powerful and vivid anger can be and how, at the same time, we can use anger to discover the emptiness of phenomena because we naturally meet emptiness when we look directly at this powerful and vivid emotion.

These two approaches of direct experience of the Vajrayana and the inferential approach of the sutra path is described by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, in *An Aspirational Prayer of Mahamudra*:²²

The way things really are cannot be phrased in terms of existence.

So he says the disturbing emotions or even the mind itself do not exist. When one seeks them, one can never encounter their existence. And then it says:

*Not even the Buddhas can see
the true existence of any of these things.*

So it is not a question of existence or of nonexistence because even the Buddhas cannot see its existence. On the other hand, one can't talk about total annihilation or nonexistence either because out of this is reflected samsara (the impure side) and nirvana (which is liberation). Whether one is in samsara or whether one is in nirvana depends on one's mind and so the next line of this prayer says:

*It is not nonexistence because therein lies
the foundation of samsara and nirvana.*

One might think that if things are not existent and not nonexistent, there is some kind of contradiction here. No, there isn't, because things manifest in the middle way, which is the union of samsara and nirvana. It is neither one extreme of existence, nor the other extreme of total annihilation. So it continues:

*It is not contradictory.
It is this fusion, which is the Middle-way.*

And the last line of the prayer is:

*May that which is free from any extremes
The universal essence of everything—be realized.*

Freedom from extremes means to be free from the *four extremes* and the *eight intellectual complications*. It's a little

strange when we start talking in terms of nonexistence and not nonexistence because this is not easy to grasp intellectually. But, as far as the actual practice is concerned, when we meditate, these words develop full meaning because we discover the essence of phenomena and the truth and meaning of those words becomes lucid. To develop peace and insight then is really just seeing phenomena as they really are. Sometimes when we meditate, it goes really well and we think, “Oh, now I’ve really got it. At last I’m a really good meditator, a great practitioner.” Sometimes it goes really poorly and we think, “Oh, there’s no hope. I’ve lost the knack of meditating completely.” Both are just attitudes of the mind. Whether we feel we have great or terrible meditation, it doesn’t make a difference to the actual essence, which always remains the same. We just continue to meditate without being carried away by the “goodness” or the “badness” of the experience. We just continue meditating no matter how we may relate to the experience.

A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At 35 he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA and is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. In Nepal Rinpoche has also founded a monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Bodhanath, a retreat center and college at Namo Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Bodhanath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He has built Tara Abbey offering a full dharma education for nuns in Katmandu. He has also completed a beautiful monastery in Sarnath, India a few minutes walking distance from where the Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths. Presently, Rinpoche has begun planning a retreat center for his Western students in Crestone, Colorado in the USA.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the 17th Karmapa.

Notes

1. Technical terms are italicized the first time to indicate that they are defined in the Glossary of Terms.
2. The Buddhist view of reality is much different from our conventional view of reality. We normally think of outside phenomena—rocks, trees, people, mountains—as solid and real. This is called relative or conventional reality (Tib. *kunzop*). However, the Buddha taught that external phenomena are “empty” (Tib. *shunayata*, Tib. *tong pa nid*) and not solid and real. Only with spiritual attainment can we see through the delusion of conventional reality and perceive absolute or ultimate reality and see “things as they really are” (Tib. *nga lu*).
A modern example to illustrate this is that when we sit in a chair, the chair appears solid, made of wood, brown and everyone would agree with this conventional appearance. However, a physicist would tell us that this chair is really just a composite of billions of atoms which are moving at great speeds. Not only that, but the “brown” that we see is just a wavelength of light that only human eyes sees as “brown” and that the atoms in the chair are so far apart from each other that the chair is actually 99.9% empty space. This is closer to the ultimate level of what a chair really is.
3. Thrangu Rinpoche is describing the egolessness of self. Human beings even when they are infants naturally and automatically make a distinction between “I” and “other.” When we make this distinction, we naturally then begin to desire the good, the pleasant, the favorable things for ourselves and develop a feeling that others don’t understand us and don’t deserve certain things. This duality causes the disturbing emotions to arise. We begin to think we deserve the desirable things in life thus creating desire and begin to believe that those we don’t like don’t deserve what they get which leads to anger and jealousy and so on.
4. When we meditate, we develop some stability in our meditation and begin to experience the mind as it really is, not as it is clouded with thoughts and feelings. The characteristic of this original or natural mind is peace.

5. This teaching on the eight-fold path comes from a teaching given to Kagyu Dzong in London, September 29, 2001.
6. As explained later, the Tibetan word for “meditation” is *sgom* (pronounced “gom”) and the Tibetan word for “habituation” or “becoming accustomed to” is *goms* (pronounced “khom”). As may be seen the words are very similar and meditation is often described as a process of gradually becoming more and more familiar to mind as it is.
7. During this talk Thrangu Rinpoche was pointing to a brass pot in front of him.
8. Buddhists believe in “reincarnation” which we prefer to call “rebirth.” The word “reincarnation” implies the Hindu concept that there is a permanent self which travels from one body to the next. The Buddhist don’t believe in a permanent self, but rather that there is a karmic aspect of the mind which passes on from one lifetime to the next. The teachings on how this occurs is described in great detail in the *bardo* teachings.

Each reincarnation of great lamas often has a different personality and type of activity, but the lamas still retain a great deal of realization. For example, the previous Thrangu Tulku (the eighth reincarnation) was a great meditator who taught and wrote little. The great scholar Mipham Rinpoche visited this eighth Thrangu Tulku and the story is that Thrangu Rinpoche made an aspiration to be a great scholar in the next lifetime. This has, of course, come true for the present Thrangu Rinpoche.
9. The first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193 C.E.) “invented” the *tulku* system in which successive reincarnations of great lamas are recognized so that they can continue their bodhisattva activity. The first Karmapa began this by writing a letter before he died giving his parent’s name, his name, and where the family could be located. Several years after Dusum Khyenpa passed away the letter was opened and his reincarnation was found exactly as described in the letter. The Karmapas have written such a letter for 16 incarnations and the letter has always been accurate.
10. For a detailed description of the Vinaya see Thrangu Rinpoche’s *The Tibetan Vinaya*, Nammo Buddha Publications.
11. Buddhist monks follow about 125 vows and Buddhist nuns follow about 320 vows.

12. In Buddhism, the deliberate killing of an animal will lead to negative karma. In the warmer climates where vegetables are abundant, many monasteries are vegetarian. In the harsher climate of Tibet where there are simply no vegetables nine months a year, the monasteries do eat meat, but they do not kill the animal directly. So even in Buddhist countries where meat is consumed, the monasteries would not hunt or fish which is the deliberate killing of a sentient being.
13. These are the teachings of *shunyata* (Sanskrit) which has been translated as “emptiness” because the essential nature of everything is “empty.” But this emptiness is not like empty space because all phenomena comes out of or manifests from this emptiness. Therefore we prefer “emptiness” to “voidness” which we reserve for completely empty as in “empty space.”
14. Buddha-nature, or Buddha-essence as it is often called, is an essential quality or essence which is present in all sentient beings (not just Buddhist) which gives them the potential to reach Buddhahood. Of course, all beings are not enlightened because this essence is covered up. For a detailed account of Buddha-nature see Thrangu Rinpoche’s *The Uttaratantra: A Treatise on Buddha-nature*, Namu Buddha Publications.
15. These are transcendent generosity, conduct, patience, diligence, and knowledge (Skt. *prajna*) plus skillful means, aspirational prayers, the powers, and wisdom (Skt. *yeshe*).
16. These “channels” refer to the subtle or psychic channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*), not anatomical ones. They are much like the meridians in acupuncture, in which energies, or “winds” (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) travel.
17. There are three levels of practice. The outer is external activities such as making offerings, the inner is making a mental commitment, and the secret involves changing the energies of the body.
18. Thrangu Rinpoche belongs to the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and so he uses these lineage holders. Members of different sects would, of course, visualize a different set of lineage holders.
19. This is the main difference between Buddhism and Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and other theistic religions: The yidam is not an external deity that one prays to and asks for help, but

rather it is an aspect of one's own mind that one is trying to develop. All individuals already have everything within their mind-stream to achieve enlightenment, called Buddha-essence, but this essence is obscured. Yidam practice and trying to receive blessings is then a practice on removing these obscurations that are obscuring this Buddha-essence.

20. These are extensively described in Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Four Ordinary Foundations of Buddhist Practice*, Namo Buddha Publications. These are the precious human birth, impermanence, karma, and the difficulties of samsara.
21. Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation are meditation techniques common to all Buddhist practitioners. In the Vajrayana there are two more meditation techniques: deity or yidam practice already discussed and looking directly at mind which is known as Mahamudra in the Kagyu tradition and Dzogchen in the Nyingma tradition. Thrangu Rinpoche has extensively discussed Mahamudra meditation in his *An Introduction to Mahamudra Meditation* and *Looking Directly at Mind: The Moonlight of Mahamudra* (both by Namo Buddha Publications).
22. For a translation and commentary on this spiritual song see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*, Namo Buddha Publications.

The Glossary of Terms

In the glossary Tib. means the word is Tibetan and Skt. means the word is a Sanskrit word.

Abhidharma (Tib. *chö ngön pa*) The Buddhist teachings are often divided into the Tripitaka: the Sutras (teachings of the Buddha), the Vinaya (teachings on conduct), and the Abhidharma which is an extensive analysis of phenomena. The Abhidharma, for example, lists the 100 states of the mind and classifies them into wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral mental states.

amrita (Tib. *dut tsi*) A blessed substance which can cause spiritual and physical healing.

atman Sanskrit for a permanent “self” which exists after death.

blessing (Tib. *jinlap*) When an individual has great devotion, he or she is able to “tap into” or receive the blessings or energy created by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The blessings of the lineage are always there, but can only be received if one makes oneself receptive to them so they are not something externally bestowed by more enlightened beings.

bodhichitta (Tib. *chang chup chi sem*) Literally, the mind of enlightenment. There are two kinds of bodhichitta: absolute bodhichitta which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena and relative bodhichitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and to free all beings from the sufferings of samsara.

bodhisattva (Tib. *chang chup sem pa*) An individual who has committed him or herself to the Mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six paramitas to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from samsara.

Buddha-nature (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*, Tib. *deshin shekpai nying po*) The original nature present in all beings which when realized leads to enlightenment. It is also called Buddha-essence.

Chenrezig (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*) Deity of compassion.

completion stage (Tib. *dzo rim*) In yidam meditation there are two stages: the creation and the completion stage. The completion stage is a method of tantric meditation in which one dissolves the visualization and then rests in the intrinsic awareness of mind.

creation stage (Tib. *che rim*) In the Vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the creation and the completion stage. In this stage the visualization of the deity is built up and maintained.

cyclic existence See samsara.

daka (Tib. *da po*) A male counterpart to a dakini.

dakini (Tib. *khandro*) A yogini who has attained high realizations of the fully enlightened mind. She may be a human being who has achieved such attainments or a non-human manifestation of the enlightened mind of a meditational deity.

dharma (Tib. *chö*) This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as it is used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha.

dharma protector (Skt. *dharmapala*, Tib. *chö kyong*) These are spirits and other entities that do not have a body which pledged themselves to protecting the dharma and helping the dharma practitioner. For example, a sadhana to the dharma protector Mahakala is done in Thrangu Rinpoche's monastery each day.

dharmata (Tib. *chö nyi*) The true nature of phenomena, not phenomena as it appears to us, and is often translated as "suchness" or "the true nature of things," or "things as-they-are."

dharmadhatu (Tib. *chö ying*) The all-encompassing space which is unoriginated and beginningless out of which all phenomena arise.

disturbing emotions (Skt. *klesha*) These are factors which disturb our mind. The main three disturbing emotions are attachment, anger or aggression, and ignorance or confusion. The five disturbing emotions are these three plus envy and pride.

doha (Tib. *gur*) A spiritual song spontaneously composed by a Vajrayana practitioner. It usually has nine syllables per line.

eight intellectual complications Something without the eight mental fabrications is: (1) without a beginning, (2) without a cessation, (3) without nihilism, (4) without eternalism, (5) without going, (6) without coming, (7) not being separate, and (8) not being non-separate.

five paths (Tib. *lam nga*) Traditionally, a practitioner goes through five stages or paths to enlightenment. These are: (1) The path of accumulation which emphasizes purifying one's obscurations and accumulating merit. (2) The path of junction or application in which the meditator develops profound understanding of the

Four Noble Truths and cuts the root to the desire realm. (3) The path of insight or seeing in which the meditator develops greater insight and enters the first bodhisattva level. (4) The path of meditation in which the meditator cultivates insight in the second through tenth bodhisattva levels. (5) The path of fulfillment which is the complete attainment of Buddhahood.

four extremes (Tib. *mu shi*) These are (1) a belief in the existence of everything (also called “eternalism”), (2) a belief that nothing exists (also called “nihilism”), (3) a belief that things exist and don’t exist, and (4) that reality is something other than existence and non-existence.

four foundations of meditation (Tib. *tun mong gi ngon dro shi*) These are the four thoughts that turn the mind. They are reflection on precious human birth, impermanence and the inevitability of death, karma and its effects, and the pervasiveness of suffering in samsara.

four immeasurables (Tib. *tsad me bzhi*) These are limitless love, limitless compassion, limitless joy, and limitless impartiality.

Four Noble Truths (Tib. *pak pay den pa shi*) The Buddha began teaching with a sermon in Sarnath, India on the Four Noble Truths. These are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the eight-fold path. These truths are the foundation of Buddhism, and are greatly emphasized by the Theravada school.

four special foundations (Tib. *ngöndro*, pronounced “nundro”) These are the four ngöndro practices of taking refuge with prostrations, Vajrasattva mantra, mandala offering, and guru yoga practice. For ngöndro one does approximately 100,000 prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yogas.

Gampopa (1079-1153 C.E.) One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet. A student of Milarepa he established the first Kagyu monastic monastery and is known for writing the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

guru yoga The fourth practice of the preliminary practices of ngöndro which emphasizes devotion to one’s guru.

healing nectar (Skt. *amrita*, Tib. *dut tsi*) A blessed substance which can cause spiritual and physical healing.

interdependent origination (Tib. *ten drel*) The theory that all phenomena are interdependent. There are twelve links to this origination called the nidanas.

jnana (Tib. *yeshe*) Literally “primordial awareness.” This is the wisdom that manifests at enlightenment when the mind is no longer obscured.

karma (Tib. *lay*) Literally “action.” Karma is a universal law that when one does a wholesome action, one’s circumstances will improve and when one does an unwholesome action, negative results will eventually occur from the act.

kayas, three (Tib. *ku sum*) There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body,” is the complete enlightenment or the complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” manifests only to bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, also called the “emanation body,” and manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha.

klesha (Tib. *nyon mong*) See disturbing emotions.

kusulu One can take the path of a scholar (the view of the pandita) and study Buddhist texts to reach realization or one can meditate with little study (the way of the kusulu).

luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*) Often called luminosity or just clarity. Although the mind is empty, it is not a vacuum because this emptiness of mind also includes a knowing, a wisdom aspect which is always present. This wisdom is called luminous clarity.

Mahayana (Tib. *tek pa chen po*) Literally, the “great vehicle.” These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma which emphasize the emptiness of phenomena and the bodhisattva way.

mahapandita (Tib. *pan di ta chen po*) A great Buddhist scholar (pandita).

mandala (Tib. *chil kor*) A diagram used in Vajrayana practices which usually consists of a central deity and a palace with four doors facing the four directions.

mantra (Tib. *ngak*) A series of Sanskrit syllables such as OM MANI PEDME HUNG which are repeated to arouse the essence of the deity in one’s mind.

- Middle-way** (Tib. *u ma*) or Madhyamaka School. A philosophical school founded by Nagarjuna and is based on the Prajnaparamita sutras of emptiness.
- nirvana** (Tib. *nya ngen lay day pa*) A state of no more suffering achieved when one is completely enlightened. Used in contrast to samsara.
- nirmanakaya** See kayas, three.
- phowa** (Tib.) An advanced tantric practice used in this case to eject the consciousness at the time of death to a favorable realm.
- pandita** (Tib. *pan di ta*) A great scholar.
- prajna** (Tib. *sherab*) Sanskrit for “perfect knowledge” and can mean wisdom, understanding, or discrimination. Usually it means the wisdom of seeing things from a high (e.g. nondualistic) point of view.
- paramita** (Tib. *pha rol tu phyin pa*) Sanskrit for “transcendent perfections.” These are the six practices of the Mahayana path: Transcendent generosity, transcendent discipline, transcendent patience, transcendent exertion, transcendent meditation, and transcendent knowledge (Skt. *prajna*) plus skillful means, power, and enlightened wisdom (Skt. *jnana*).
- Patrul Rinpoche** (1808-1807 C.E.) A great practitioner and scholar in Tibet who is best known for writing *Words of My Perfect Teacher*.
- rinpoche** Literally, “very precious” and is used as a term of respect for a Tibetan (usually reincarnated) guru.
- relative truth** (Tib. *kunsop*) There are two truths: relative and ultimate truth. Relative truth is the perception of an ordinary (unenlightened) person who sees the world with all his or her projections based on the false belief of ego.
- sadhana** (Tib. *drup top*) A ritual text which details how to do a specific tantric practice.
- Sakya Pandita** A hereditary head of the Sakya lineage. A great Tibetan scholar (1181-1251 C.E.). He also became head of the Tibetan state under the authority of the Mongol emperors.
- samadhi** (Tib. *ting nge dzin*) Also called “meditative absorption” or “one-pointed meditation” and is the highest form of meditation in which the mind remains in meditation without any distraction.
- Shamatha** or tranquillity meditation (Tib. *she nay*). This is basic sitting meditation. The aim of Shamatha meditation is to be able

to place the mind on an object and remain there without distraction.

samsara (Tib. *kor wa*) Conditioned existence which is ordinary suffering in life which occurs because one still possesses passion, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

sangha (Tib. *gen dun*) Companions on the path. They may be the regular sangha who are all the persons on the path or the noble sangha who are the realized ones.

siddha (Tib. *grub thob*) An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

siddhi (Tib. *ngö drub*) Spiritual accomplishments of advanced practitioners.

skandha (Tib. *pung pa*) Literally “heaps” and are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived. These are form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness.

spiritual song (Skt. *doha*, Tib. *gur*) A religious song spontaneously composed by a Vajrayana practitioner. It usually has nine syllables per line.

subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*) These “channels” refer to the subtle channels which are not anatomical ones, but pathways that subtle energies or “winds” (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) travel.

shunyata (Skt., Tib. *tong pa nyi*) Translated as “voidness” or “emptiness.” The Buddha taught in the second turning of the wheel of dharma that external phenomena and the self have no inherent existence and therefore are “empty.”

sutra (Tib. *do*) The Theravada and Mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Vajrayana teachings and the shastras which are commentaries on the words of the Buddha.

sutrayana (Skt.) for “sutra vehicle.” In this book this refers to studying and analyzing the teachings of the Buddha rather than doing direct meditation to understand reality.

tantra (Tib. *gyu*) The teachings of the Vajrayana.

Tara (Tib. *Drolma*) A female deity who has great compassion and has pledged to protect others and is known as the “patron saint” of Tibet.

three immutables These are the Theravada, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana.

- three jewels** (Tib. *kön chok sum*) These are the Buddha, the dharma (the teachings of the Buddha), and the sangha (the companions on the path).
- Theravada** (Skt. Tib. *neten depa*) The “elder ones” or the school of Buddhism which has been maintained in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka.
- Theravadin** A follower of the Theravada school.
- three roots** (Tib. *tsa wa sum*) These are the lamas, the yidams, and the dharma protectors.
- Tirthikas** Religious people who believe in a personal self.
- torma** (Tib.) A ritual object made of dried barley and butter and put on the shrine used as a symbolic offering to the deities.
- tranquillity meditation** See Shamatha meditation.
- two truths** See relative and absolute truth.
- ultimate truth** (Tib. *dondam*) There are two truths or views of reality—relative truth which is seeing things as ordinary beings do with the dualism of “I” and “other” and ultimate truth, also called absolute truth, which is transcending duality and seeing things as they are.
- vajra** (Tib. *dorje*) This is either an implement used in Vajrayana practice or it denotes something which is indestructible such as in “vajra nature.”
- Vajradhara** (Tib. *Dorje Chang*) The name of the dharmakaya Buddha. Many of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage came from Vajradhara.
- Vajrasattva** (Tib. *Dorje Sempa*) The Buddha of purification. Vajrasattva practice is part of four preliminary practices.
- Vajrayana** (Tib. *dorje tek pa*) There are three major types of Buddhist practices. The Theravada, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana which emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.
- Vajrayogini** (Tib. *Dorje Palmo*) A semiwrathful yidam.
- Vinaya** (Tib. *dul wa*) These are the teachings by the Buddha concerning proper conduct. There are seven main precepts that may be observed by lay persons or 125 or 320 to be observed by monks and nuns.
- Vipashyana meditation** Sanskrit for “insight meditation” (Tib. *lhag tong*) This meditation as used in this book refers to meditation into the fundamental nature of phenomena. It is closely related to

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Shamatha meditation in that one needs the calm, one-pointed concentration of Shamatha meditation to accomplish this.

wheel of dharma (Skt. *dharmacakra*) The Buddha's teachings correspond to three levels: the Theravada, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana with each set being one turning.

yana (Tib. *thek pa*) Literally, "vehicle" but refers here to level of teaching. There are three main yanas (the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana).

yidam A Vajrayana practitioner's personal deity.

yogi (Tib. *nal yor*) An accomplished practitioner who usually chooses an unconventional lifestyle.

Glossary of Tibetan Terms

<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Transliterated</u>	<u>English</u>
chang chup chi sem	byang chup kyi sems	bodhichitta
chang chup sem pa	byang chub sems dpa	bodhisattva
che rim	bskyed rim	creation stage
chö	chos	dharma
chö ngon pa	chos mngon pa	Abhidharma
chö ying	chos dbyings	dharmadhatu
chag pa	chags pa	desire
ngö drub	dngos grub	siddhis
do	mdo	sutra
dondam	don dam pa'i bden pa	absolute truth
dorje	rdo rje	vajra
dorje teg pa	rdo rje theg pa	Vajrayana
dpa po	dpa' bo	daka
dul wa	'dul ba	Vinaya
dutsi	bdud rtsi	healing nectar
dzo rim	rdzogs rim	completion stage
gen dun	dge 'dun	sangha
genyan	dge bsnyen	lay precepts
gom	sgom	meditation
gom lam	sgom lam	path of meditation
gur	mgur	spiritual song
gyu	rgyud	tantra
je gom	dp Yad sgom	analytical med.
jin lop	byin rlaps	blessings
khandro	mkha' 'gro ma	dakini
khom	goms	habituate
kön chok sum	dkon mchog gsum	three jewels
kor wa	'khor ba	samsara
ku sum	sku gsum	three kayas
kunsop	kun rdzob kyi bden pa	relative truth
lay	las	karma
lhag tong	lhag mthong	Vipashyana
loe pa	glod pa	loose
lung	rlung	subtle wind
mö pa	mos pa	aspiration
neten depa	gnas brtan pa' sde pa	Theravada

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ngak	sngags	mantra
ngö drub	grub thob	siddha
nya ngen lay day pa	mya ngan las 'das pa	nirvana
nyon mong	nyon mongs	disturbing emotion
nyu ma	gnyug ma	natural
pak pay den pa shi	'phags pa'i bden pa bzhi	four truths
pandita	pandita	scholar
phowa	'pho ba	ejection practice
pung po	phung po	skandha
sang gay	sangs rgyas	the Buddha
sang gnak	gsangs snags	secret mantra
dang pa	sang ba	fresh
she nay	zhi gnas	Shamatha
she wa	zhi ba	peace
sherab	shes rab	prajna
ta ma pa	tsad mrd pa	4 immeasurables
teg pa	theg pa	vehicle
tek pa chen po	theg pa chen po	Mahayana
tek pa chung wa	theg pa chung ba	Theravada
tendrel	rten 'brel	interdependent orig.
tin ne dzin	ting nge 'dzin	samadhi
torma	gtor ma	cake offering
tsa	rtsa	subtle channels
tsa wa sum	rtsa ba gsum	three roots
tsad me zhi	tshad med bzhi	4 immeasurables
tsultrim	tshul khrim	discipline, effort
un ma	dbu ma	Madhyamaka
yeshe	ye shes	wisdom (jnana)

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Patrul Rinpoche. *Words of My Perfect Teacher.* Padmakara Translation Group.

Maitreya. *The Uttaratantra.* *The Uttaratantra* is one of the five books that Asanga received from the Maitreya Buddha. This book is a detailed description of Buddha-nature and is studied by all sects in Tibet as one of the foundations of the Mahayana path. For a translation of the root text and a commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche see *The Uttara Tantra: A Treatise on Buddha-nature.* (Namo Buddha Publications, 2002).

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Thrangu Rinpoche. *Teachings on the Tibetan Vinaya.* (Namo Buddha Publications, 2001) This book describes the three vows (the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana) involved in Buddhist conduct.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *The Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice.* (Namo Buddha Publications, 2001) This book is a companion to the *Three Vehicles* and describes the four thoughts that one should contemplate before practicing.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *Moonbeams of Mahamudra: The Direct Meditation on Mind.* (to be published by Wisdom Publications.) A detailed overview of Mahamudra meditation which is the principle meditation of the Kagyu lineage of Tibet.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *The Open Door to Emptiness.* (Vancouver: Karne Thekchen Choling, 1997) Based on Mipham's treatise on

the proof of the emptiness of phenomena in easy to understand language and with practical examples in everyday life.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *The Ten Virtuous Actions.* (Namo Buddha Publications, 2001) This booklet describes the four criteria necessary for an act to become negative karma and discusses the 10 virtuous actions that creates positive karma.

Books by Thrangu Rinpoche

The Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice. There are four thoughts one should contemplate before practicing precious human birth, impermanence, karma, and the downfalls of samsara.

The Middle-way Meditation Instructions of Mipham Rinpoche. A commentary on the great Tibetan scholar Mipham, who for a while actually stayed with the previous Thrangu Rinpoche at his monastery, and describes how one develops compassion and then expands this to bodhichitta and eventually develops wisdom.

Transcending Ego: Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom. This book, which includes the original text of the Third Karmapa and Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary, describes in detail the eight consciousnesses and how these transform into the five wisdoms at enlightenment.

Showing the Path to Liberation: The Kagyu Lineage Prayer. Thrangu Rinpoche was asked by the 16th Karmapa to lay out the Buddhist path for Western students. He did this in what is actually his first work for Westerners using the Kagyu Lineage Prayer as an outline.

The Practice of Tranquillity and Insight. This book is a practical guide to the two types of meditation that form the core of Buddhist spiritual practice.

Creation and Completion: Essential Points of Tantric Meditation. This is a brilliant text by Jamgon Kongtrul, the Great on the two main aspects of Vajrayana practice. Included is the Tibetan script, Sarah Harding's translation of the root text, her extensive notes on the translation, and Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on the text.

Buddha Nature. This book is an overview of the whole concept of Buddha-nature as it is presented in Maitreya's *Uttaratantra*.

The King of Samadhi. This book is a commentary on the only sutra of the Buddha which discusses Mahamudra meditation. It is also the sutra which predicted the coming of Gampopa. Also includes a 50 page commentary on Jamgon Kongtrul's *Song of Lodro Thaye*.

Essential Practice. Thrangu Rinpoche gives a lengthy commentary on Kamalashila's great treatise on the gradual way. This treatise outlines the way dharma is practiced by all the major schools of Tibet.

The Life of Tilopa and the Ganges Mahamudra. A telling of the life of Tilopa who could be said to be the founder of the Kagyu lineage about 1,000 years ago. This is combined with an explanation of the Ganges Mahamudra, Tilopa's most famous spiritual song.

The Songs of Naropa. This book tells the story of the life of Naropa and analyzes in detail his famous summary of Mahamudra which lays out the path of Mahamudra meditation by the guru whose succession of students went on to found the Kagyu lineage.

A Spiritual Biography of Marpa, the Translator. Marpa went to India and brought back and translated these teachings into Tibetan. This book describes how he obtained the teachings for Hevajra, Chakrasamvara, and Mahamudra and brought them back to Tibet.

The Life and Spiritual Songs of Milarepa. This book tells the story of Tibet's greatest saint who was a student of Marpa and sinned greatly but with extreme diligence was able to attain enlightenment.

Rechungpa: A biography of Milarepa's Disciple. Milarepa had two main disciples: Rechungpa and Gampopa. Rechungpa returned to India three times and received teachings Marpa was unable to obtain. However, he had a major obstacle of pride and defied Milarepa three times. Because of his devotion, he was able to overcome his pride and attained rainbow body at his death.

Medicine Buddha Teachings. An extremely detailed treatment of the Medicine Buddha practice which contains a new translation of the sadhana, Thrangu Rinpoche's instructions and commentary on the practice and also a detailed explanation of the sutra The Twelve Aspirations of the Medicine Buddha.

Everyday Consciousness and Buddha-Awakening. This book which is commentary on the Third Karmapa's *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom* and covers the same material as *Transcending Ego*, but from a different perspective and a different translator. This book with *Transcending Ego* is a very complete treatment of Buddhist psychology.

The Open Door to Emptiness. This book goes through in a easy-to-understand way the arguments made to establish that all phenomena are indeed empty.

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation. This treatise by Thrangu Rinpoche outlines the entire Buddhist path. This commentary on the classic book on Buddhism is an excellent companion to the translation of the original work by Gampopa.

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