



# Buddha Nature & Preliminary Prayers and Their Explanations

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Geshe Tenzin Zopa brings Dharma from the monastery & retreat cave straight into our e-chat rooms, our living rooms and the rooms in our minds which we have kept hidden and locked for a long time. Interlacing his teachings with insights into the habits and thinking of urban society, Geshela holds up a mirror to those who hear him teach – an experience that can be both unsettling and illuminating. His wit and incisiveness find their way into these pages.

This book contains the first 2 topics from an 18-topic Dharma course taught at Losang Dragpa Centre, Malaysia where Geshela is the Resident Teacher. Key points from the Lam Rim and other texts are woven into these early chapters, with elaborations to follow in subsequent publications of teachings from this course.

Any errors or confused phrasing are mine alone. Had you listened to Geshela directly, the teachings would have been clear to you.

I wish to thank the untiring Khor Yuyin who braved hurried design and formatting work with her sunshine cheer and the generosity of members & supporters of LDC who made the publication of this book possible.

Special dedication to our unsurpassable Lamas, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama who are the source of all virtue, for their long lives and fulfilled wishes. Gratitude and long life dedication is also made to Geshe Tenzin Zopa, a wise old Lama in a youthful frame.

Yeo Puay Huei



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# **Chapter 1**

## **Buddha Nature**

# Chapter 1

## Buddha Nature

(The teaching starts with recitation of the Heart Sutra)

### Benefits of Reciting the Heart Sutra

In order to gain realizations, one needs to listen or study the Dharma teachings, contemplate and meditate on them. Contemplate means to think through and digest the teachings in a way that relates to your day-to-day life. This is to habituate our minds with the teachings in order to gain its realizations up to enlightenment. For this, one has to receive teachings of the unbroken lineage that is traceable to the Buddha; you need the direct, oral blessings of the lineage which originates from the Buddha that is passed on to the current lineage holder i.e. present day masters who directly received the lineage teachings from their masters and back all the way up to Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha Manjushuri, Buddha Maitreya, Buddha Tara, Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Amitayus and such Buddha-deities. It is not sufficient to study only from books. If you seek only intellectual knowledge, it is then beneficial to study from books alone. However, if your purpose is to establish realizations in your mind, then intellectual knowledge is not enough. Oral lineage teachings carry the blessings of the Buddha and all the masters who hold and practice them and are therefore so precious. Yet somehow obstacles to be able to receive them often arise. Therefore, the recitation of Heart Sutra is a very powerful practice to clear these obstacles.

Whenever we begin Dharma study, there are many obstacles to clear. Obstacles such as not finding the time or perhaps a dinner party invitation comes up just when the teaching starts or something goes wrong with the family. And even after listening to the teachings, obstacles like distractions, family or noise appear when you try to



contemplate. And even when one is able to contemplate and embark on meditating on the teaching, much heavier obstacles such as the superstitious (mistaken) mind, doubts, and disturbing thoughts arise while you meditate. The worst obstacles are falling into wrong view (to be discussed later) and the obstacles posed by the 6 six delusions/afflictions. Actually, you have more than that - the 6 are the main ones but there are 20 secondary afflictions following close behind!

Our purpose of receiving the teachings and studying them are to find the antidote to eradicate these delusions/afflictions, as they are the greatest obstacles to our happiness and enlightenment. These delusions are far more dangerous than the outer enemy which has guns and troops. Therefore, during our recitation of Heart Sutra, we dedicate the recitation to the clearing of all those obstacles, so that we may be able to achieve the realizations of the Path up to enlightenment, within one lifetime. With that motivation please recite the Heart Sutra.

(Recitation of Heart Sutra by all, followed with short Mandala offering)

### **Mandala Offering – a powerful method to accumulate merits**

Lama Tsongkhapa's efforts in studying Buddhist philosophy made him a great scholar who was able to compose many commentaries and root texts on the Emptiness teachings, which is one of the most profound and difficult topics. Some of these teachings, he received directly from Buddha Manjushri and even though he could describe what one should do to be able to realize emptiness, he remained unable to gain that realization himself. This led him to making strong prayers to Buddha Manjushri for guidance and Manjushri explained that Tsongkhapa's inability to gain realisations on this topic was due to his lack of merit.

So, you see, it is all linked. If you don't gain realizations, you cannot abandon the delusions; but in order to abandon delusions, you need the direct antidote which is the wisdom directly realizing emptiness; to be able to gain this wisdom, one needs merit. Manjushri thus advised Lama Tsongkhapa to put effort into accumulating extensive merit by doing Mandala offering.

Without delay, Lama Tsongkhapa went into retreat, offering over a million Mandalas (using the same visualizations that we do here in class) and one day - just suddenly - Lama Tsongkhapa gained the direct realization of emptiness. Through the mandala offerings, a great store of merit was built and together with the blessings that came from sincere practice, he was able to obtain realizations of emptiness. Therefore, for us, no matter how much we know in theory, that is insufficient. In order to build up the required merit to absorb the teachings deeply into one's mental continuum and gain realisations for liberation, before each Dharma teachings or discussions, before reading Dharma books, before you meditate, you should offer Mandala to the Gurus and Buddhas.

When offering mandala, one should offer to the entire lineage Gurus, which include all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is the instruction of Buddha from his own holy speech and not just a story that somebody made up. Mandala offerings should be done with extensive motivation and visualization. Even if you have forgotten to bring your mala, just with one's bare hands, offer the Mandala mudra – where the center fingers symbolize the Mt Meru, the 4 other finger tips symbolize the 4 continents of this universe and visualise offering this together with all sorts of possessions and wish fulfilling jewels. Hold the thought that "With this offering to the Buddhas, I will be able to realize emptiness". Just like that.

So please be relaxed and treat this Dharma session as form of enjoyment, like a vacation from your busy schedule, from your family and from your work etc. Relax both the physical body, as well as your mind. That is very important.

### **Do we have Buddha Nature?**

You might find this topic simple but it is very important to re-energize your understanding of Buddha Nature that dwells within your mental continuum. Even though I may not know how to express things properly, for the people who are listening, you should know how to listen. There is a saying that even through the speaker might not know how to speak, as long as the listener knows how to listen, there can still be benefit. Otherwise, even if the speaker speaks perfectly, if the listeners do not listen properly, then it doesn't work!

Do you believe you have Buddha Nature in you? **THAT IS A BIG QUESTION!** This is really the basis for us to gain faith in the Buddha because if we do not have Buddha nature within us, there is not much purpose for us to accumulate merit, to purify negative karma and no purpose for us to do any practice!

“What IS that Buddha nature?” When we begin to search for the answer to this question, we soon encounter the obstacles posed by the 6 delusions/afflictions and the 20 secondary afflictive emotions. We will need to fight hard against the force presented by these afflictions and thus need to recognize what these 6 delusions are. What is their nature and how do they dwell within us? How they perform their activities within us? How do they control our mind and actions? Similarly with the 20 secondary afflictive emotions.



## Delusions, overcoming them and understanding Mind

The first step is to recognize these 6 main delusions or afflictions! In Dharma terms, we say that these delusions/afflictions are the *objects of negation*. These are the things that we have to negate/remove/purify or abandon in order to be able to see the true face of Buddha nature within us. **The 6 delusions are anger, attachment, ignorance, pride, doubt and wrong view.**

Let's start with the delusion of anger. Firstly, we mistakenly see our angry minds as existing innately within our mind. It is wrong view to see the angry mind, attachment mind, the jealousy mind, all these afflicted minds as existing INNATELY within our minds. If we say the delusion mind exists innately, it means that there is no difference between the delusion-mind of anger and our fundamental consciousness. It means there is no difference between the angry mind and the clear light mind (the subtle mind) that we possess; the continuum of the mind we now have and which will continue from life to life, which came from beginningless lives up to present day and which will travel up to enlightenment.

Secondly, we need to CHECK and see whether this deluded mind of anger is the same nature as our clear light mind or not? Same nature with the mind that travels from beginningless lifetime up to now? This is a meditation process. If we really want to find out, we need to analyze, we need to investigate.

### The angry mind is mind play

So now think - if the angry mind is the same nature as the fundamental mind that we possess life after life, that means whenever the mind exists, it should exist in the manner of anger and hatred! Does it? Let's look at how this angry mind arises. The angry mind is where one's

mind/consciousness is overwhelmed by over-emphasising the negative aspects of a person or situation. For example, why you get so angry at someone whom you regard as an enemy? Because you exaggerate the negative quality of that person, more than the actually amount of faults that the other person has and gave the label "enemy". It could be that that person punched you just once but the incident gets exaggerated, over-emphasised and an extra projection is placed onto the person thinking that he punched you because had a mind to kill you. He may not have had the thought to kill you but the extra negative label of "he wants to kill me" was affixed. That's how hatred gets generated. Your mind might run even further to think, "Last year I gave him a dumpling and he thought I poisoned it, so today he is trying to kill me". Actually, this man might never have thought about last-year's dumpling but you over-reacted and heightened the negative qualities of that person to the point where hate arises and you cannot tolerate that person any more.

However, if we say that one's angry mind and one's fundamental consciousness is no different, it means that this hatred mind should exist whenever your mind exists. That means our conventional true nature of mind shouldn't even have a single moment of calm and peace. In short, if this angry mind is the same nature as that of our fundamental, conventional mind, it means our mind is in the nature of never being calm and never being peaceful. Is this so?

The fact is, the nature of the angry/deluded mind and that of the fundamental, clear light nature of our consciousness/mind, is different in nature. Even though both aspects of mind come under the broad category of "consciousness", they manifest in a different manner. Because they manifest in different manner, they can never be said to be of the same nature. They are never the same nature conventionally nor ultimately, you see?

## True nature of Mind and Buddha Nature

Therefore, what is the conventional, true nature of our mind, which is totally different from the afflictive mind of the 6 delusions? The true nature of the conventional mind is its nature of clarity and cognition, i.e. mind is that which is clear and able to know. The nature of mind has the foundation of improvement, the foundation of perfection. What is meant by the foundation of improvement? It means something where, upon our putting in effort to it, improvement and even perfection becomes possible. So when I say our mind has the foundation of improvement, it means that when we put in effort to purify the afflictive mind, it can develop positive qualities such as compassion, loving kindness, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness. This foundation is not limited like the physical form, such that if you train your body for jumping, one is still not able to jump more than 100 meters.

The negative afflictive mind also has limitations because even if one tries to develop negative emotions, there is no way of achieving real development or perfection; similarly, if you train in attachment, although attachment might increase, the mind is not moving nearer to perfection. However, because one has Buddha nature, one's clear light (subtle) mind is stable, it becomes possible to purify afflictions and develop virtues such as loving kindness, compassion and wisdom realizing emptiness in an unlimited way. This is how one is able to obtain the state of perfection, which is the omniscient mind. We ordinary beings, who presently possess all the 6 delusions and the 20 secondary defilements and the zillions of smaller defilements, by purifying, we are able to optimize our Buddha Nature and achieve Buddhahood.



The next point is that after identifying negative afflictive minds e.g. anger, attachments, jealousy etc, we can begin eradicating them one by one and gradually, we clear our minds of misleading afflictions.

Presently, the clear light mind itself, which is the Buddha nature, even though residing within us, is totally dominated by afflictions/negative emotions which prevent us from seeing that we have the Buddha nature and the potential to become Buddha! Those afflictions are well-guarded by the 6 delusions, especially ignorance, the main force, the main General who gathers the troops of the 20 secondary afflictions and rest of the 5 delusions, to make sure they continue to control us and hinder us from realising the Buddha nature; arising from this, we continue to suffer in samsara and continuously take rebirth in samsara.

### **Discovering the Buddha Nature in us**

Now, through the blessings of past good karmas, which are related to the Triple Gem, we realize we need to work hard to remove these negative afflictions. Only then one can see the true nature of oneself. In fact, it is said in some texts that we have actually already obtained the state of nirvana; that we ordinary beings, including animals like cats, rats, and cockroaches already obtained nirvana but have not recognised that fact and thus exist in suffering - it's shocking to hear? In general, in the scriptures, nirvana has two categories (1) the Hinayana nirvana and (2) Mahayana nirvana but the fact is there are 3 types of nirvana, the third being the nirvana of the clear light mind, the Buddha nature.

We have obtained the state of nirvana in terms of having the Buddha nature, which is no different from the omniscient mind. However, the problem is that we have never recognized this Buddha nature and state of nirvana and WHY? Because we totally hand over the responsibility for our entire body, speech and mind to the delusions of ignorance, anger, attachment etc. We are totally under the guidance of ignorance!

Since we take choose to take refuge under ignorance, ignorance happily protects us, to make sure it sends all its protectors in the form of attachment, anger, pride, jealousy to surround us. If somebody looks down on you, straight away ignorance will say, "No, no I am better than you!" Such pride, such egotism. So you see, ignorance has been taking care of us very closely from beginningless lifetimes and has done an excellent job because even till today, we are unable to see the nature of our mind. This ignorance is so effective that it has shielded us from our seeing our true Buddha nature 24 hours a day, every lifetime, even during the intermediate state! Even at the time in the womb, when we dwell for nine months. The moment you are conceived, ignorant mind is present, even before consciousness enters into the physical form, ignorant mind is already there!

If attachment is on standby, the anger will also be on standby. The very first moment new life is conceived, even that moment, that being has a feeling of attachment, has a feeling of anger and has a feeling of relations. These are all fuelled by the ignorant mind.

How then are we to win and overcome ignorance? In the daytime at work we cannot win; in the Dharma centre at nighttime, we cannot win; when doing meditation we cannot win; when listening dharma teaching we also cannot win. Therefore as mentioned earlier, we need tremendous effort to combat the delusions/afflictions and find the Buddha nature within us.

### **Faith in Buddha and the Triple Gem**

Even though "faith" sounds a simple subject, without understanding it at a deeper level, our faith in Buddha is just bla, bla. If somebody comes and challenges your faith, you get agitated; you have no answer. That is because you are just not convinced. If you have total understanding and faith in the Buddha and in Refuge, then Refuge will stabilise you; it will

save you from lower realms. Think - If you have to die now, are you ready to leave?? No! No! You have family, you need to live, you're still enjoying my life. Your faith is shaking, shaking wildly! Truth is, as long as you know you have the Buddha nature and reflect deeply on that, then even though you don't have the words to express this understanding but you nevertheless are totally convinced about it, you will definitely receive the blessings from Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and gain realizations. Because of your conviction, your faith will be stable, 100% dedicated and blessing will definitely be there.

We often pray to Tara and say, "I really trust you. Your practice is so powerful, I come back to you to pay homage tomorrow." But what you often mean is that if really things work out, then I will come back; if not, I will have doubt in you. If we check our subconscious mind, we are not 100% convinced about Tara and the practice and its ability to definitely help. Tomorrow you might hear someone say, "If you pray to Tara, you will get enlightenment tomorrow morning before you wake up". Even though you have declared that Tara and the practice is excellent and that Tara will never disappoint you, even though you pray to her, you continue to have the doubt, "How will I get enlightened before I wake up tomorrow? No way! I never practice, so how can I get enlightened? In fact, before I wake up, I might be dead in the bed. No way will I get enlightenment by tomorrow." This shows that in your subconscious mind, you are not convinced. The subconscious mind is not convinced because you have not seen the Buddha nature. In order to see the Buddha nature, you have to understand all these afflictive emotions are clouding your clear-light mind in your day-to-day life, so that this will make you mindful and perform meditation more often. For example, when attachment comes, you need to observe how attachment reacts, how attachment destroys you, how attachment disappoints you. Then you will appreciate that non-attachment is



wonderful, makes sense, and can truly liberate me or at least bring me into the state of peace.

### **Mindfulness, introspection and meditation**

Since we have been taken care of by the ignorant mind from beginningless time, which has kept us in suffering, we need to find a new and different guide. Who will be this different guide? Mindfulness and introspection. Through these, we guide our mind, our motivation, our actions.

How do we do that? How do we gain the mindfulness and introspection that can keep me on the right path and free me from suffering of samsara? The initial steps is to do some simple meditation, focusing on our present mind, by avoiding the superstitious thought. The term "superstitious thought" refers to our dwelling on memories of the past and dreaming about the future (and believing in the inherent existence). We need to avoid this especially during meditation. The present-moment mind is very clean, soft, clear, calm, gentle, alert.

However, we need to be aware that our daily conduct does not foster the development of mindfulness and introspection. For instance, from the first moment upon waking up, even before we perform our daily actions of washing up, going to the toilet and such activities, from that very first moment – we just let our ignorant mind handle us. Without much thought, we pick up the phone to call a friend and say "Hello, have you had breakfast or not?" or "Are we still meeting today?" or "What time are we meeting for dinner?" We haven't had breakfast yet but are already planning for dinner! Like that, before all these distractions happen, at that very first moment upon waking up (it can be half an hour or more or 5 minutes or it can be a few seconds!) we need to be aware of that moment, check yourself; analyze yourself. This is a very important time because at that moment, your mind has not yet

been dominated by the day's plans nor is it occupied with yesterday's memories. **Your mind in those first waking moments, is quite calm, clean, fresh and if you want to place any imprint on it or want to dilute/negate anything, it's very easy to do so then.** That kind of clean, clear mind absorbs easily. You should go to check this out for yourself. It's definitely there. There is such a clean, clear mind there. THAT is the moment that you should meditate.

Meditate on what? Meditate on that mind. Become aware that your mind has two aspects - one is mindfulness; the other is introspection. Mindfulness catches that very first moment of mind, which is calm, clear and still. It then tries to remain in this clean, clear, still state. Introspection mind is like a guard, alert, making sure that whilst you are focusing on the first moments (through mindfulness), your hand doesn't go to the hand phone to start dialling numbers or getting the make-up things. Introspection makes sure that your mindfulness does not drawn away by any kind of other distractions.

You try to remain in this quiet, still meditation, focusing on that clean, clear mind - that's all you do. No other thing. No need to remember any Buddha's image or any Lam Rim teaching at that time. Just focus on that clean, clear mind. Although you may think that these first moments of the day upon waking are a bit "blur", actually that kind of state mind is very calm. As it is not really active, it appears blur in the sense that it is not thinking of anything specific in the future or the past but it doesn't mean that it is faulty in terms of its cognition/ability to know. So try this for one moment, 5 minutes, one hour. These could be the best moments of your entire day. Good for your physical health and very good for your spiritual health. It helps you to obtain a stable mind.

The first instant benefit of engaging in mindfulness and introspection upon waking, is that you develop on that day, a stable mind. One that is more stable and more calm than the previous mind on the previous day.

It's quite level. Not too excited, not depressed, just calm. When you are too excited, what happens is that one moment you're happy but at some stage, there will be a drop in this "high-feeling" and then you have a sense of feeling low. This up-down situation happens when one's mind is unstable. If you are able to achieve some percentage of control over your mind, this unstable emotional condition can be overcome. Therefore, our practice is to control our emotional mind. Why are we so easily upset in the first place? Because we cannot control our mind. By becoming familiar with mindfulness and introspection practice, these will become a habit which will enable us to control our afflictive emotions and our mind, bringing us a certain level of peace, a certain amount of calmness and a certain amount of stability. Then one day, even before you go to the cave, you will discover you have achieved clairvoyance. Clairvoyance can happen in an instant you know. It's not like you need to go into 6 year or 10 year retreat to acquire it. This is the immediate benefits of regularly applying mindfulness and introspection. It is stated in the teachings. Once you achieve clairvoyance, you won't have to worry about the stock market (laughter). Whatever situation you are in, you won't have to worry. Clairvoyance is able to see the future, isn't it? Just sit there and enjoy...(laughter). Yes, yes, we must do this practice of mindfulness and introspection.

### **Correct life style**

The problem here with us is that we are occupied with cleaning ourselves on the outside but never think about cleaning ourselves on the inside. From the early hours in the morning you have already spent many hours washing up and after that, you rush to work and similarly, spend hours there and getting back. How many hours have been spent on these external activities? After that, snore. So where is the time to practice; to work on the mind? Like me, the moment I enter into my

wash room, first thing is to use the toilet. Then I see the tooth brush. At the same time, I see the soap. At the same time I see the water tap. At the same time I see the towel. Like this, my mind is already busy with 5 or 6 types of things, how can I make my mind still? No way. On top of that, I think of today's appointments, meal appointments and meeting people, so many things already coming in. Therefore, from the moment you wake up, straight away catch the mind. Meditation at that time, is the best. Also, if possible, sleep alone, it's very good (laughter). Solitary sleeping. Nobody will disturb you then, isn't it?

In fact, apart from this mindfulness/introspection meditation, for those intent on meditating on Lam Rim topics or engage in single pointed concentration, this moment is best. I don't do much meditation but I do try to do it once a day. In my own experience, that waking moment, that period is the best! Even if you want to do meditation on Guru Devotion, the most effective time to do so is then as well; otherwise, if you try to do so later, distractions are likely to start flowing in such that when you think of the Guru, you simultaneously think of the burger. Burger is often more potent, as its image has a way of immediately coming into one's mind. Of course, the heavier or more frequent the imprint, the deeper its effect on your subconscious mind. This is how strong the karma comes to function. We will cover this topic later.

In order to actualize this practice, best not to eat heavy meals in the afternoon. Drink liquids instead. Eating meat, garlic, onions are amongst the obstacles for you to achieve alertness in the morning. As for sleeping hours, best, is around 10 -11 o'clock. Many of us don't sleep till 2 o'clock, isn't it? Then it becomes difficult to do meditation the next morning. Even for health it is necessary and more so for spiritual practice, to sleep before midnight. Best is still 10 to 11 o'clock as you will have best quality sleep and be able to wake up 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, naturally fresh. 5am is the best quiet time to meditate. Try

not to eat during lunch or dinner the night before and garlic or onions affects the quality of the meditation the next morning. That's why there is benefit to being vegetarian; if not, at least to have only light evening food; for those without gastric problems, liquid diet is also good.

Thefore, mindfulness and introspection are some of the methods provided for us to see the Buddha nature and actualize the potential for enlightenment that it holds. If we don't do this, then even if we meditate on bodhicitta, loving-kindness, our minds will be like leaves in a tornado, totally shaken, constantly trying to hold onto some level of concentration, yet nothing comes. Without these two tools with you all the time, there is no way you can take over the responsibility for yourself from the ignorant mind. And as long as we don't take over this responsibility, there is no way we can be free from karma and delusion. This in turn means that there is no way we can be free from death, birth, rebirth in samsara. A real waste of opportunity.

Unless you are a Bodhisattva, where your own rebirth is up to you, for ordinary people like me, birth is totally determined by the force of karma and delusion. To be free from samsara, means to be free from rebirth. Those Bodhisattvas who come to benefit us, we don't usually say that they take rebirth; they are manifesting existence in human form to relate to us and to benefit us. Thus, starting from tomorrow, train in mindfulness and Introspection. From there, you will be able to train in concentration.

### **Concentration training**

The first step to training in concentration is to look into our still mind. No need to think of any deity, just remain still and quiet inside for 5 minutes or 10 minutes. If you can able to remain 5 minutes, that is marvelous. The immediate result is a certain level of peace and calm

with emotional control. People ask, “How can I control my anger? I get angry so easily. Please teach me the method to control my anger. How to control my attachment? If I see my neighbors and my friends improve their business, I can’t handle myself... I get jealous, how do I control this?” Concentration training is the best method to control emotions. It’s simple, very simple. Apply the technique tomorrow morning.

With concentration ability, you will be able to achieve deity yoga practice. Without stable mind, how to practice tantra? Tantra means transformation; protecting your mind from ordinary appearances and ordinary emotions. That’s why tantra is so powerful. It teaches you to be free from the superstitious mind. This is the point you need to grab!

### **What is tantra?**

What is mantra? It means to protect the mind. What is tantra? It means to protect and transform but transform what? Transform the mind, its ordinary perceptions and thoughts. Ordinary mind is deceptive. Observe how the ordinary mind behaves - when you pray to Tara, you are often deceiving Tara and deceiving yourself. Why? Because you only pray to Tara in order to have success in your business which means you are creating causes to come back to this world again to become rich which also means you have to re-experience all the sufferings that life brings, so in this way, you deceive yourself. Tara doesn’t like you to do that. But Tara has no choice but to listen to you. You put your palms together to her, tears flowing from your eyes, knees bent on the floor. She has no choice. She has to keep silent and she has to stay still. That’s why Tara manifests only in statues. We keep saying we wish to “achieve enlightenment” but your real purpose in praying to Tara is to get rich in this life. You offer candlelight for this-life activities (business, wealth, health). **As long as the motivation is involved with only this life concerns, it is not Dharma and is nothing more than**

**one of the 8 worldly concerns** (the 8 worldly concerns come in 4 pairs namely wanting gain and not loss; wanting praise and not criticism; wanting comfort and not discomfort; wanting good reputation and not bad reputation).

## **Dharma and non-Dharma**

As long as 8 worldly-concerns form the basis of our activities, even religious activities, all is impure action! Dharma means correcting delusions, protecting the mind and directing the mind away from worldly thinking (about this-life concerns). **Therefore, whether a practice is dharma or non-dharma is whether your purpose is for this life or beyond this life. If your practice is for this life goals, then it is non-dharma practice.** It's worldly dharma. So how can Tara grant blessing to us if our purpose itself is worldly and totally mistaken? We cannot blame Tara. Tara definitely has the power to grant the blessings but we have to be very careful in what we are asking. We have to ask properly, with correct motivation. We have to be very pure; we have to have to be a very pure container, so that she can pour in the blessed nectar. Otherwise the nectar will leak or it will stain; the way medicine can become poison. You repeatedly ask for blessings, yet due to worldly motivation in the request, your prayer becomes a pollution of dharma because your mind is totally disturbed and dominated by worldiness and superstitions.

## **Superstition versus Buddhadharma**

The actual meaning of tantra therefore comes in i.e to transform; to free you from superstitions. Even in the meditation we discussed earlier, thoughts of the past memories and future plans are all superstitions, which have nothing to do with the present moment's awareness. To relieve your mind from superstition, practice upon waking hours for even just a short period as I earlier mentioned - clean, clear, calm,

peaceful. That's it. There is no other than that. We have to train our mind into this condition so that we can achieve single pointed concentration and then be able to achieve the realizations in the graduated path to enlightenment.

So this basic **mindfulness, introspection and concentration meditation** is very, very important with the benefit of enabling one to **control one's emotions and free ourselves from superstition** Once one is able to control one's emotions, you can live quite happily in this samsara and transform this suffering samsara into a precious opportunity to attain freedom from samsara.

Without these as the foundation, our mind is no more than a very light leaf spinning in a tornado. Think about it! How many thoughts you have in your mind at any one moment? All those are superstitions but without meditation, you don't realize it! What we call ignorance is by no means dull and slow. In fact ignorance and its way of dealing with things is actually very alert, very scary! It is like it's almost equal to the power of wisdom realizing emptiness. Only difference is, ignorance keeps us in the dark, covering our clear light mind but its "cleverness" is almost as sharp as the wisdom realizing emptiness. It is cunning too. The moment you try to move this way, it will move the opposite way to counter you. The moment you try to cross this border, it will cross over twice. So, the moment the superstitious mind comes, it will immediately send the grasping mind to support its activities! Grasp, grasp, cling! Somebody punched you, so it must be he wants to kill you (even though there wasn't any such thought). Who knows maybe his punching you was what you call "sayang" (local language for "affection"). So, maybe the punching could be sayang but your mind misjudged it to his wanting to harm you. The grasping mind further think "Yes, I will hold the grudge in my heart and I will take revenge on him. If possible right now, if not then tomorrow but for sure before I



die! Cling, hold very tight! “ This is how our ignorant mind dictates us. So if we do not put effort to apply our own alertness, mindfulness, introspection and concentration, we will get carried away by emotions. It becomes so dangerous. This is so obvious but if we don’t think over this, we just carry on "enjoying" our life ruled by ignorance.

Superstitions: Define superstition? Whatever thoughts you have now are all superstitions. Totally superstitious! **Until you realize the lack of inherent existence of all these thoughts, all are superstitious mind.** That means, like me, whatever thoughts that come into me are all superstitions because I can’t see the lack of inherent existence in my way of thinking, in what I perceive, in what I cling to. I don’t have realizations, so as long as I don’t achieve direct realisation of emptiness, all thoughts will be superstitions! As long as you don’t realise the emptiness mind on this microphone, cup, mug, table, work, car everything is superstition. Superstition is the ordinary mind’s way of perceiving all persons and phenomena and we have to purify that! We need to negate that mistaken mind. Delusions and secondary afflictions are all superstitions. That is why you really have to be careful in interpreting Buddhadharma. It is 100% not superstitious, though you know, many people do think that Buddhadharma is superstitious!

Is religion superstition? As for Buddhadharma I came up with these responses from my own viewpoint. First of all imminently it’s a religion in the sense that we follow one particular track, Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings which came from his direct experience. Second thing is that it is a philosophy with a vast body of reasonings and logic. Thirdly I say, it is a science, as it investigates reality and it deals with facts! Lastly it is a lifestyle. That is my interpretation of Buddhadharma. For me, anything that don’t have all these criteria, I regards as superstition. I find these characteristics in the Buddha’s teachings, in the teachings of compassion, in the prayers and thus I don’t regard any of these as

superstitious. That is why when you are practicing pure Dharma, you are not superstitious. As long as you have a clinging mind, then it's superstitious! Pure dharma is not superstitious. You are requesting definite blessings, which have the value of conventional truth and ultimate truth free from superstition.

### **Benefit of meditation**

The ultimate benefit of meditation is that one will be able to unveil and brighten the clear light mind. At the present time, due to the dominance of afflictive emotions, one is unable to cognize the truth of all phenomena and remains an ordinary person with mistaken views. But if that ordinary person can purify and negate those afflictive emotions, the same clear light mind will become all knowing. All knowing means having perfect wisdom that knows conventional truth and ultimate truth. That all knowing state of mind is called the omniscient mind, Buddha mind. That is the moment we achieve Buddhahood.

Through meditation, one will gain a stage of stable stillness, able to remain in the meditative unification stage of great bliss and emptiness. One can be able to remain still without distraction, for days, months, years, and even eons. That's why one will be able to achieve the perfection stage. The Buddha mind is non-dual. For ordinary beings, when you meditate on conventional truth (how things ordinarily appear to exist), you lose concentration on the ultimate truth (the emptiness of all self and phenomena); when you meditate on the ultimate truth, you lose meditation on the conventional truth. As far as the Buddha is concerned, the Buddha sees both truths simultaneously. With one single pointedness, one mind; one subject, That's why here, Buddhas remain in still meditation of unification of great bliss and emptiness ("great bliss" refers to conventional truth; "emptiness" refers to ultimate truth).

For ordinary beings, it is difficult to meditate on both conventional and ultimate truths simultaneously (and thus cannot eradicate the subtlest of defilements) because the strength of our memory is very limited. This is because we mostly use the gross levels of our mind to remember things; we never touch the subtle mind. We only use the gross mind which has limited capacity to remember things. When we use the gross mind to concentrate, again, we cannot remain in long-term concentration for long. Therefore the need to penetrate to the subtle levels of mind.

### **Gross and subtle mind**

Due to the limitation of the gross mind in remembering details, the meditation technique described before is for us to learn to hold a tight rein on the gross mind (which carries superstitious thoughts) and penetrate into the subtle levels of mind.

For this, the method is to compress, to neutralise the gross mind; then do the same to the secondary gross mind and gradually reach the subtle level mind and again compress that mind and move towards the subtle of the subtle mind and finally to see the clear light mind.

So it's like pressing the untamed, misleading nature of the more gross levels of mind down with steady and great concentration until perfect clarity is attained. In this way, subtlest mind concentration pierces through to gain direct cognition of the clear light mind. That is why many practitioners, they use the opportunity at the time of death to achieve this. They practice in tapping into the subtle levels of mind in their day-to-day life when they are alive. First they practice in daytime hours; then they train in dreams. This is because when you sleep, your gross mind naturally ceases to be active. In order to be able to do that when we are awake, we have to at least try to avoid the very gross mind, for example, if you want to focus on teaching, at least avoid thinking of

your family members or whatever parties you have been invited to. Just be here. Leave the grossest superstitious thoughts aside. After training this way, you will find yourself better able to control your gross mind and able to check yourself in dreams.

In order to check yourself in dreams, you need a certain technique. Again you need the supporting positive lifestyle earlier explained, in order to effectively apply the technique. Your dietary habits also help you to avoid an deep sleep but one where you still get rest. Under those conditions, one is able to control the dreaming mind.

Then when you wake up, you are able to remember your dream clearly, including how you controlled yourself in the dream state. Just to remember the dream is easy but how you maintain control, how you analyze that dream as a dream during that dream state. For example, you remember your dream of an elephant entering through your door into your room. You have to be able to tell your subconscious mind that this is dream and not real because you are able to reason in your dream that the door is too small for the elephant to enter. All this logic you need to be able to work out and communicate internally and upon that analysis, you are able to wake up and be able to tell yourself you achieve certain level on concentration. Once this becomes a familiar process to you, then at the time of death you will be able to use this technique at the time of death. During the death process, there are definite stages of degeneration. We look at our natural death which involves aging, slowing down, weakening eye vision, ears cannot hear properly, taste failing. Compare this to the time when we were babies where our skin was so sensitive, 1000% more sensitive than our present skin and other senses. As we age and enter the death process, we experience degenerations; dissolutions of elements.

Once the gross body dissolves, from the medical point of view, the person is dead. No more breathing, sight, hearing touch etc. Medically

dead but not necessarily spiritually dead. Conventionally, even though the gross body is gone, the mind could still be in the central channel (the teachings refer to the presence of an invisible, internal nervous system within us consisting of channels, inner winds and drops). If you cannot accept this, have you wondered why the body only degenerates after some pus or blood passes out from the newly deceased body? It is commonly known in the Tibetan and Chinese communities these will definitely be observed after some time in a person who has passed away. 100% it will come. So until that happens, consciousness is still in the body. During the death process, every single living being including cockroaches, experience clear light mind but mostly don't recognize that is the clear light mind. At that time you see your own Buddha. You own self in the state of Buddha, so clean, clear, cognizing state of mind, which is the Buddha nature mind...

### **The Clear Light Mind**

So practitioners understanding all this, use this lifetime to work with the subtle mind through meditation. That's why meditation is so important. It seeks to cognize that clear light mind and use that clear light mind try to perceive the true ultimate nature of the clear light mind and the absence of all inherent existence. It is said that when you cognize the true nature of the clear light mind, it brings instant bliss.

In normal life, sometimes in your mind, suddenly you experience instant bliss. Like father-mother bliss, there is an instant bliss. When you cognize the true ultimate nature of the clear light mind and gain the wisdom to perceive the two truths simultaneously, the bliss experienced is far more subtle than that kind of bliss. That's the reason we call union of bliss and emptiness.

The opportunity to use the clear light mind that arises during the natural death process to cognize the two truths simultaneously is why

many practitioners gain enlightenment at the time of dying. If they don't gain enlightenment right then, they at least try to realize emptiness directly at that time. That's why there is a saying that when we practice dharma, we practice to prepare for death. What it means is to prepare for peaceful death, calm death, death which has great purpose, death with lots of blessings. In our day-to-day life, there are many distractions due to gross senses; we cannot escape. So the best opportunity is at the time of dying.

Those great practitioners, they are so happy to die! They view their liberation as being so close by; their liberation is so near. The moment the gross consciousness dissolves, naturally they can go into the subtle, subtlest concentration of clear-light meditation to cognize the emptiness there, apply the antidote of all their defilements and gain enlightenment! All within 1 hour, one morning, 3 days, one-week, one month of clear light meditation. You hear of Buddhist masters doing clear light meditation at death-time, using this technique.

As for the middle-capability being, these are quite good practitioners but not really 100% successful practitioners like those just mentioned. But at least, these practitioners die without regret. They have the confidence in their practice of at least being able to realize emptiness during death. Hence, even though they may not attain enlightenment, they are able to at least realize emptiness and thus have no regrets.

As for the lousy practitioners, they tried to practice but didn't do very well. Still, they at least won't fear the death. They have confidence that they will not fall into lower realms and understand that they will be reborn in the human realm to be able to again practice Dharma.

For those very low practitioners, somebody like me lost in the desert – how afraid to die! So scared of death! The moment one hears of death, we freak out! Some even fear to think of death nor talk about rebirth.

Freethinkers are not spared – to be a freethinker doesn't mean it's good, you know? Freethinkers are no necessarily brave nor have a lot of wisdom.

Freethinkers can be of two types - they are born as free thinker meaning they are totally not educated in matters concerning death and those who do have some understanding but they are too fearful to talk about death. Whatever type of freethinker you are, you understand aging that leads to eventual death. You were born, now you are much older and may not have head wrinkles before but now you do. Previously, you don't even have one white hair, now you have lots! Feel uneasy about this? This itself is fear of death! Thus for this kind of thinking, the best thing is to avoid thinking or talking about death and avoid believing in rebirth and think of only this life! Excuse me but I think they're just scared. I have several Westerner friends who are so scared of death. The moment you speak of death, they remark "O, don't make me suffer!" They don't want to hear of it as they are scared they understand who they are.

For those who are afraid of death, you see the expressions on their faces at the time of death. For others, some are very peaceful. Even when they are suffering from cancer, they have peaceful faces. Some die with screams and opened twisted mouths. They scream like they see what is happening, they see their karma. In fact, only Buddha can see their subtle karma but all the gross functioning karma, this dying person is able to see. Dying with open mouth and grasping hands! You can analyze what kind of rebirth he is going to take. Like that.

Q: What is clear light mind?

Ans: Clear light mind is the subtlest level of consciousness, which continuously travels from beginningless lives up till now and beyond in a continuum. It is called clear light because the nature is clear of obscurations and so bright due to being free of outer obscurations.

Q: Meditation on death: Do we have to meditate on union of great bliss and emptiness all the time?

Ans: Yes, this we have to practice all the time. In our daily life, we can say that the unification practice is bodhicitta. When you generate the bodhicitta mind you have patience and an instant feeling in your mental continuum of the spontaneous feel of bodhicitta, is the equivalent to great bliss and the wisdom realizing emptiness.

When you conjoined these two practices (of bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness together) and working for other beings through performing the 6 Perfections practice, you are practicing the unification of method and wisdom. In tantric practice you use great bliss and emptiness and in Sutric practice, you use method and wisdom.





## **Chapter 2**

### **Preliminary Prayers and their Explanations:**

- (1) Refuge Prayers**
- (2) Prayers to Develop Bodhicitta**
- (3) The Four Immeasurables Prayer**
- (4) The Seven-Limbs Prayer**

## Chapter 2

### Preliminary Prayers and their Explanations:

- (1) Refuge Prayers
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- (3) The Four Immeasurables Prayer
- (4) The Seven -Limbs Prayer

Whatever Dharma practice we do, it needs to involve three important points: (1) Motivation (2) Actual practice (3) Dedication. Through this, one will actualize one's practices in the most essential and complete way.

#### (1) Refuge and Bodhicitta prayers

As a Mahayana practitioner, we always begin by setting out the bodhicitta motivation for doing any practice and gaining inspiration from the Triple Gem, as the object of refuge. That's why in the Mahayana teachings, Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer form one paragraph.

In Tibetan phonetic:

*Sang-gye cho-dang tsog-kyi chog-nam-la*

*Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi*

*Dag-gi jin-sog gyi-pe tsog-nam-gyi*

*Dro-la pen-chir sang-gye drub-par-shog*

English translation:

I go for refuge until I am enlightened

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Supreme Assembly.

By my merits of giving and other perfections,

May I become a Buddha to benefit all sentient beings.

These four lines prayer condense the practice of both refuge and bodhicitta. The first two lines refer to the object of refuge which is Triple Gem – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and the inspiration to take refuge in them. The second two lines raise the supreme inspiration for doing any virtue and practice, namely bodhicitta (the altruistic mind that seeks enlightenment to free all beings from suffering).

Some of you have been Buddhist for more than 20 years, some 2 years or 1 month. The first thing we learn and need to know about is Refuge and bodhicitta, especially when we are Mahayana Buddhist practitioners.

If I asked a question: Is it sufficient for us to just recite the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer verbally in order to actualize the meaning of this prayer and practice?

The answer is: Absolutely not.

Another question: But is there any benefit to merely reciting the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer?

The answer is: Yes, there is benefit but it is very limited. It will definitely leave a positive imprint in our heart but there is not much

chance that it will move our heart much nor habituate our minds with the key points, if we only recite and not make effort to reflect on the meaning of the prayer.

### **Importance of imprints**

Contemplating deeply on the meaning of prayers and the teachings is very necessary to plant firm imprints in our mental continuum. Without doing so, there is not much chance we will benefit from them at the moment of time of death nor in the next life.

The most potent and positive influence on our life now, at death-time and future lives is the imprint of Dharma. Generally, there are positive imprints and negative imprints. Positive imprints help to actualize positive results such as happiness. Negative imprints bring suffering results. Refuge and bodhicitta practice will implant positive imprints that will bring happiness now, later in life and even at the time of death. It will guide us to a higher rebirth and best of all, this practice can lead us to enlightenment and if not, at least to a stage of high realizations of a bodhisattva; if not, at least an ordinary bodhisattva; if not, at least as a human being who possesses good heart. Some human beings have inborn compassion, inborn bodhicitta mind which is always wanting to help others, always practising tolerance. These are special beings, high realm beings, great beings who have imprinted their minds with such qualities from long before, so at least we will take such rebirth such as human rebirth which all of us have obtained now. Just by taking refuge and having refuge in our mental continuum, that will protect us from falling into lower realms. Even though our rebirth is by the force of karma and delusion, still, with these we can take rebirth in higher realms such as a human with all its potential.

We need to reflect on the meaning of prayers rather than just reciting it like a parrot. When you teach a prayer to a parrot, it cannot

contemplate on the meaning, so if we don't reflect on the meaning of refuge and bodhicitta, we are no different from the parrot. So as a human being, especially those who possess the karma to meet the Mahayana teachings, we must cultivate and use our actions to benefit infinite beings as motivated in bodhicitta prayer.

Here I will explain through the Tibetan words. This is also a form of Tibetan language class! You can learn some Tibetan from here.

### **The meaning of Sang -gye**

“*sang gye*” means Buddha.

“*sang-gye*” contains two components - “*Sang*” means to purify, abandon, overcome. What is abandoned, purified and overcome? The two obscurations namely (1) obscuration to liberation/nirvana (2) obscuration to enlightenment/full Buddhahood.

### **Obscuration to nirvana and Obscuration to omniscience**

The obscuration to nirvana/liberation is the self-grasping mind. Obscuration to omniscience/full enlightenment is both the self-grasping mind towards oneself & phenomena and the self-cherishing mind towards oneself & phenomena. In short, we can refer to these as ignorance. Ignorance is the main obscuration to both nirvana and omniscience.

Buddha has obtained the qualities of overcoming the two obscurations – the obscuration to nirvana (due to the self-grasping mind); the obscuration to omniscience (due to self-grasping and self-cherishing towards oneself & phenomena). Thus, “*Sang*” contains this meaning.

When you recite “*Sang-gye cho-dang tsog-kyi chog-nam-la*”, the moment you hear the word “*Sang*” (abandon/purify/overcome), straight away reflect on the need to abandon all the afflictions and obscurations such as the 6 root delusions and 20 secondary afflictions. When you chant “*Sang*”, at that time, remember the disadvantages of not being free from afflictions, not being free of the grasping mind, having ignorance and defilements, then you will get the real feeling of what “*Sang*” means.

“*Gye*” means obtained. What has been obtained? All the qualities of an enlightened being – the ten powers, the method to benefit numberless beings, the four bodies of the Buddha, the five concentrations, the accomplished Six Perfections and omniscient mind. At our level, we are engaged in the practice of the Six Perfections namely generosity, ethics, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom but we have not perfected them yet. We are only getting familiar with them. Who has perfected the practice of Six Perfections? Only the Buddha. Buddha is the supreme one who has attained perfection and is the principal object of refuge because he has already overcome all defilements, problems, obstacles and who has obtained all the powers. If I don’t respect this great being, then whom should I respect? If I don’t take refuge in this holy one, in whom should I take refuge? Thinking this way allows you to really will feel who Buddha is.

So whenever you recite “*gye*”, you should reflect all these qualities of Buddha.

In short, by abandoning and overcoming all afflictions, we develop the qualities of the Buddha - this is how to reflect on the word “*Sang-gye*”.

### **The meaning of “cho” - Dharma**

“Cho” means Dharma. The literal meaning is to identify and then transform. Identifying and transforming what? Identifying afflictions,

then transforming them. All the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha are antidotes for different defilements. What is Dharma then? Dharma is that which enables us to overcome afflictions; the main antidote being the direct realization of emptiness, which overcomes ignorance.

When studying emptiness, one learns about the two truths: (1) ultimate truth and (2) conventional truth (we shall cover this topic later). When we apply our understanding of emptiness to our minds, it will enable us to identify and transform disturbing emotions and defilements. Without applying emptiness, without using the tool of the two truths, there will be no way of escaping defilements. So this is Dharma.

“Sang-gye cho-dang **tsog**-kyi chog-nam-la”

### **The meaning of “tsog” - Sangha**

The term “tsog” here is not referring to our tsog offering during Guru Puja. This “tsog” is referring to community or group, i.e. the Sangha community. The Sangha are our companions in our efforts to apply the antidotes to our afflictions in daily life. Buddha is the doctor, Dharma is the medicine and Sangha is the nurse. Buddha who is like a perfect doctor, diagnosed that our sickness is the afflictions/delusions (the 6 root delusions and 20-secondary afflicted emotions) and proceeded to prescribe the medicine needed to treat this sickness, which is Dharma, which is the wisdom realizing emptiness. The Buddha then asked the Sangha to act as companions as nurse to feed the medicine to the patient, to inspire them to live life in virtue to obtain enlightenment. So it is exactly like that, after taking the perfect medicine of Dharma by practicing it in daily life, with support and inspiration drawn from Sangha, one is able to achieve the awakened mind, the omniscient mind.

When one takes refuge in Sangha, one is referring to those Sangha who have realized emptiness directly, the arya Sangha. Those beings are the actual Sangha refuge. And those beings need not necessarily be monks or nuns or live a celibate life. Even as a lay person, as long as you have perceived emptiness directly (not just understand it intellectually but have direct experience of emptiness), you are the Sangha refuge.

### **Why respect Sangha**

In my case, even though I am Sangha, I am being called Sangha and I have Sangha vows, since I have not perceived emptiness directly, I am not the actual Sangha refuge, I am just a representative, a symbol of the Sangha refuge. By your respecting Sangha like me, there are benefits due to my holding the 253 ordination vows, the highest vows that Buddha possessed which I also now hold. Because of these vows and for those who show respect to possess these vows, will receive benefits.

Monks and nuns are like the sons and daughters of Buddha. Buddha instructed that all novice monks and nuns who possess the 36 vows be given the task of attendants to serve fully-ordained Sangha. This means to regard oneself like a servant to the fully ordained Sangha as a senior, as a master. This is all due to the vows held. It is not that the fully ordained Sangha should demand respect and be bossy like a master. Buddha certainly didn't mean that. Buddha gave this instruction because the novice Sangha or anyone who offers service to the fully ordained Sangha gains an enormous amount of merits and receive great purification.

But of course for those who obtained 253 vows cannot take advantage of those who serve. The vow-holders must have pure motivation and be humble when accepting the service. Others are serving you for the purpose of accumulating merits, which means you have to be in the position to earn that respect. If one receives 253 vows and then act



badly to those who serve, it is not right. That's why senior Sangha have to abide in the manner of a senior; junior Sangha have to stay in the manner of juniors. Anyway, this is just for Vinaya purposes (code of conduct for Sangha), so please don't worry about it too much. It is Vinaya rule and practice. Please don't misunderstand that I asked you to serve me.

I was once questioned about an incident where a lay person in the presence of many other lay people, asked me to fetch a drink for that person, whilst knowing that I hold full ordination vows. From my side, I accepted the request to serve drinks because I was the one who asked whether I could serve some drinks. This person responded with "Yes, yes, yes. Good. Bring me a drink." Of course the manner of request was like an order but in my mind, I was very happy to oblige, so I went. When I went out to make the drink, a strong debate arose amongst the people there - one person said, "How dare you do this? Geshela is an object of respect, you cannot do this to him!" The person who asked for the drink said, "Why not? We are still human beings, we are the same." Later on, I was questioned by this same person. "Is it ok to ask you to make me a drink or not?" I reply, "Yes, sure, of course! Sure you can ask me to do that because I treat you like a friend. You can order me, ask me to do this and that for sure. But it will be wrong for you to ask other Sangha like that". So that was my answer.

Here we cannot misunderstand. We have to be flexible as we are all practitioners of bodhicitta. Whether the other person deserves respect or not, for you, you should respect every single living being, not only the Buddha. If the Buddha manifested in front of you, it is most likely that the Buddha would offer you more respect than you would offer the Buddha!

## **Showing equal respect to sentient beings, as you would to Buddhas**

In many parts of the Buddha's teachings, it is taught that whilst you respect all Buddhas for your liberation, if you don't respect ordinary living beings, then your so-called respect and practice is a joke. It is one-sided. If you are respecting Buddha for the benefits of your liberation, you must have equal respect to all the mother sentient beings for the same reason.

That's why in tantric teaching, you are required to see every single living being as a Buddha, every single living beings as a Buddha, all male beings as daka, all female beings as dakini. It is stated as such in the teachings.

## **Ordinary Sangha & Arya sangha**

"Sangha" need not necessarily be ordained monks or nuns. As long as you posses direct perception of emptiness i.e. when you reach the Path of Seeing, you become an Arya being, you become the Sangha Refuge.

On the subject of the 5 Paths, from the Mahayana viewpoint, if the practitioner practices the Hinayana path first and attains the Path of Seeing in the Hinayana tradition, they are said to then enter into Mahayana path at the first level of Path of Accumulation as a Sangha Refuge because he/she already gained the direct perception of emptiness because he/she was an Arya being in Hinayana level before and is now he/she just continuing his/her practice.

For those practitioners who practice the Mahayana path, when they attain the first Path of Accumulation, followed by the second Path of Preparation, they are still not eligible to be the Sangha refuge because they have not obtained direct perception on emptiness. When they enter into Path of Seeing (direct realization of emptiness), from there they become Sangha refuge.

Ordinary sangha or ordinary monks or nuns are the representatives of the Sangha refuge. Therefore by showing respect to Sangha, it has the great benefit of connecting your karma to become Sangha refuge in the future, to obtain realization on emptiness directly.

When you reflect on the practice of refuge, “*sang-gye cho-dang tsog...*” the moment you hear “*tsog*”, you should admire the Sangha community and those who have obtained direct realization on emptiness, then meditate and make prayer “may I able to achieve that realization on perceiving emptiness directly too.” Because without perceiving emptiness directly, you cannot cease defilements and in order to create the cause for that is to take refuge under Sangha, follow the advice such as not following negative friends (those who distract oneself from virtue). By taking refuge three times in morning and three times at night, the moment you do this prayer, make sure that you remind yourself - I will make sure that I will not be influenced by negative friends.

### **Who are virtuous friends & negative friends?**

A negative friend is whoever distracts you from virtue; who asks you to avoid taking Refuge, to get into evil actions, to harm others, to indulge in intoxicants and gross enjoyment of the five senses, who foster greater desire and greater grasping in you. Somebody who encourages you and influences you with respect to all these, is a negative friend. By reciting “*sang-gye cho-dang tsog...*”, if possible, you pause here for a moment when mentioning “*Tsog*” - admire the Sangha Refuge and remind yourself to make sure not to fall into negative friends’ advice. This is very effective protection for you. Just by reflecting on this is already protecting you. If you meditate on this, it helps; if you don’t meditate, it doesn’t help.

As well as reflecting on Dharma, “*Sang-gye cho...*”, remember you are also taking refuge under Dharma i.e. not to kill, not to harm any living being. Think “I will make consciously ensure that I will not harm others even unintentionally. I will put full mindfulness in even my footsteps so as not to step on ants; I will make sure my hand movements do not knock or harm anyone”. So by taking refuge under dharma, you are already assured of being a good person, at least on that very day you do the above reflection. Naturally you accumulate so much merit, and naturally it makes you a better person. If you can do this every day, you will reach perfection.

As for taking Refuge in Buddha, again reflect – I should not take refuge in spirits and worldly gods who themselves are not enlightened and not liberated from samsara. My main purpose is to gain liberation from samsara, so if the person whom I take refuge is not liberated from samsara, how is he going to liberate me? He himself is lost, so how is he going to guide me onto the right path? Thus I must resolve that I will not be influenced by negative guides and instead follow Dharma friends, virtuous friends. Note that one refers to one’s Guru as a Virtuous Friend.

Why are spirits and worldly gods regarded as non-virtuous friends? Because reliance on them will bring suffering. Think about it – how can praying to worldly gods such as land protectors or nagas, bring suffering? Here the suffering I am referring to is samsara/cyclic existence/re-experiencing hardships again and again. By making incense and light offerings toward spirits to please the spirits, or worse, taking sole refuge under them, will bring some benefits but the benefits is temporary. Temporary benefits take on the appearance of short-lived gain but in fact, it will carry with it, the suffering of change and not the lasting ultimate happiness that we seek.

What are the sufferings of change? Changes leading to failure. When we take refuge under worldly gods, the minute we stop praying, the gods (being samsaric beings also have afflictions of anger, ignorance etc) will cause harm the next day or one year or ten years later but for sure you will receive some form of harm from them, so you have to continuously appease them. In some cases, your grandparents and your parents have prayed to these spirits for their whole life, so you think of this as commitment to pass this on to your children as well, and onto your grandchildren, why? It is almost as if you have no choice, you have to do it because you fear that not doing it will bring harm into family. Sometimes this does happen. Therefore, it is important not to take refuge under spirits or worldly god. Now to be secure in your Refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, just recite the first line “*Sang-gye cho-dang tsog-kyi chog-nam-la*”; “*sang-gye*” is Buddha; “*cho*” is dharma; “*tsog*” is sangha.

Second line:

*Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi*

“*Jang-chub*” refers to enlightenment, the state of perfection, the state attained by Shakyamuni Buddha. The bodhi tree is called “jang-chub-shing”, “shing” is tree. Thus, “jang-chub” refers to the Sankrit word of Bodhi (awakened state; enlightened state).

“*bar-du*” means until.

“*dag-ni*” means I

“*Kyab-su-chi*” means go for refuge.

So “*Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi*” means that after knowing the qualities of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, I will take Refuge in the Triple Gem until I obtain “Jang-chub”, buddhahood, enlightenment. So this completes the Refuge.

Now go to third line,  
*Dag-gi jin-sog gyi-pe tsog-nam-gyi*

“*dag-gi*” means “my”

“*Jin-sog*”, “jin” normally means “jin-pa, which means generosity, it is noun”. “sog” means etcetera. So jin-sog means “*generosity et cetera*”.

“*gyi-pe*” means “by doing”.

“*tsog-nam-gyi*”, “tsog” here refers to merits – the merit of method and the merit of wisdom. “*nam-gyi*” is “by then”.

So, “*Dag-gi jin-sog gyi-pe tsog-nam-gyi*” means “by my merits from giving/generosity and other perfections” “Other Perfections” refer to the remaining five of the six Perfections i.e. ethics/morality, patience, joyous perseverance, concentration and wisdom.

## **An explanation of the Six Perfections:**

### **Generosity**

Generosity is the mind of giving. There are three types of generosity?  
(1) Generosity in giving material aid (2) generosity in granting protection and (3) generosity in dharma.

### **Morality/Ethics**

Morality generally refers to being a good person, wise, truthful person, dedicated, responsible, loving person, compassionate person, kind person. In the teachings, morality or ethics refers to the morality of practicing ten virtue actions and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions (committed by one’s body, speech and mind). At a deeper level, this refers to upholding the five lay vows, pratikmosha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows, three precepts of ordinary vows, thirty

six precepts of novice vows, 253 vows of fully ordained sangha, daily life precepts such as 8 mahayana precepts, so living a life this way or at least living a life of avoiding killing, telling lie, is living in morality. We have to cultivate this practice in our daily life. Even if you cannot do much service physically, mentally you can be there for others; you completely belong to others without discrimination. Whoever comes first, you serve first, without discrimination. Living a life of morality is so important.

## **Patience**

Patience or tolerance is a great stabilizing force in our Dharma practice and living life meaningfully. It is as if from birth, we have been thrown into a snake-pit and highly attractive to all forms of snakes. We are born in this condition. At any time, at any moment, we can be bitten by the harmful minds and actions of others. We have been born into human society but the human mind, despite all its potential for good, can also be..... ai yoo... my goodness! One person can destroy so much, let alone many people with this kind of destructive mind and there are only a very small number of beings who selflessly do things to benefit others. Most people act in anger, pride, frustration, cheat, deceive and offend others. Look at this world, it is like that. You don't have clairvoyance, you don't know who is biting you. Appearances can sometimes be that someone is feeding you milk but in truth, it is the opposite. It is difficult to know. So you see, it can be scary.

There is a saying, "Solitary Realizer practitioners practice alone; they don't practice in groups". Sometime they even avoid their teacher, they live totally on their own in solitude. Their goal is "I myself alone will achieve liberation." They have such kind of mind. In school we used to pity such practitioners because once upon a time, they too used to work like us so-called Mahayana practitioners wanting to benefit numberless beings but they became disappointed with betrayal and harm caused by

those whom they tried to help. In the end, they felt they had no choice but to run away and live in solitude. It was not motivated by the wish to be alone but they felt forced to do so, in order to progress towards their liberation.

So there is this danger that when we practice Dharma in society, if our mind is not strong or if our resolve to practice is unstable, we will encounter difficulty and abandon our efforts. It is like in the Dharma center, as a new comer, when you first come in, you expect everything and everyone to be pure; that the place has no ghost nor spirits as there are so many holy scriptures and statues; you even expect the light to be brighter than your home and the cushions here more comfortable because it is a compassionate place and there should be water to drink, nice toilets to use and whoever you see in this hall, you will expect them to be like bodhisattvas just waiting to serve you, smile at you, think purely of you, never speak poorly of you and only give respect and service to you. As a newcomer, it could be that you expect all these but if upon coming in, you see the opposite, then it becomes very disappointing.

If in a family, let say the wife makes effort to study dharma but husband doesn't and later, the wife wants to force the husband to learn Dharma and gets into disagreement with the husband when he continues to refuse – to this lady I say, “I support your husband. I don't support you. Why do you push your husband to study Dharma? Look at yourself, so impatient, so much anxiety, even in small things, you can't give way. Although I haven't met your husband but I am sure your husband is much calmer than you; more tolerant and accepting than you. If this is how you are, how can you ever convince your husband to go to a Dharma Centre? And another thing, this kind of impatience, it gets worse when you come here isn't it?”.



She replied, “Yah! For the last two years I have been practicing very hard.”

Then I said, “Oh! So this is the result of your practice. Gaining realizations the opposite way. This is totally wrong. So from now on, please stop asking your husband to come to the Centre... no need. Your homework from now is to set yourself as a good example for him. Instead of pushing him, just be yourself to stay calm, gentle, accepting, letting go, patient, respectful, softer in words, more gentle, more sweet, more of a smiling face. If you do this, I will guarantee your husband will be inspired to follow you to the Centre. Just use yourself as an example to convince others; don't demand that they come to the Centre. Why they don't want to come? Because they scared that they will become like you.”

### **Benefits of practicing patience**

One of the benefits of practicing patience is that you will receive a beautiful and attractive body with persuasive speech in future life times. Even in this life, you will earn respect and you will liked by many people. When you have patience, you are gentle and pleasant to look at. An ugly face is not just about facial appearances. For example, nasty words, negative facial expressions and negative mental thinking, are all reasons for people to run away from you. And why do people come to you? It is because you are beautiful inside, your speech is beautiful, your mind is beautiful, your appearance is attractive and these are the results of patience.

### **The quality of samsara**

For example, offerings of flowers is said to generate merits which will result in achieving beauty in future life time but being patient is much more effective to secure this. Going to beauty parlor, putting on

makeup, all that is temporary. Rather you try to actualize the innate beauty, the inner beauty, then you can attract those who you would like to attract.

External beauty has the danger of attracting those who come near to you for the wrong reasons. Just a simple example, when we talk about make up - let say there is a young girl who prefers to live simply without seeking companions or attraction from others. Although this is the inner wish, the outer conduct follows the desire mind i.e. always wanting to make up to look attractive. By doing so, the boys get attracted by you and it is then not the fault of boys. You created the situation to attract them. At the first moment you might feel very good when somebody comes near to you but after a while, you might start feeling irritated; you now want to avoid him; you get angry, upset, thinking "Why this person following me?" Mental discomforts come. Now there is the danger of blaming the boys, because whenever you see a boy, you don't show your exact appearance; you show the made-up appearance. I don't know how to explain it nicely. You do not want something but you create that very thing to happen. **In fact this is exactly the kind of quality that samsara possesses - we do not want suffering but we always create causes of suffering.** We want happiness but we never engage in the creation of causes of happiness. This is all about samsara.

### **Innate beauty is the result of good karma**

In our day to day life, be yourself, be simple, just be natural. I am not saying don't go to make up or beautify yourself, this is your business, there is nothing to do with me. I am not talking about anybody here, I am just talking in general. Having real inner beauty is necessary. Inner, natural beauty is the result of good karma which you earn and if you seek a companion, you will definitely attract somebody who will be very good for you. For this, the best insurance is to practice patience. If you

practice patience, whatever problem you have in your relationship will quickly cease.

Practising patience means to see the faults of getting angry and retaliating. Think, if you hit me, Thank you very much! If you scold me, Oh ! Wonderful! Om Mani Padme Hum! If I set my mind the thinking that all scolding words are Om Mani Padme Hum and everything is Dharma, then even if you scold me and the more you scold me, the more mantra I hear.

### **The beauty of inner & outer world**

Actually there is a meditation during Highest Yoga Tantra practice where the practitioner is required to regard whatever is heard as the mantra of the deity; whatever image seen as the image of the deity; whatever thought arises as being the deity's thought. Whatever appearance you show to others, it is deity's thought, deity's speech and deity's appearance. This practice in relation to others is one of acceptance and one without defensiveness. Even wrathful, ugly or angry images appearing before you are regarded as daka or dakini, so it becomes OK. If something comes to bite you and you try to push it away, you are likely to get a punch; whereas, if you don't push, the chance to get punched is reduced. The moment you push, that itself will build the strength of conditions for you to get punched. So, just be calm and smile. If people accuse you for doing things that you didn't do, just remember the mantra of the deity which you are familiar with. This is very powerful practice because a Buddha-deity will not get angry nor scold nor think negatively. The wrathfulness aspect of a Buddha deity is in fact born out of compassion to subdue the afflictions of beings they are helping. In this way, you protect your mind. Mantra means protection for the mind; that how tantra practice offers protection. By being well-guarded by patience and understanding, patience is one of the best methods to accumulate the real beauty, the innate beauty in us.

The better the practitioner the greater his/her patience; the worse, the practitioner is the more impatient that person is. This is a clear sign which we don't need to go to request for observations from a Lama on how much realizations have I gained? You can check yourself. You will know if you honestly look at yourself and your level of patience. That's why we say dharma practice is to look into ourselves and investigate our minds to see what dwells within; what strength of negative emotions and afflictions we have. If we see those afflictions subsiding, it means that our practice is helping.

*“Thoe-dak shi-shing-dul; gom-dak nyon-mong dul”*

*“thoe-dak shi-shing dul”* means the beneficial effect of your having listened to Dharma and the sign is one of humility. The more you hear Dharma, the more humble you get in your speech, mind and action.

*“Gom-dak nyon-mong dul”* means the sign of contemplation and meditation on Dharma, as it lessens your delusions.

Therefore, we have to check up inside ourselves – up till today, have I been practicing true Refuge and bodhicitta? Is there any improvement in my mind? Am I more patient? Am I less intense in my delusions, my anger, hatred, jealousy or more? If my afflictions have increased, it means that something is wrong in the way one is practicing Dharma. Need to check up more closely. But if the afflictions have decreased, then all the more so one should put in effort as our efforts are working. This is how you should check on yourself, not by others.

### **Joyous Effort/ Enthusiastic Perseverance**

In Dharma practice we need a lot of effort in our day to day life, to transform our samsaric life into Dharma practice. In the Lo-jong teachings, it says that we need tremendous effort; not one that is about hardship or torture but instead, effort that is joyous; a state of mind

which has so much enthusiasm and inspiration that one is able to endure many situations, even difficult ones because one is totally inspired to Dharma practice, cultivating Refuge and bodhicitta. When you look at the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, it naturally brings so much inspiration to all your efforts - that's why the word they use is "joyous effort".

Joyous effort is not like normal effort. Normal effort sometimes requires you to force yourself; in dharma practice you ought not force yourself because it that could direct you onto a mistaken path. Mistaken path in the sense that your practice will not actualize your purpose, rather will fall into mistake due to mental agitation and discomfort. We should not let this arise. Therefore we cannot force but *put effort with the understanding* of the benefits and advantages of Dharma practice. By knowing the advantage of practicing refuge, you cannot even wait for one moment to practice refuge. You will happily feel that just to practice refuge for your whole life is enough because you understand the merits, the benefits, the advantages of doing so. This kind of joyous effort is therefore, important.

Even attending classes or any dharma activities, requires much effort doesn't it? If you don't remind yourself of the benefits of attending classes, you will probably give up and go for some nice dinner or meeting up with friends to gossip about other's faults - after all, these are much more "fun" ! So we need to see the benefits and advantages of engaging in Dharma in order to sustain our efforts.

One of the advantages of joyous effort is that it leaves a very strong imprint. Whether one fully understands all the fine points of Dharma or not, it doesn't matter, due to one's mind being joyful about putting effort on Dharma practice and activities, a potent virtuous imprint is planted and the result of this imprint is real happiness. So if you realize this, then you will not give excuses for not attending Dharma classes.

Otherwise, the excuses will be endless - the rain, traffic jam, very far or thoughts like “Even I go there I will not understand” or “I have heard such teachings before or even if I listen, I don’t practice so let’s just forget about it” or “if I go today, I might not have time to attend the next one, so better I don’t go at all”....excuses are endless. Many people give up this way.

Now you check, other than this, what other truly beneficial activities are you going to do? Are you going to do meditation on your own? Are you going out to do social service or help other beings? Those are also good. But honestly ask yourself - what are you going to do during that one and half hours of class time. You ask yourself and answer yourself. After answering yourself, when you come, you will not feel tired. You will enjoy, you will see the benefit of learning Dharma. Otherwise it is very tiring to listen to somebody (me) who is not a good speaker, who speaks broken English and the sequence of points sometimes upside down, sentences running off everywhere, flying everywhere, not focused, attempting to short talk on a four-line verse but in the end taking two hours. All these are so boring and difficult, making your life so difficult, right? (Laughter). But inspite of this, as I said before, it will leave strong positive imprints in your mind and at least for this purpose, you attend Dharma teachings.

## **Concentration**

Concentration is much-needed in life as well as in your practice of Dharma. Without concentration there is no chance of achievements. Even if you perform generosity, without concentration, you will not achieve its greatest purpose. Concentration involves mindfulness and introspection and without this you will not be able to gain the stability needed to attain deep understanding of the Dharma nor accomplish the goals of one’s Dharma efforts.

## Wisdom

Wisdom - it is not possible to over-emphasise the importance of wisdom. Whether engaging in generosity and all other practices, without wisdom we will be unable to actualize the rest of the Six Perfections to become Buddha. When we say “wisdom” there are several aspects. The ultimate wisdom is of course, wisdom realizing emptiness. However, wisdom can also refer to alertness in what we do; having clear understanding of our motivation, our actions, the objects of our attention. All these require some form of wisdom. Even when you want to perform generosity, there might be the need to consider whether this money will go to spoil somebody’s life or will benefit somebody’s life? When you finally make the donation, it is good to perform the act of giving with a happy, unconditional giving mind – thinking that “They truly need my donation, my help. If I don’t help, they don’t get what they need, so I exist for them, therefore I help in whatever way I can”. However, if after giving, you generate a mind of regret such as, “Oh! I shouldn’t have given the donation to this person as I heard this person did this and that...” then it will not only be a case of you losing your money but your merit from that act of giving will be lost as well. The regret robs the generous act of its merits. Do you see?

Wisdom is clearly needed here - as long as you performed generosity, close the chapter, rejoice and wherever the money goes, it doesn’t matter. Your purpose to give with good motivation is complete upon your parting with the money or the help you gave. Don’t spoil it by having regret and doubt just because somebody said, “Oh! Your money was used for this and that purpose”. Just close your ear and rejoice at your own giving. That’s it! If you feel strongly about how your offering is used, then first check carefully so that when you give, you will give it with joy and gain merits from it. Otherwise, giving with negative mind only ends up creating negative karma, so one needs to be careful.

Fourth line:

*Dro-la pen-chir sang-gye drub-par-shog*

May I become a Buddha to benefit all sentient beings. Why do we practice the Six Perfections? The reason is to accumulate two types of merit: (1) the merit of method (action) (2) merit of wisdom.

The merit of method refers to bodhicitta and acts of compassion. The merit of wisdom refers to actualizing one's realization on emptiness which produces extensive merit. That is called the merit of wisdom.

These two types of merit will become the antidote to overcome or eradicate the two types of obscurations to enlightenment. Therefore may I become Buddha to benefit all sentient beings.

'dro' mean '*dro-wa*', it means sentient beings.

'pen-chir' mean 'to benefit'

'sang-gye' mean 'Buddha'

'drub-par-shog' means 'able to become Buddha'.

Sentient beings here refer to the six realm beings - the three higher realms and three lower realms beings. The three higher realms are human, demi-god and god-realms; the three lower realms are animal, preta realm and hell realms.

All six realm beings endure the general sufferings of samsara (suffering of suffering, suffering of change and pervasive suffering) and specific sufferings in relation to their respective situations of existence.



## Suffering of the Three Lower Realms

For us to have real feeling when we aspire to become a Buddha to benefit all six realm beings, we first need to understand the conditions faced by lower realm beings. *Hell realm* beings endure extreme suffering conditions from various levels of hell such as the Eight Hot Hells, Eight Cold Hells, Black Line Vajra Hell which is the worst of all. Our goal of being a Buddha is to free those beings from there.

Above that is the hungry ghost realm or *preta* realm. The specific suffering of the hungry ghost or *preta* being is unrelenting hunger and thirst and the purpose of actualizing Buddhahood is to free those beings from these hardships.

The specific suffering of the *animal realm* is torturing one another, eating each other, harming each other, for example, bigger animals eat the smaller animals.

## Suffering of the Three Higher Realms

The specific suffering of the *human realm* is that of birth, aging and death. Birth by the force of delusion and karma, the cause for human life contains impurities. From the moment of a baby comes out through the womb, so much suffering has already been experienced. Growing in the womb for nine months is almost like crawling through a small hollow into a huge iron ball and placing ourselves there, sealing up everything and dwelling there for all that time. The darkness and pressure there and the smell. Sometimes, when we are in a newly painted house, we cannot bear the smell of the paint. It makes you choke. Imagine if you were the baby in the womb for 9 months in a similar situation. You want to open your eye but you can't because of the pressure. Nine months in the womb feeling so fragile and totally covered in a bag. Your senses are developing, so the moment the mother

calls the husband to come over, this sound is piercing like loudspeakers put to your ear. Sometimes, the mother sings or plays nice music to the baby but the baby may be having a lot of difficulty with this. As for taste, I saw this from a Hindi movie, so I'm not sure how true is this – in that movie, the pregnant mother had strong cravings for food – sometimes consuming very sour foods or spicy foods. From the mother's side, she feels relief upon eating what she wanted but the baby suffered so much; and when the mother drank Coca-Cola, these caused unbelievable suffering to the baby. Each time the mother got up or lay down, the baby felt as if it were rolling the ball from high mountain.

At birth or even in caesarian births, when the baby comes out, there are different kinds of pain being experienced. In the teachings it is described that for the baby emerging, it feels as if it is being squeezed in between two huge mountains. I am not discouraging you from having a baby, ok? That would be your own business.

[For *demi-god realm* beings, their specific suffering is their intense jealousy against god-realm beings and always suffering defeat at the hands of the god realm beings and having their wealth taken from them]

For *god-realm beings*, one of the greatest suffering moments is the time of dying; of leaving the god realm. That suffering can be equated to the suffering of hell beings. God realm beings were born in comfort and luxury due to past good karma – every thing of comfort, good crops, they just have to wish it and it comes. However, this luxury is distracting and thus no cultivation of Dharma occurs. Thus, god-realm beings continuously exhaust the good karma of the past and fail to restore good karma. When the good karma to enjoy finishes, death occurs and the next rebirth (a lower rebirth) is certain, as no accumulation of merits was done in the god-realm.

We see around us, some people are successful in business or family-life, even though some of them are involved in negative actions, either cheating or destroying others but somehow they are very successful. However, this is not necessarily a good sign. When experiences in life go up and down, it is a good sign. For some people, everything goes down and that it is not a good sign; for others, one only sees everything going up – that too is not a good sign. This is because when you are “up”, you are using up good karma and unless you are wise enough to re-accumulate merit, you are actually using up your merit and when that finishes, suffering comes. Some people achieve worldly success in everything but they never generated good heart nor respect for others, so they never accumulate new good karma and the moment they finish using up their good karma, it is so difficult to revive the good karma.

That’s why I say life showing signs of up and down is not a bad thing. Low times remind us of the need to practice and the results of practice, so at least there is some balance there.

In the god realms, they exhaust all their good karma. One week before they die, they are able to see their next rebirth like in a television, seeing where they are going to be born, the exact moment of their death and the kind of hardship they will experience. Within that one week because of their total exhaustion of good karma, the negative karma (which has been unattended too due to their being too busy enjoying their luxury-existence), overwhelms them and throws them into a lower realm rebirth.

*‘Dro-la pen-shir sang-gye drub-par-shog’* - the purpose for taking Refuge, practicing Six Perfections and becoming a Buddha is to free all those six realms-beings from the common and specific sufferings of samsaric existence.

Therefore, each time you recite this four line prayer, try to meditate on all this. That way, you will be meditating on the entire Lam-Rim, the entire Stages of the Path. Whether you attend Lam-rim classes or not, if you are able to meditate properly on these four lines, it is most meaningful. It will be almost like you don't want to touch any other practice and just practice and live these four lines.

### **Avoiding samsaric rebirth**

I am saying that all of us should avoid samsaric birth. This is to be distinguished from taking birth in this world with compassion out of choice (the way highly realized beings and bodhisattvas do). Those kinds of special births are entirely different - the mother doesn't experience pain and baby too. For nine months, the baby merely shows the aspect of awaiting birth but there is no pain due to their birth not being influenced by delusion and negative karma. For us, we don't have this kind of choice. We are born by the force of karma and delusion. That's why it is better not to come back, not to take rebirth, there is that much tremendous pain. In samsaric births, you feel you are growing but in fact you are degenerating, every single moment, we are degenerating. We often are unaware of we degenerate – even for 30 year olds, there is already white hair and wrinkles; all the things that we don't want, it comes.

### **Urged to get old**

Sometime around 2003, I was at Sera Monastery. Rinpoche set up a center in Bangalore and instructed me to teach at the Centre every month. I used to be very thin and my size is very small. Those who came to the Centre for the teachings led by me were all are very senior. Some were doctors, professors and most of them non-Buddhists but from a Hindu background and not young people. When I sat there, I felt very small, young and unable to convince them. How I wished that

I could become old quickly with white hair and wrinkles and then only sit in front of them. I used to think like that and I urged myself to grow old! So we cannot say that we never want to be old. There are certain times when circumstances make us wish for it. Anyway, the point is that the things that we don't want, tend to naturally fall onto us. This is the nature of samsara.

### **Death – dissolution of Four Elements in us**

Death for most of us, is a scary time. A most scary time! Death occurs in stages we call “dissolution”, when the elements of earth, water, fire and wind start to dissolve and fade away. When the earth element dissolves, it feels like your flesh is sinking and you are falling down; your limbs are falling down and feel heavy, like a mountain is descending onto you.

Next, the water element starts to dissolve: You feel as if every single corner filled with water and there is no mountain, no boat, no tree and you are sinking into the ocean whose waves are not only large but the water very dirty.

Next, the fire element dissolves and you feel as if fire is burning you, the flame is in front of your eyes. Then when wind element dissolves, you are totally carried away by the wind. In fact, the wind element is dissolving but your experience is the opposite way, there seems to be much wind. As the dissolution progresses, there will come a time where you experience total darkness. You feel totally lost and although your consciousness is still present, you don't know where to go and suddenly there are scary images appearing. These are all from your own mind but in the confused state, you only experience fear. That's why in some Tibetan Lama dances, they put on scary masks to leave an imprint to prepare you for the images that appear at the time of death. With this familiarity, you will not be so afraid. There is the intermediate stage

called “bardo” and we will have a talk about death and the intermediate state at another time.

### **Importance of doing a “glimpse-meditation” on Lam Rim**

Whenever we request Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche to lead prayers, he frequently pauses because Rinpoche is contemplating on the meaning of each verse and line. Rinpoche is meditating on the key points of every prayer. So likewise, it is good for us to reflect when we recite prayers. Otherwise, we are just saying the words. By reflecting on the meaning of the lines and verses of prayers, we are doing a glimpse-meditation, a condensed/brief meditation on the whole Lam Rim.

If we are able to do at least a glimpse-meditation on whole Lam Rim, then even if we die today, we have already planted a precious seed in our subconscious mind of the entire, complete stages of the path that will lead us to us enlightenment. With this good karma supporting your receiving blessings of your guru, you will definitely reach enlightenment. Otherwise if you only know the map halfway, then even how much of a great student or master in Dharma knowledge you are, you will still be lost. Like for me, if I go up to the centre’s gate here, I can say that I know everything that is on these grounds; I can say that I have mastered the map of LDC in knowing which room has what inside it but the moment I go out of the gate, I’m lost. Similarly with enlightenment. You have to know every single stage of the path up to enlightenment and recall the map again and again, therefore, glimpse meditation in Lam Rim allows you to achieve this and is thus very important.

This concludes the explanations on Refuge and Bodhicitta prayers.

## (2) The Four Immeasurables prayer

Nagarjuna stated in his teaching that we should always make ourselves available for the welfare of all sentient beings just as the earth, water, fire, wind, medicine and forest are available for all.

The purpose of learning Buddhadharma, especially Mahayana Buddhadharma, is to make ourselves available to all living beings by our abandoning our self-grasping mind through the cultivation of cherishing others. That is the whole purpose why we are here.

So both from my side and your side, we should take this session as part of meditation to habituate our minds with the advice of Buddha on this and apply it into our daily lives. It is not about learning the theory; gathering more information but rather taking the essence of the teachings, contemplate and habituate to one's mind on them in order to transform ourselves. Not only that, if we don't set ourselves certain ground rules on how to spend our days, our life can end up wasted on constantly collecting causes for samsara and suffering. Therefore, even though one might not be able to spend 24 hours in Dharma practice, at least spare 5 – 10 minutes in morning and at night before going to bed, to seriously look into oneself and make use of this precious human rebirth to accumulate extensive merit and purify the immense negative karma we have accumulated and cultivate one's life to benefit others. Following Nagarjuna's advice to make oneself available and of benefit to others, so one should be ready to serve the needs of others. For that reason, we do meditation, sadhana and prayers.

After we recite the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayers, we resolve to engage in performing virtue in four different manners as set out in the Four Immeasurable Thoughts.

The first line is:

*Sem-chen tam-chay de-wa dang de-wai gyu dang den par gyur chig* which means

may all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness

This relates to cultivating loving kindness towards all sentient beings. Every single living being is equal in wanting happiness but they don't know how to accumulate the causes for happiness. Instead, due to ignorance, they accumulate mostly causes of suffering and therefore experience endless suffering. Here, one should contemplate the six realm beings such as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animal, human beings, demi god-being and god-beings and the sufferings that each realm of existence goes through, as well as the general suffering of samsara. By contemplating on these hardships of all beings, one is able to strongly inspire oneself that whatever action one takes, it should be to create happiness and the causes of happiness for others. Most beings are totally dominated by the ignorant mind, so they need to be awakened, educated and we can help to create the conditions for them to be able to create their own causes of happiness. To do this, we make our actions of body, speech and mind as examples of virtue.

### **What is the cause of happiness**

Virtue is the cause of happiness. Therefore it is absolutely necessary to always cultivate and live with a loving mind, respectful mind, compassionate mind, forgiving mind, tolerance mind, mind of generosity, good ethic, effort, concentration and wisdom. One that cultivates the ten-virtuous actions. Once we are able to live in that manner, naturally we will be able to draw others to adopt our example. That's how one is able to benefit numberless beings. This is how one should think when reciting the first line of the prayer "May all sentient



being have happiness and the causes of happiness.” Otherwise it doesn’t move us, there is no real feeling and no real weight in the prayer even though it sounds noble.

## **What is loving-kindness; what is compassion**

The second line:

*Sem-chen tham-che dug-ngel dang dug-ngel gyi gyu dang drel-war gyur chig*

May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

One should here reflect on the suffering of six realm beings, after that to reflect on how to free them from this entire suffering. To do this, one needs to meditate on compassion. What is compassion? Compassion is the mind or thought seeking every single living being not only to have happiness but also to be free from the causes of suffering. Loving kindness is to bring them into the state of happiness; compassion is to liberate them from entire suffering and all its causes. Just by wishing that may all beings be happy is not enough because if the seeds/causes of unhappiness are still there, the happiness may not last. So the second verse is to reflect the meaning on compassion.

In order to generate compassion, one needs to reflect on the general and specific sufferings of individual six realm beings. Since here it is Mahayana practice, then one should generate great compassion, not just compassion. Great compassion is to take the responsibility by oneself to cause every single living being to be free from entire suffering.

Therefore one should avoid ten non-virtues (3 of body, 4 of speech and 3 of mind, namely killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct; lying, harsh speech, divisive speech and gossip; ill will, covetousness, and mistaken view); avoid the breaking of the five root vows which are not to kill, lie, steal, commit sexual misconduct and take intoxicants. One should also practice abandoning miserliness, impure ethics, being a cunning, cruel and harmful person and one who never puts effort to differentiate between what is virtue and non-virtue; living a life in total darkness and misled by negative friends. By avoiding all these, one becomes an example and thus one performs the act of liberating others. If one is unable to do this, there is no way for us to help other beings, therefore one should start from one's side.

The basic causes of suffering is ignorance and the other 5 root afflictions (anger, attachment, pride, doubt and wrong view) and karma. One has to eliminate the afflictions and negative karma, and in order to eliminate negative karma, one has to guard one's body, speech and mind into not engaging in non-virtuous acts. By stopping the creation of new negative karma, whilst at the same time purifying past negative karma, you will cease all the causes of suffering.

A second method of ceasing the causes of suffering is to obtain the awakened mind which means seeing the true nature of existence by seeing that all things are empty i.e. have no inherent existence that is independent of our mental projections.

In order to cease all these suffering causes in others, you need to be a good example to influence them by being a good example and save them from falling into such kinds of negative act. That's how you can help to free them from causes of suffering.

The third verse:

*Sem-chen tham-che dug-ngel meh-pey de-wa dang mi-drel war gyur chig*

May all sentient beings be inseparable from the happiness that is free from suffering

What is the state of being inseparable from happiness? It is the state of Buddhahood. As long as we don't achieve Buddhahood, we will remain in samsara, inseparable from suffering. Even as human beings we are inseparable from the 3 general sufferings of samsara namely, the Suffering of Suffering, the Suffering of Change and Pervasive Suffering.

In our day to day life, we may experience some contentment or happiness but if we look carefully, this happiness doesn't last. This shows the suffering of change which comes about because our 5 aggregates (form, feeling, cognition, consciousness and karmic imprints) are presently impure i.e. our present existence as a container is impure and in the manner of suffering. Therefore, whatever is poured into this tainted container will likewise be tainted and experienced as suffering. Therefore we need to liberate ourselves from samsara and obtain everlasting state of happiness, which is the state of omniscience, Buddhahood.

In the Lam Rim teachings, liberation can refer to three categories;

- 1) Hearer's Liberation
- 2) Solitary Realiser's Liberation
- 3) Liberation of the Bodhisattva

Since we are studying the Mahayana teachings, the total freedom from suffering refers to enlightenment which is everlasting happiness. The moment you chant "May all sentient beings be inseparable from the

happiness that is free from suffering”, you should contemplate the quality of state of enlightenment, wishing oneself and every single living being to attain this state. Without this aspect of helping others, one will not finish one’s task.

Enlightened beings don’t just sit there doing nothing and only remain in meditative bliss. In fact, enlightened beings have more jobs and are more busy than us because their minds are vast and they try to reach out to every single living being. But sentient beings are untamed and naughty. No matter how much you try to reach them but they tend to do the total opposite thing. You ask them to quit one stick of cigarette, they will want to smoke 2 cigarettes instead. That kind of urge comes. The moment you say ‘no’, he feels like doing it more. The moment you ask them not to lean on wall, they immediately want to lean on wall. The moment you ask them not to lie, they have the urge to lie. That’s why sometimes it said that having no rules is better (!) but in fact it is not, as rules in the sense of some self-control is still far better.

**There have been many Buddhas in the past but why have they not liberated every being and brought them to Buddhahood?**

This question may arise, “There are many enlightened beings but why is it they have not been able to liberate every single living being and bring them to Buddhahood, to the state of being inseparable from happiness?”

The answer is that different living beings have different karmic affinity with others. This means that there will be sentient beings who have special karmic link with you, who will only be liberated only when you become enlightened. Shakyamuni Buddha has liberated numberless beings who had particularly strong karmic affinity with him; Buddha Maitreya also liberated numberless beings; Tara has also liberated numberless beings but still there are numberless beings suffering, so

perhaps 95% of those beings are waiting for your enlightenment. So if you delay in gaining enlightenment, it means that they will suffer more.

When you think like that, you really want to practice hard; you have to be determined to become a Buddha right now, otherwise other beings have to carry on suffering for a long time. For those beings who have karmic link with you, their liberation is dependent on your enlightenment, on your blessing.

As each of us has the same potential to become Buddha, we all have to put in the same amount of effort to achieve this. You cannot say that only Sangha or practitioners in caves have to put in more effort but I as an ordinary, Malaysian human being don't have to practice hard and instead merely put effort in earning money at working. You cannot think like this. Every single living being has its own responsibility to become Buddha as soon as possible, otherwise many numberless beings will continue to suffer which is an unbearable thought. You should feel that it is very necessary for you to practice hard right now and to be enlightened right now, so that you can able to lead numberless beings into the peerless happiness.

## Enemy, Friend and Stranger

Forth verse:

*Sem-chen tham-che nye-ring chhag-dang nyi-dang drel-wei tang nyom-la  
ne-par gyur-chig*

May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free from desire for friends  
and hatred for enemies

Here one should focus on the practice of equanimity – this means having an even-mind towards all, without discrimination, combined with having good ethics, respect, care for others, eliminating pride, jealousy, attachment, anger and ignorant mind.

If you don't abandon anger, there is no way that you can achieve equanimity. Why do we get angry? Why do we generate anger? As long as we generate anger toward a person, that person is perceived by us as an enemy. So if you don't abandon anger, there is no way for you to be even-minded; no way to attain equanimity.

Similarly, if you don't abandon attachment, equanimity won't be achieved. When you obsess over someone or something, you over impute qualities onto that thing; you exaggerate the contaminated quality bias about that object. As long as you exaggerate the contaminated qualities (which are the cause for samsara), you will cling, grasp, not want to let go of it, hold it as supreme and superior to your enemies and those whom you are indifferent towards. If so, you have no even-mindedness. So if you don't abandon attachment, you cannot attain equanimity.

Then the stranger: Why is there such a thing as a stranger? It is because of our ignorant mind which does not recognizing all beings as having been one's mother at one time or other and as someone who has benefited to you in the past. Why makes you get close to someone? When you think that the person has benefited you. Why do you put distance between yourself and another or generate anger to another? It is because you feel that person has harmed you. So why do you label someone as stranger? It is because you don't remember either receiving any harm or benefit from this person and thus you place this person in this neutral category; you feel indifference towards this person.

Enemy, friend, stranger – all these show an absence of equanimity in your mind. Equanimity is not having discrimination, being ven-handed in giving respect, care and concern like a mother to her only dearest child.

Therefore, to begin the practice of equanimity, one should think well about the 3 root poisons/afflictions (anger, attachment, ignorance) and on purifying the three poisons. You might have seen the drawing of the Twelve Links which illustrates the workings of samsara. In the centre, you can see a snake, chicken and pig linked to each other in a circle. The pig's tail is held by the snake; the snake comes out from the chicken's mouth and the chicken has come from the pig's mouth. The symbolism is this: The pig represents the ignorant mind and from the ignorant mind comes attachment, which is represented by the chicken. Arising out of attachment, anger arises the moment someone harms the object of your attachment. Although anger appears to be like a thought of protection to the object of attachment, what happens is that anger has arisen (which harms everyone) is represented by snake; then the snake (anger) holds the pig's tail (which links up to and enhances ignorance). Therefore, if we do not gain awakening, these three poisons act like a continuous circle, spinning without stop, causing us to commit endless negative karma and that's how we suffer in samsara/cyclic existence within the six realms. This topic will be covered in more detail later.

**The attainment of equanimity is vital to the cultivation of bodhicitta. Equanimity is its foundation. Without equanimity and bodhicitta cherishing all beings equally, we remain in ignorance and will not have the basis and merits to understand the reality of existence. As long as one is not free from ignorant mind, one will be unable to see the clear light mind and if one unable to realize the clear light mind, one will be unable to apply the antidote to all**

**afflictions and thus no liberation and no enlightenment. That's what the Four Immeasurables Prayer is advising us.**

After reciting and contemplating on the Four Immeasurables prayer, your mind is already in very good shape because you now know the purpose of your practice; you know how much ability you have to benefit others but you will also know your present weaknesses; you will know the truth of yourself i.e. how much negative karma you have; you understand how much merit you have and what to do to enhance this merit and how to eliminate the negative action which accumulate in the past. This then leads us to the Seven Limbs Prayer/Practice.

#### **(4) The Seven Limbs prayer**

What are the Seven Limbs Practice? The limbs of prostration, offering, confession, rejoice, requesting, supplication and dedication, also we refer this as Seven Branches of Practices which is very very important to be familiar with.

The first line goes:

*Go sum gu pai go ne chag tsal lo*

Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind;

First is the limb of prostration. Here when you recite the first verse, if possible one should do the long prostration; otherwise, the short prostration and as a minimum, put your palms together. Place the thumbs into palm which represents offering the wish fulfilling jewel and also prevents the hand from being empty handed when requesting the Triple Gem in which you have taken refuge. Now that you understand that you need purification and accumulation of merit, offering respect through prostrations in a very proper manner, whole



heartedly respecting Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, precisely allows us to purify negativities and accumulate extensive merit.

Here in Tibetan it said '*chag-tsel*', it means prostration. '*chag*' means 'clean' or 'wash up'. But cleansing what? Cleansing negative karma. Once cleaned, you become a pure container. '*tsel*', it means give or grant. Grant what? Grant you blessings. First I cleaned my inner myself to become a pure container. Now I am requesting the Buddhas to grant me blessings, which I as a clean container can hold. A stained container cannot hold pure blessings. There is a saying in Tibet that in order to hold the precious milk of a snow lion, you need a wish fulfilling gem container. If you don't have such a container, once the snow lion's milk is poured into a stained container, it will either break or leak or the milk simply won't find its way into the container. I don't know whether snow lions really exist or not but that is the saying. It is like when you go to school or when you receive dharma teaching, you need to have a clear mind, a pure mental container. Otherwise you will either misinterpret or the teaching will merely enter the left ear and exit the right ear or you could get totally confused or you totally exaggerate what you hear with superstitious mind, then instead of benefiting, it might even destroy the small peace of mind.

So how do we receive blessings? Even though dharma is the real antidote to pacify defilement but if we remain an impure container, it will be difficult to receive blessings. Similarly, in order to receive blessings from Tara or any aspect of the Buddha, when you make a wish, it is necessary for you to first have inner cleansing, to make your mind pure. To purify past obscurations in relation to our physical form, we recite *Om Namo Manjushriye Namah Sushriye Nama Uttama Shriye Svaha*,

Or

I prostrate to Buddha, I prostrate to Dharma, I prostrate to Sangha

Or

I prostrate to Guru, I prostrate to Guru, I prostrate to Guru, I prostrate to Buddha, I prostrate to Buddha...

Or

I prostrate to Tara, I prostrate to Tara...

You can prostrate to every single statue, every single Buddha. When you recite 'I prostrate to Tara', in your mind you should think you are purifying the impurities in you with the act of prostration. After you feel confident that you have purified negative karma, you then request for blessings with full confidence and kneeling down. Remember to request for success for numberless sentient beings and not just oneself and family; otherwise, the request is selfish and no blessings will be granted! Then open your eyes and have a heart filled with faith and confidence that Tara will definitely answer your prayers. Without this, the prayer will not bring such strong effect. So this is very important.

When you prostrate, you purify body. Whatever prayer you recite, your purify speech. Whatever thought arises during this recitation is the purification of thought. So together, these are called the prostration of body, speech and mind, one of the very powerful practices to purify and accumulate merit as well as earn the genuine respect of others. When you earn respect, you will get help from human beings, even from nagas and spirits, even the most evil beings will come to help you because you have earned their genuine respect. Thus by doing prostrations, there is much benefit derived.

I also heard it is a very good practice for those suffering from gastric troubles. If you have gastric problem, doing long prostration is one of the best cure. Of course you have to eat food on time, you have to follow some system of doctor's advice, on top of that if you do prostration, especially with the prostration of body, speech and mind, it is very powerful. If you don't do, then it is like me with my gastric

problem before, you will suffer, then it is your fault, it is not Buddha's fault.

The second verse:

*Ngo-sham yi-trul chho-trin ma-lu-bul*

I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and mentally transformed;

The second limb is the limb of offering: 'clouds' refers to 'infinite offerings, vast as space which is infinite. What kind of offerings should we offer? Every type of offering. Some are physical offerings such as light offerings, flowers, nectar, perfume, music and includes keeping gumpa or your prayer room clean and tidy. As for flowers, if you keep them too long on altar until the flower sleeps without changing the water until it smells, there is no benefit from that. How would you feel if offered such? You would rather no flowers at all isn't it? Offer things that are the best quality that one can manage. If you like red flowers best, then offer red flowers to the Buddha. Of course flowers of colours in relation to different deities may have various meaning but the key point is that you should offer the best from your heart and not in competition with others. That kind of attitude only accumulates negative karma.

When somebody offers food to let's say Sangha, there is so much merit. If you look at the Theravadan practice, you will see the manner in which they offer food to the Sangha. Straightaway, you can see how much benefit there is but if you look into the benefits stated in the scriptures, the benefits are immense. Buddha purposely asked all Sangha not to have their own kitchens and not to go to shopping but go out to beg for food because that provided the opportunity to offer dana to Sangha, which would in turn allow many people to accumulate

extensive merits. But again, if see your friend offer rice and dhal and you then want to be “seen” to be offering dana in the manner of competing, then there will be no benefit. Being competitive this way, is one of the afflictive emotions.

If somebody you know offers to your guru a very beautiful flower or a diamond or whatever offering and your Guru’s manner is one of appreciation, if this causes you to think “Aiyo! There is so much attention given to my friend” and it makes you desire the same attention and you don’t have money to get the same gift and you steal money to get a much bigger diamond or offering. Doing this may get you some attention but also full of negative karma. An offering made with pure mind and sincere heart accumulates much virtue karma but though your diamond offering may be bigger but it is filled of negative karma. This is the harm that comes from competing with a friend in practice. In dharma practice, as long as you compete, there is no meaning.

When you make a sincere offering from the depth of your heart, it is not the matter of size or the value of the object, it is the matter of your heart, your sincerity and the total respect, this is very very important. Many people get into this kind of mistaken practice of making offerings as a form of show or competition. This is the reason for my bringing up this topic here.

Now you have to make sure that when you offer, you offer by yourself and with the mind not seeking any return; offering without expectation. The moment you expect a return, 75% of merit drops. When an offering is made unconditionally and total dedication, an immense amount of merit is created such that even if you don’t want, good results will come.

People make offerings for various reasons. Let's say for business, you might offer a candle light to Tara because Tara is one of the most effective Buddha deities to grant you success. So you come to the Center, buy a RM 50 candle light, place it on the Tara altar and request that "by tomorrow, let me have at least 50% more profit, that means RM100." So you offer RM50 candle and you request for RM100 by tomorrow. You may not be calculating in this way but you are calculating more than that. If by tomorrow you didn't receive any results, you then blame Tara that you wasted RM50 offering the candle and Tara didn't grant you any blessing. Here, the thing is that your request itself was not pure and because of the impurities, the selfishness and the mind of wanting return, you accumulated very little merit. With very little merit, how do you expect to get great success?

Without cause there is no effect, so the cause for success is merit. Without great merit, how to gain big benefit? It is more worthwhile to make offering to the Buddhas for the benefit of numberless beings; with a wish for oneself to gain great success in business for the benefit of numberless sentient beings, then in this way, even if immediate results don't come, you have created extensive merit such that when you offer one candle light tomorrow, for sure the success you wish for will come. You try this for yourself.

One more thing to add here, just now I said 'for sure' success will come. I should add one thing - otherwise I will get into trouble. It needs to be understood that often, due to too much negative karma already in the past, these might cause obstructions to you at certain times even though you do sincere Dharma practice. Therefore you should put great effort on the first limb practice of prostration. Otherwise even though you are accumulating much merit, the heavy presence of negative karma somehow prevents your practice from producing the full benefit quickly, so there is a danger of possibly not getting what you are supposed to get.

The actual offerings are all the beautiful things that you can see with you're your senses. On the way to town, those Christmas lights on street can also be offered – you just recite OM AH HUM and offer those lights or flowers or beautiful trees and rivers, people, shopping malls, anything. Just recite OM AH HUM and offer. This is actual offering.

Mentally transformed offering means there may only be one flower, but through the power of your visualization, you emanate that one flower into many to totally fill the entire space and earth in the universe to offer to the Buddha. Mentally transformed offerings such as water, light, beautiful scenery, incense, perfume, food and every single thing, don't just offer one piece of that thing, transform it into infinite numbers of that offering. On top of that, transform objects into divine offerings; transform all the things that we can eat and drink into nectar whose quality is that the moment it reaches the mouth, total bliss and inseparable happiness is experienced. Stones, water, trees, houses, cars, watches, diamonds, pearls, whatever is beautiful, you just transform them into wish fulfilling jewels. Transform through the power of your mind, your visualization and concentration and with the power of faith and conviction. Then think that "Yes, this is a wish fulfilling jewel and I offer it not just to one Buddha but as infinite offerings to every Buddha." You can accumulate so much merit doing this.

It is so easy to make offerings, especially mentally transformed offerings. Everywhere we go, whatever we see, we can make offerings out of those and thus build up immense merit from this. But if we don't know how to offer, such that even offering one small orange causes us to feel stingy about it, then accumulating merit becomes very difficult. Offerings are not just to put on one's altar. Our altars are usually too small to contain much offerings, so how are we to gather much merit if we restrict ourselves to just offerings on an altar? It has nothing to do with that.

Extensive, offerings, actual and mentally transformed offerings – offer in an infinite way and remember to offer with conviction and faith that you have definitely carried out this offering.

Third verses:

*Thog-meh ne-sag dig-tung tham-cha-shag*

I confess all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time

The third limb is the limb of confession: In order to purify negative karma, one should apply the Four Opponent Powers. It is said in the teachings that there is not a single negative karma which cannot be purified by applying the Four Opponent Powers which include purifying the five heinous crimes. The Four Opponent Powers are – (1) regret, (2) resolve not to repeat the mistake, (3) reliance upon the Triple Gem and (4) remedial-action.

Recognise one's mistaken actions and *regret* all past negative karma. Feel as if you have just mistakenly swallowed one full mug of poison which you know will cause your death within 5 minutes. This kind of intense regret. You will then try everything to expel the poison from your body or take extreme action to get the poison out. Negative karmas are like poison. But you should think more than that. You should reflect that if you don't purify that negative karma, you will be born into hot hell and how to endure the hot hells? There is so much unbearable suffering there. Even a toothache I cannot bear, what more being born in hell how? That much regret. A regret that will make the mind of *resolve* not to commit negativities again. Even at the cost of my life, I will never do this again, I will never commit such negative karma again. When doing this confession, you need an object in front to express the confession to, so the object is Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

whom you *rely upon for guidance* and help or in front of your home altar or confess to your Buddha nature, the Buddha in your heart.

Then the final opponent power of *antidote or remedy* is to recite Vajrasattva (purification) mantra and prostration mantra or any purification mantra or the recitation of Buddha's name or at least focus on the Buddha image, look at His eye emanating light and blessing to you to purify your negative karma. All these are antidotes. Or you can meditate on emptiness, which is one of the most powerful antidotes.

By applying these Four Opponent Powers, one can purify all negative karma but one has to do the confession practice. That's why it is mentioned here under the third limb of confession – I confess all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time. One has to do this again and again, if possible one should do this everyday because life is beginningless. Even in this life, even yesterday's negative karma we cannot remember, not to mention beginningless lives. Even during sleep time, we accumulate negative karma; when we wake up, we are not mindful and thus also accumulate negative karma. Every single momentary movement of body, speech and mind is accumulation of negative karma. So you see, you need to do confession again and again, if possible, two times a day, 6 times a day, as many times a day, if possible, every moment, every minute but at least should do once a day, so that one can do the necessary purification.

If you are not inspired to do this practice, then think of your beginningless rebirth, think of the moments past, yesterday and day before yesterday, then go back to childhood, go back in the womb, go back in past life's, and go back to the lives when you were taking life as crocodile, eating fresh meat all the time, think about that; or when you were a shark which each time you opened up your mouth, hundreds of small fish went inside your mouth and when you closed the mouth,



hundred of lives in one moment was extinguished. We have taken such kind of lives.

Now you understand how much negative karma you have have accumulated just in relation to killing. Similarly, we have lied, committed sexual misconduct, stolen, broken the ten virtues vows, committed all sorts of negative karma. Therefore, today we must confess, then gradually purify. This way, we become lighter and lighter, brighter and brighter and good things will start to fall into our lives because we are getting purer and accumulating more merit.

Forth verse:

*Kye-phad ge-wa nam-la je-yi-rang*

And rejoice in the virtue of all holy and ordinary beings

The fourth limb is the limb of rejoicing. Rejoicing is important and also one of the easiest things to do. It doesn't require any physical effort. If we cannot make any material offerings or do any specific kind of practice, one can still accumulate merit but merely sitting there and rejoicing at others' virtuous deeds; feel happy at the merit of others. If you remember something good you did yesterday yesterday or the year before, you should feel happy about it thinking "Oh great! I have done something good, I am happy for myself". This is the mind of rejoicing. Or "Oh, I heard that my sister or my friend was generous or did act benefiting others, I am so happy for them. May I be able to do so in future.' That's rejoicing.

Here the verse says 'virtue of all holy and ordinary beings'. "All holy beings" means the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arya beings, ordinary bodhisattvas (who are normal human beings that have obtained

realizations on bodhicitta). As they accumulated an immense amount of virtue and merit, we rejoice, we feel happy for them.

The rejoicing in respect of ordinary being like ourselves trying to accumulate merit is also good. For instance, I might have a friend who often gets angry and do all sorts of negative action. However today, I heard he saw a cat lying on the road in the midst of traffic. So he went to rescue it, putting his own life in danger to save the cat. This is great, saving somebody's life. So wonderful, thus I rejoice, I feel happy for him and hope that I too may I be able to do so. Even though that act was done by an ordinary person but it was a great deed of merit, so we can rejoice at that ordinary being's virtue. Again, when people do meditation or listen to dharma or engage in practice, they are trying their very best to do virtue, so we should rejoice and feel happy for them.

Rejoicing is one of the best antidotes for the jealous mind. If you rejoice you will not get jealous, if you don't rejoice, the opposite mind of jealousy can arise. Jealousy is a very unpeaceful state of mind; a very disturbed mind, whereas a rejoicing mind is peaceful and happy.

Fifth verse:

*Khor-wa ma-tong bar-du leg-zhug-ne*

Please, remain until the end of cycle existence

The fifth limb is the limb requests the Guru to remain: This is one of the most powerful practices for the long life for your guru and yourself and also best practice for the long life for your parents and loved ones. When you reach this fifth verse, you should dedicate strongly to the long life, good health of anybody you wish to dedicate, especially your spiritual related guru. By doing so, all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, holy beings, dharmapalas and protectors surround you to fully protect you.

When you invite holy objects such as statues and thangkas into your house, to bring an abundance of benefit and blessings, you should perform this practice of requesting the Guru to remain, so that their blessings will continuously be with you. So this is one of the very powerful practice to prolong your life. By practicing this, it is equivalent to practicing White Tara mantra, Amitayus mantra and Namgyalma mantra etc. If you practice this daily, then it is the same as performing Long life Puja to your guru every day. What amazing merit.

Sixth verse

*Dro-la cho-kyi khor-lo khor-wa-dang*

And turn the wheel of dharma for sentient beings

The sixth limb is requesting the Guru to teach Dharma: It goes without saying that in order for you to gain enlightenment, one needs to receive the blessings of Dharma from Guru and Buddha. Without sincere requests, whatever teachings you receive will not bring the greatest effect. In order to respect the teachings, one should request the master to teach, that's why it is especially meaningful to put palms together and kneeling down whilst holding dharmachakra and blowing conch shell with the request, "Guru, please teach me Dharma, please turn the wheel of Dharma".

Even for Shakyamuni Buddha, after he attained enlightenment, he had to live 49 days in jungle without giving any teachings because nobody requested him to. If he taught without anyone requesting for it, the teaching would have had no weight in that people would not treasure it, not see the need nor importance of teachings. Therefore even to receive one single mantra oral transmission, one should request in a sincere manner. That way there is possibility of receiving blessings. You cannot

take teaching so lightly. Sometimes one hears the complaint that Guru has all the knowledge but is not revealing the teachings. There is a danger of blaming the teacher that “I requested these teachings many times but still there is no clear answer. Why? Why is it so difficult to receive teachings?” We do occasionally complain this way, isn’t it? “How come the Lama is so stingy about giving teachings?” In fact they have so much respect for the teachings that they want to see the sincerity of the disciple wanting to receive the teachings. If disciple really wants to learn, then the teacher will give and the disciple will learn. If disciple doesn’t want to learn, just say bla bla, then it is wasting the teacher’s time and it would be better to meditate in a cave.

Therefore this teaches us to always request for teachings every single day and moment. At least once a day, we should remember Guru and we should request for teachings. It doesn’t matter whether the Guru is in front of us or not; or whether the Guru is alive or has passed away. It doesn’t matter. We just request our Guru and all Buddhas to guide us with teaching, to turn the wheel of dharma everyday and in so doing, we accumulate the merit for us meet the right guru, to receive a wealth of teachings. Some people wish to receive teachings but they don’t get opportunity because the car breaks down or dinner-invitations are many or someone comes by to talk about making money – then we just forget about seeking Dharma teachings. This happens because we don’t have enough merits.

In order to receive Dharma, you need so much merit. In order to receive dharma into your mind, you need much more greater merit. In order to gain realizations through meditation, you need great huge amount of merit, that’s why we do the Seven Limbs Practice.

This practice will also accumulate the karma of never being separated from your perfect guru in all lives. You will all lifetimes meet and be guided by your perfect guru until you achieve enlightenment. By doing

this, it will create the cause for you to always have the Guru with you. Even at the time of death, when the consciousness is leaving the body, your Guru will be there to transfer your consciousness to the Pure Land. Even in the intermediate state, if you are unable to gain enlightenment here, through the power of Guru's mind and prayers, he will guide you through the intermediate state, bring you to the right parents of a good family where you can enjoy Dharma again and re-connect with Guru.

And if you have the realisations to be enlightened at the time of death or in the intermediate state, the Guru is the main channel to guide you. Practices of Vajrayogini or Tara through whom one is going to gain enlightenment in then intermediate state, who will connect your realization-mind to Vajrayogini's enlightenment? Guru is the one who is the connection. It is like when you go to a new place, you need someone to guide and introduce you, isn't it? So guru is the one who leads you to the state of enlightenment and introduces you to that state. Otherwise, there is danger that you could fall back into samsara. That's why we call it the supplication prayer which is like expressing all wishes. This is slightly different from dedication. Supplication is making a strong request to link your merits and practice to the Guru's and Buddha's heart.

Seventh verse:

*Dag-zhan ge-nam jang-chub chen-por-ngo*

I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great enlightenment

The seventh limb is the limb of dedication: This is the final and vital concluding part of the Seven Limbs namely to dedicate all the virtues of onself and others to the great enlightenment.

If you dedicate your merits to the highest goal, all the smaller in between achievements naturally happen. However, if you dedicate only to lesser goals, the greater benefits will not be achieved. Therefore one always should dedicate in the greatest way, which is to seek the state of enlightenment for self and others. So whatever accumulation of merit that I accumulated, through the practice of earlier six branches of practices, may they be the complete cause for myself and all other living beings to get enlightenment.

So these complete the Seven Limbs Practices.

Now we go to the Dedication Prayers:

*Ge wa di yi nyur du dag*

Due to the merits of these virtuous actions

*La ma sang gye drub gyur ne*

may I quickly attain the state of a Guru Buddha

*Dro wa chig kyang ma lu pa*

And lead all living beings, without exception,

*De yi sa la go par shog*

Into that enlightened state.

Due to whatever merit accumulated in the past through the practice of Refuge, Bodhicitta, the Four Immeasurables practice and the Seven Limbs practice, may I quickly attain the state of Guru-Buddha. Guru who is Buddha and Buddha who is Guru; Guru who is Yidam (meditation deity), Guru who is daka, Guru who is dakini, so to quickly attain that state without delay for even a moment.

May all virtuous actions accumulate the two types of merit – (1) the merit of Method and (2) the merit of Wisdom. Merit of Method is that

in relation to the practice of bodhicitta; the Merit of Wisdom is in relation to the actualization of the wisdom realizing emptiness.

May I quickly attain the state of Guru-Buddha. “Quickly” means without delay for even a moment. State of “Guru-Buddha” is enlightenment itself.

“And lead all living beings, without exception” means that you cannot discriminate and leave out cockroaches just because you don’t like cockroaches – No! Here, to lead all sentient beings without exception means you take full responsibility to liberate all living beings. Liberate to where? Liberate them into the enlightenment state which is inseparable from peerless happiness and the state of Buddhahood. Then follow by bodhicitta dedication:

*Jang chub sem chog rin po che*  
*Ma kye pa nam kye gyur chig*  
*Kye wan yam pa me pa yang*  
*Gong ne gong du phel war shog*

May the supreme jewel bodhicitta  
That has not arise, arise and grow;  
And may that which has arisen not diminish  
But increase more and more

Bodhicitta is described as the supreme jewel because the supreme mind, the greatest altruistic mind is bodhicitta which acts as a wish fulfilling jewel that can grant the entire wishes of peerless happiness and knowledge to all beings. The prayer goes on to aspire that where the bodhicitta mind has not emerged, that it do so; and where it has emerged but has declined, to be re-energised and enhanced. In the practice of the Five Paths, the first Path is the Path of Accumulation. When you reach there, you obtain the bodhicitta mind but you are not

yet enlightened. Even that bodhisattva also needs to develop and strengthen the bodhicitta mind all the way through the Five Paths and the Ten Grounds; that bodhicitta mind is to be the companion for the wisdom realizing emptiness, which is the antidote to cease all defilements and then finally, attain enlightenment.

In our ordinary life, we can also practice bodhicitta but how should we do this? Begin by inspiring oneself to obtain full enlightenment by first understanding that life is for oneself and all others is full of suffering; then resolve to liberate oneself and all living beings from samsara, thinking that may I obtain full enlightenment for the benefit of entire numberless sentient beings, therefore I must cultivate the practice of Six Perfections, practice bodhicitta mind and strengthen that mind until I achieve full enlightenment.

There may be a practitioner who has just achieved the Path of Accumulation, who has very freshly attained the bodhicitta mind but upon meet a self-liberator, a Hinayana master, is told “You are just a first stage bodhisattva. You haven’t freed yourself from samsara. How can you gain enlightenment and free all living beings? This is something that you will not able to do, so come down and gain self-liberation first”. These words discourage the new bodhisattva who then thinks, “Oh ya! That sounds real. What can I alone do? I have bodhicitta but I cannot do much. If I have to wait to gain enlightenment, it may take aeons, rather I first liberate myself” and with that he gives up the bodhicitta mind. That is what the prayer means by not having bodhicitta diminish. So we have to make a prayer that for those who have attained the bodhicitta mind, to never give it up. They need our prayers not give up bodhicitta mind because if they do, the duration to become Buddha is very long and sentient beings have to suffer that much longer.



As for increasing bodhicitta more and more, is to dedicate your merits to become a cause for bodhicitta mind to increase immensely in every single moment. Such as those tantric practitioners - how is it they can achieve full enlightenment within one life time, on one very cushion? It has been said that it takes a minimum of the merits of three countless for a living being to become Buddha, so how is it that some need three countless eons, whereas others can Buddha right now? And why some people cannot even make it in three countless aeons but require, hundreds of thousands of aeons to do so? The reason is the amount of merit produced through by practicing Bodhicitta combined with emptiness. So if you strongly increase the strength of the bodhicitta mind, you can accumulate the merit of three countless eons merit within one very moment without the need to wait for three countless eons. That is the reason that we have to dedicate our prayer for ourselves and for others to increase bodhicitta mind more and more.

*Jam pel pa wo ji tar khyen pa dang  
Kun du zang po de yang de zhin te  
De dag kun gyi je su dag lob chir  
Ge wa di dag tham che rab to ngo*

Just as the brave Manjushri and Samantabhadra too,  
Realized things as they are,  
Also I dedicate all these merits in the best way,  
That I may follow their perfect example.

The meaning is here is that the hero Manjushri has understood emptiness and likewise Samantabhara too, I dedicate this virtue that I may follow their example of accumulation of merit as they did. That I too like all the past Buddhas who have obtained enlightenment through accumulation of merit by making dedications, will express dedication to benefit not only self but others in that same manner.

Finally – the Merit Multiplying Mantra - to increase one million times any merit created. This mantra is recited at the end of each teaching or prayer session.

*Chom-den-de de-zhin-sheg-pa dra-chom-pa yang-dag-par dzog-peh sang-gye nam-par nang-dze o-kyi gyal-po-la chag-tsel-lo*

Recite this one time or three times, but it is good to recite three times.

*Jang-chub sem-pa sem-pa chen-po kun-tu zang-po-la chag-tsal-lo*

Recite this one time or three times, after this recite this mantra:

*Tayatha om pencha griya ava bodhani svaha  
Om dhuru dhuru jaya mukhe svaha*

These two mantras should be recited seven times.

Due to the fact that our concentration is weak, our visualizations of poor quality, our purity of practice is doubtful, we need some divine help to bolster our efforts. Through his compassion, the Buddha provided this powerful mantra to further enhance and multiply by 100,000 times our virtuous efforts. By reciting this mantra below three times, whatever prayers made will be actualized.

*Chom-den-de de-zhin sheg-pa dra-chom-pa yang-dag-par dzog-pey sang-gye ngo-wa dang mon-lam tham-che rab-tu du-pe gyal-po-la chag-tsal-lo*

Due to the power of the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattva, the power of infallible dependent arising, and the power of my pure special attitude, may all my pure prayers succeed immediately.

“Due to the power of the blessings” is to bring the cause for your prayers to succeed. We need the blessings of the infinite Buddhas,

Bodhisattvas and pure holy beings to aid us in having our prayers materialize.

“Power of infallible dependent arising” means to think of the teachings on emptiness. Every single phenomena, including yourself which is the dedicator and the “material” being used to dedicate which is the merit and the object of dedication which is the state of enlightenment, all these three things: 1) dedicator 2) the material – dedication or whatever virtue accumulated 3) the enlightenment that one wishes to obtain, are all in the nature of dependent arising i.e. they lack inherent existence. This is very important. To make dedications in emptiness offers protection from the degeneration of one’s merit because aeons of virtue can be destroyed by one single moment of anger. One single moment of frustration mind can cease aeons of merit. So powerful anger is, so there is the need to protect against that. Because we ordinary beings get angry again and again, to preserve and protect one’s merits, dedications with emptiness as in the manner above, is necessary.

At least just to say or to think that every single thing lacks of inherent existence, every single thing exists based on cause and effect, that’s it! If you can feel this, good! If you cannot feel it, at least think in this way and it will seal your merit in the safe-box, which you will never lose, plus the interest on it will increase. You will enjoy every single moment from now on up to enlightenment, you will enjoy the happiness from the interest building on your merit, although the “merit-capital” is still there. When you become Buddha, you can take whole thing – the capital to share with everybody and all living beings.

“The power of my pure special attitude” – this refers to the virtuous mind, the bodhicitta mind which takes responsibility to liberate all beings. This pure special attitude can actualize all your prayers.

For those people who have very busy lives, as a minimum, try to live the teachings of these 4 short prayers - starting with Refuge and Bodhicitta, then the Four Immeasurables and then Seven Limbs Practice. For those who want to do a bit more, you can in between these 4 prayers, just before the prayer of Dedication, insert whatever other prayers or sadhana practice or mantras or Lam Rim meditation you wish. After that, you do the dedication. Then you will have a very meaningful life.

Thank you very much!

## HOW TO TREAT DHARMA BOOKS

Dharma books contain the teaching of the Buddha: they have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation.

Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk and not stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separated from other mundane materials. Other objects, including statues and stupas, should not be placed on top of Dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered bad will create negative karma.

If it is necessary to dispose of written Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash.

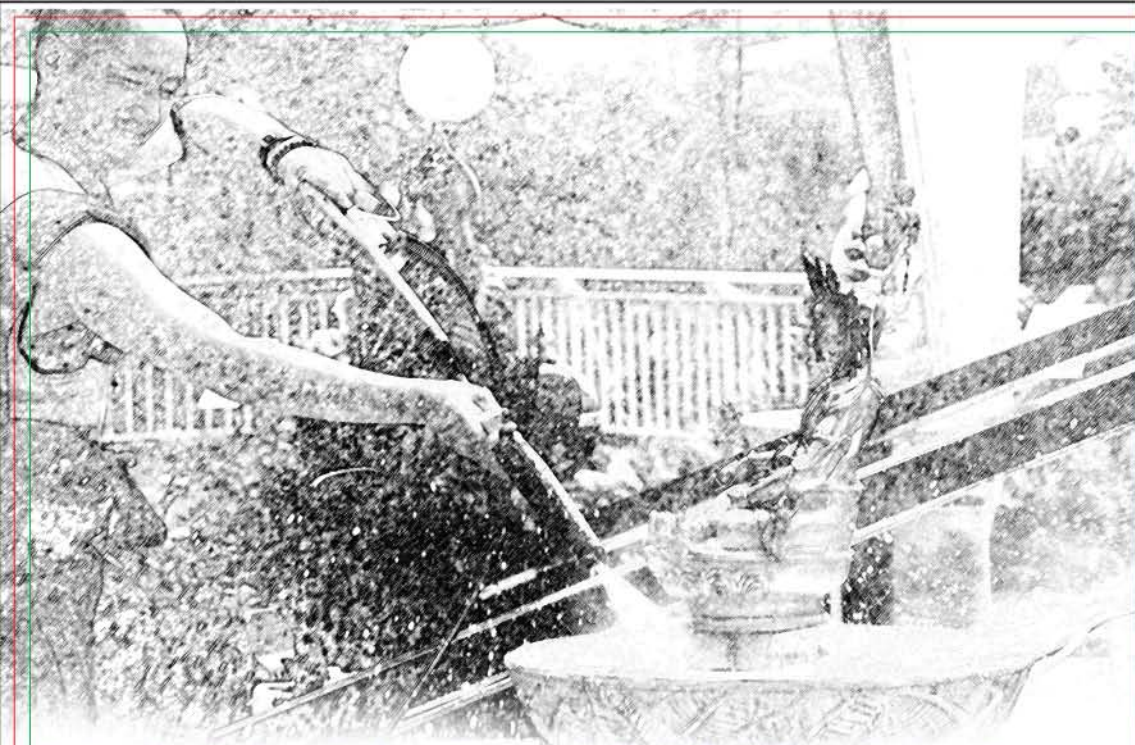
When offering Dharma texts to the fire, first recite the mantra OM AH HUNG, then visualize the letters of the texts (to be burned) absorbing into the syllable AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mindstream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUNG, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has specifically advised that photos or images of holy beings, deities or other holy object not be burned. Instead, they should be placed with respect in a stupa, tree or other high, clean place. It has also been suggested to put them into a small structure like a bird house and then seal the house. In this way, the holy images do not end up on the ground.

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Geshe Tenzin Zopa has a contemporary style of teaching which he combines with the ancient wisdom derived from his years of philosophical studies and debate, thereby benefiting everyone who has met or heard him teach. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the face of a dynamic and socially engaged Buddhism in the 21st Century.

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