A small green seedling with several leaves is growing out of a crack in the dry, cracked brown earth. The background is a vast expanse of parched, cracked soil, symbolizing resilience and growth in adversity.

The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas

*Commentary
by
Geshe Tenzin Zopa*

Editor's Note

Imagine that – 84,000 teachings of the Buddha condensed into 37 compact practices. Only thirty seven steps to the lasting happiness of enlightenment. What are we waiting for?

A handbook to smart living and smart Dharma practice with sublime results, this commentary on Togmay Sangpo's legendary "37 Practices of Bodhisattvas", by Geshe Tenzin Zopa is presented in Geshela's inimitable style of transposing the timeless wisdom of the Buddha, Lama Atisha and the Kadampa masters, into today's iPad culture and Facebook generation.

At first, I was impatient to gobble up what the mighty 37 practices had to say but the richness of Geshela's explanation, peppered with humorous anecdotes and pertinent life-stories, made me naturally slow down; savouring the wise and hugely practical advice; taking in the medicine being prescribed through Geshela's teachings which is sometimes bitter and sometimes sweet; crying for myself and sentient beings; rejoicing at the human potential. Such is the power of the teachings in this book. If one feels one has no time to enrol in extensive Dharma courses but seek a complete pocketbook guide to ultimate happiness; if one is seeking a frank and plainly worded set of instructions for enlightenment, then THIS is the one to read!

This book is dedicated to the unsurpassable HH Dalai Lama, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Khensur Rinpoche Lhundrup Rigsel and Geshe Tenzin Zopa for initiating us into the 37 Steps. Without these unparalleled Gurus, we would be directionless, rudderless, tossed in the ocean of confusion and troubles. To their good health, long lives and fulfilled wishes and may all our actions only please their holy minds.

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A Summary of The 37 Practices of the Bodhisattvas

1. Extract the essence of the precious human rebirth.
2. Give up the “homeland” i.e. objects which trigger ignorance, anger or attachment.
3. Find conducive place to cultivate.
4. Give up this (worldly) life.
5. Give up negative friends.
6. Rely on the spiritual master.
7. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem.
8. Reflect on the sufferings of the lower realms.
9. Reflect of the overall suffering of samsara and aspire towards liberation.
10. Cultivate bodhicitta – seeing all sentient beings as having been one’s mother.
11. Practice the exchanging of self for others.
12. Transform one’s mind - see all harms as opportunities to cultivate virtue.
13. Transforming suffering into one’s spiritual practice.

14. Return sincere praise in the face of criticism and slander.
15. View your critic as a spiritual teacher.
16. Practice the great heart of patience in the face of betrayal and disappointment.
17. Regard those who harm you through ill-will and jealousy as one's spiritual master.
18. Transform failures into the path and transform successes into the Path.
19. Conquer pride .
20. Transforming the objects of anger and attachment into the Path.
21. Abandon pleasures of the senses which give rise to attachment.
22. Training in ultimate bodhicitta.
23. View objects of attachment as like-illusions.
24. View unpleasant situations as like a dream.
25. Practice generosity.
26. Uphold morality.
27. Practice of patience.

28. Cultivate joyful effort in helping sentient beings.
29. Develop the power of concentration.
30. Cultivate the wisdom realising emptiness.
31. Examine one's own conduct for faults.
32. Avoid criticizing higher practitioners.
33. Practice non-attachment.
34. Never express harsh words.
35. Apply antidotes to disturbing emotions.
36. Apply mindfulness and introspection for the welfare of all living beings.
37. Dedicating all merits towards the enlightenment of all living beings.

The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas

Root Text by Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo

Commentary by Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Introduction

When we come together for Dharma discourse, it is not simply for fun or to pass our time. It is to extract knowledge as mind-food, not for the sake of intellectual knowledge but solely to benefit others each day, according to one's best ability until one attains full enlightenment. Our coming together with the right motivation can change the world. To change the world does not mean changing the external world; it means changing your inner world, your own mind, for only then, can you influence and transform the minds of others on the planet. This is the sole purpose for learning the 37 Practices of to Enlightenment, the 37 practices of the Bodhisattvas, without which there is no means by which one can become a Buddha.

Togmay Sangpo is one of the great bodhisattvas who became an Arya Bodhisattva within a very short period through practising the 37 practices. He then revealed this teaching in a condensed and practical way so that ordinary beings will be able to immediately apply them in this samsaric life. This teaching is a special lineage practice undertaken by all the past by great Tibetan yogis and now by His Holiness The Dalai Lama and our Gurus. The 37 Practices are indispensable throughout one's


spiritual life – from the preliminary stages of one’s practice up to and beyond Buddhahood because it is the means by which sentient beings can be helped and guided.

I feel extremely fortunate to have received this teaching from the 14th Dalai Lama many years ago and also from my late guru, the great mahasiddha Geshela Lama Konchog several times. Out of great compassion, our Gurus have taught us and granted us blessings to obtain realizations. However, due to the strong negative imprints from our past lives, our practice to this day has been totally unsuccessful and instead of becoming more compassionate, we are becoming more cruel and selfish. We have some blessings to have the karma to connect with these teachings and not waste this precious opportunity to actualise the 37 Practices.

 *Homage Verse*

*I pay homage through my three doors,
To my supreme teacher and protector, Chenrezig,
Who while seeing all phenomena lack
coming and going,
Makes single-minded effort for the good of
living beings.*

Togmay Sangpo begins with a profound homage to Chenrezig, Compassionate Buddha with the words “Namo Lokeshvaraya” which means “I pay homage to you Compassionate Buddha who has true compassion for all living beings without discrimination, without any concept of friend, enemy or stranger, without any hope for return, unconditional compassion. I pay homage to Chenrezig, whose nature does not exist from its own side, yet whose mind is infused with benefiting others day and night. I pay homage to Chenrezig who has this quality, I pay homage day and night and I pay homage with my body, speech and mind. Homage to Chenrezig, who has obtained the wisdom realizing all phenomena as lacking inherent existence, whose view is free from the two extremes (of true existence and nihilism) and completely conjoined the practice of great compassion. Therefore, Chenrezig is the emanation of the Buddha’s compassion to whom I make prostrations from my body, speech and mind”. This is the meaning of the stanza of homage.

 *Perfect Buddhas, source of all well
being and happiness,
Arise from accomplishing the excellent teachings,
And this depends on knowing the practices,
So I will explain the practices of Bodhisattvas.*

This verse is Togmay Sangpo's pledge to explain the 37 Practices by composing this text. All the past Buddhas who have gone beyond samsara and have obtained Tathagatahood practiced these precious 37. All happiness, even temporary happiness, relies on the right causes and conditions. Enlightenment comes from training in wisdom and from training one's mind to be of sole benefit to others. That training is found in the Mahayana teachings.

 Verse 1

*Having gained this rare ship of
freedom and fortune,
Hear, think and meditate unwaveringly
night and day,
In order to free yourself and others from the ocean
of cyclic existence,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

The 1st Practice is to extract the essence of the precious human rebirth, as it is the boat that will ferry ourselves and all living beings across the ocean of samsara. To “extract the essence” requires us to listen to Dharma teachings, contemplate and meditate on them and apply them continuously, until one attains the full state of enlightenment.

This precious human rebirth of the 8 freedoms and 10 endowments, presents us with all the necessary conditions to negate all defilements which obstruct our attaining full enlightenment. The precious human rebirth is the only chance for one to obtain full Cessation.

Whatever lifestyle one might have, one needs to put full effort towards practising Dharma day and night with good motivation, even before one sleeps. Sleep for the benefit of others and wakeup for the benefit of others; go about your day for the

benefit of others, whatever actions of body, speech and mind are done, base it on Dharma and the purpose of benefiting others. But to practice something requires one to first acquire the knowledge. Hence, the advice to listen, contemplate and meditate.

How do we do all these when we have such busy lives? The condensed advice is, listen closely to the teachings and advice of one's Guru, even if it is just to recite a few om mani padme hum mantra. If you are able to do so and apply it to benefit others, you can gain realizations by the simple act of reciting om mani padme hum. That's how it works.

In order to control our emotions such as anger and hatred, first one must listen to the proper teachings on the nature of anger, its sources, its faults and the methods of overcoming it. Then we contemplate on the reasons on why we need to be free from anger and hatred. Reasons based on knowing the disadvantages of anger and advantages of patience. One then habituates one's mind with this reasoning again and again. The action of reminding oneself, familiarizing oneself (with the Buddha's teaching and reasoning) is meditation. Through consistent meditation, we will be able to overcome the disturbed mind; we will be able to extract the essence of the precious human rebirth for the benefit of others.

 Verse 2

*Attached to your loved ones you are stirred
up like water,
Hating your enemies you burn like fire,
In the darkness of confusion, you forget what to
adopt and discard,
Give up your homeland. This is the practice of
Bodhisattvas.*

“Give up your homeland?” So, you have to give up Malaysia! (Laughter). Here, “homeland” refers to any objects of ignorance, anger or attachment i.e. strangers, enemies, loved ones, places, possessions etc. If you are able to practice the 6 Perfections (generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom) in relation to, for example, your family, without grasping at them, then you need not give them up. The “homeland” that Togmay Sangpo is warning us about are the objects that hinder us from benefiting others equally. These dangerous objects are the objects which give rise to ignorance, anger and attachment; this type of “homeland” must be given up.

Therefore, **practice no: 2 is letting go of any object which triggers more attachment, more anger, makes you indifferent** e.g. one’s country, family and friends, projects, possessions, anything which brings on delusions, these form the “homeland” to be given up.

This teaching says that if we love anyone based on attachment such as parents, friends, sons and daughters and cling to them, we are accumulating the causes for samsaric suffering. Attachment to loved ones stir you up like swirling water and due to this attachment, anyone who interferes with one's attachment, will ignite anger within us, giving rise to the concept of "an enemy" . Through this, one's innocent mind gets swept away by these two strong emotional currents of anger and attachment, which arose mainly from your "homeland". Thus, in order to practice pure Dharma, you must give up your homeland, the 2nd practice. It's very difficult, isn't it?

Q&A

Question: so the "homeland" is a metaphor?

Ans: Yes. However, to be able to let go of this homeland, we need to create causes and conditions for this. One's mind will resist letting go. Thus, we need to train and amongst the conditions is finding a conducive place to practice our meditation. If the environment has many opportunities for anger or attachment to surface, is it not a conducive place. A Dharma centre can be a conducive place but if it becomes a place where anger or attachment gets activated, then you need to give up the centre too. Running a centre is much more difficult than running a huge international company because in a Dharma centre, you have to create an atmosphere that is conducive and pleasing to everyone. Otherwise, it will become a place for people to give up! (Laughter). If you want your home to be a conducive place,

you have to create that atmosphere such as placing holy objects in every corner - such as dharma books, tsa-tsas, Guru's picture, whatever reminds you of virtue - such that each time you get in, it puts your mind into a virtuous state. This becomes a conducive place. Just like the centre, the moment you walk in, it reminds you of dharma. You forget your negative thoughts. A conducive place plus one's effort at practice will enable us to give up the homeland which is the source of suffering due to it increasing one's desire, anger or ignorance. It makes sense doesn't it?

***Question:** The homeland includes objects which bring about attachment. On the other hand, the bodhisattvas need such sources of attachment in order to transform them as part of their practice, right?*

Ans: Bodhisattvas do not need nor seek any object of attachment because they understand very well the poison of attachment. Further, all beings are equal in their eyes. If we say Bodhisattvas need sources of attachment, it is like saying that bodhisattvas always hope for living beings to suffer in order to find objects to practice their compassion on! This is not so! This is just our own excuse for indulging in attachment. What bodhisattvas want is for every one to be a Buddha right now, free from all afflictions. What Bodhisattvas do is transform anger into tantra practice; transform attachment into the bodhisattva's practice.

***Question:** Are we supposed to rejoice if someone makes us angry? After all, when you meet someone who makes you angry, you should be happy that the other person is making you practice*

(patience). So, we should rejoice, right?

Ans: No doubt that we should regard an angry person as a chance for us to practice patience and to practice transforming our mind. However, rejoicing at anger in itself does not help. How can we be happy about a cause of suffering? If we rejoice when someone makes us angry, then we should encourage everyone to make everyone else angry, so that we can all rejoice in each other !! (laughter).

Question: *Since you can't avoid every desire, what's the point of trying?*

Ans: Is there end to samsara? Of course there is end of samsara! There will be one day where everyone will become a Buddha but we have to start by learning the obstacles are and how to tackle them.

Question: *I totally disagree. Here it says that if you try to become a bodhisattva, then you will try not to be angry, as that person becomes an object of practice. Every time I complain to Rinpoche about somebody, he always tells me to rejoice that they give me a chance to practice.*

Ans: We need to differentiate the person and the delusion. We can never rejoice at delusion. Having the attitude of rejoicing in the face of an adverse situation is the practice of a bodhisattva. But that does not mean that one should encourage anger or stir others to get angry, just so that we can practice tolerance. If we did that, it would be encouraging delusions. What Rinpoche is saying is that the best thing is if no one gets angry nor make others angry. But if faced with an angry person and giving advice

cannot pacify that, then it is better for oneself (receiving the anger) to practice mind-transformation by viewing the angry person as an object of compassion; as a “guru” in the sense of reminding oneself of the need for patience and compassion.

***Question:** But this verse is saying, when someone makes us angry or annoys us, we should leave that place.*

Ans: Yes, because we ordinary beings cannot control ourselves. If you can control yourself, then you can remain in that situation. Rinpoche has to deal with difficult people all over the world and yet he just laughs and enjoys being with them. Why? Because he has an unshakeable mind of compassion and treats them all as Gurus. It’s such a profound teaching and a wonderful view that holds that there is no choice but to practice patience because otherwise, people will not will only get angrier. Thus Rinpoche has the mind of “I can’t give up on anyone because I am engaging in the Bodhisattva practice”. Rinpoche often purposely gets close to those who are difficult. I have seen that. Rinpoche does this because Rinpoche is engaging in the practice of the bodhisattva and practicing the six perfections. As for someone fragile like me, I must give up this homeland.

***Question:** So if someone makes you angry, you walk away?*

Ans: Yes, I walk away! I will definitely walk away (laughter) because I am not able to transform. If I can transform, then I will practice like Rinpoche but I am fragile. If anyone gets angry with me, the only way is to run away. If I don’t run away, I will be trapped there crying (laughter).

Question: *But if you run away, does it make you a bodhisattva?*

Ans: No but at least my mind will be quiet. As I am in the process of cultivation and not yet in the perfection stage, it is better for me to leave and establish a quiet mind to meditate, “If someone makes me angry, I should be stronger. That person is also object of my compassion. And when I have made myself stronger, I will return to face that person”.

Question: *These 37 practices by Togmay Sangpo are part of a sutra teaching or tantra teaching?*

Ans: Both. They are both sutra and tantra.

Question: *If both, then one should take anger into the path, rather than avoiding it, isn't it?*

Ans: To take any affliction into the Path, you must have the ability to manage it. Let us take the case of fire. If you can handle fire, it can be used for positive purposes like cooking and keeping warm but if you don't know how to handle fire, it will burn and destroy. As I mentioned during the mandala offering practice, if you can transform, even your body-waste can be transformed into precious gems and offered as mandala offering. But if you don't know how to transform it, even precious gems will be seen as the poorest, most samasric offering to the Buddha. So a fragile practitioner like myself who is not strong enough, when people keep making me angry or are angry at me, I prefer to run away, lock the door and stay inside. Less harm and danger.

Question: *When I was young and fell in love, I could not help myself. Nowadays I have people calling me to ask me what they are supposed to do when in love. I said for a start, you shouldn't just run away. Running away is even worse. How do you deal with this? One can't help oneself with anger.*

Ans: When we cannot handle a situation, we first need to stabilize and energize ourselves. After doing that, one will be in a better position to deal with it. Hence, the advice to listen, study, contemplate and habituate your mind with it. Contemplation means to think about the teachings in relation to the situation; habituating one's mind means to repeatedly contemplate on the teachings with increasing depth of understanding. This is called meditation. Practitioners have to first train their mind in quiet, conducive places like caves in order not to be disturbed by worldly distractions, so that when they return to the city and have criticisms or stones thrown at them, they will not be disturbed. Without being in a conducive place, instead of their minds getting habituated with virtue, their minds are getting habituated with more anger, attachment and ignorance!

Question: *May I give you two situations - If you have 2 children, the first one you send into a cave and meditate, never meet angry people, never meet objects of attachment but just meditate until they become perfect. The other child meets all these things but you also teach him how to meditate, how to contemplate. 20 years later, you throw both of them into New York City. Who do you think will cope with New York City better?*

Ans: It all depends on their individual minds. How strong their

mind is. How much they really practiced. Maybe the one who stays in the city might practice much more than the one who stays in the cave. Maybe the one in the cave will be better. Like the story of Lama Atisha's 3 disciples – his attendant, a meditator and a scholar. The attendant Dromtoenpa cooked for Atisha and made tea for his Guru everyday and was a lay person. The meditator was a monk who spent his time meditating in a cave; the scholar spent his time studying scriptural texts. The meditator thought his realizations would be the highest; the scholar thought his efforts at study would result in the highest realizations. Lama Atisha summoned all 3 to him and through his clairvoyance checked their realizations and declared that Dromtoenpa had the highest realizations, the scholar second and meditator third. So you see – “the ability to cope” is a matter of whether one has applied what one has learned. If one doesn't know how to meditate and is unwilling to meditate, unwilling to give up the homeland as advised by this 2nd Practice, then whether you stay in the cave or in the city for 20 years, there will be no realizations.

Only if one is able to give up the “homeland” of attachment, anger and ignorance, would one be safe in remaining with the family, possessions etc to cultivate.

Question: Who is Togmay Sangpo who composed this text? Is he a Buddha? How do we know that what he says is 100% true?

Ans: When Togmay Sangpo was composing this, he was already an Arya Bodhisattva i.e. he has seen emptiness directly. As for

the 2nd Practice of giving up the “homeland”, let’s take the example of this centre –if this place disturbs your mind and makes it negative, you better run away. If I go to a cave and the cave disturbs me more in making my attachment and anger arise more, I better abandon the cave. On the other hand, if by coming here and sitting here with you, I am able to practice more, then this is my conducive place.

Question: Can I say that when I run away from my homeland or remain to transform delusions, both are practices of bodhisattvas? And do these practices apply to different levels of practitioners?

Ans: Yes, both are bodhisattva practices. The main point is to overcome the delusions. Realised beings like Rinpoche can remain in any situation. For those who are not able to effectively handle anger/attachment/ignorance, they have to give up the homeland and focus on developing mindfulness and compassion.

 Verse 3

*By avoiding bad objects, disturbing emotions
gradually decrease
Without distraction, virtuous activities
naturally increase,
With clarity of mind, conviction in teaching arises,
Cultivate seclusion. This is the practice
of Bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 3 is about finding a conducive place to cultivate.

“Completely from things that excite us, our mental disturbance slowly declines and allowing our mind’s attention on the virtuous will surely increase, as wisdom shines clearer, the world comes in focus. Our confidence grows in the dharma we have learnt, live alone far away in seclusion. The sons of the Buddhas practice this way.” Practice No: 3 is about finding a conducive place to practice.

What is the purpose of finding a conducive place? It’s not just to develop concentration. After all, even non Buddhist practitioners like Hindu Sadhus are able to train to high levels of concentration. As a Mahayana practitioner, the purpose for us to find a conducive place is to be able to meditate and actualize bodhicitta. Further, a conducive place is a treasure as it facilitates our gaining the deeper understanding of all the knowledge that has come about through our listening/studying Dharma,

contemplating and meditating on it. Why is a conducive place often a remote place? “Remote” does not necessarily refer to a place with no human beings or animals. It means a place where one is separated from distraction and able to carry out the 3 activities of studying, contemplating and meditating. Places like caves tend to be less affected by outside disturbances. That is why past masters meditated in caves. After they received the teachings, they proceeded to caves for solitary practice. Even the centre can be the most conducive place because when you are here, you can listen to dharma, able to contemplate the meaning then you are able to meditate to develop the mind.

Question: *would you say that this verse is advising us to do a retreat?*

Ans: Yes. A retreat provides a scent of the teachings. Normally a retreat is to meditate on what we have learned and contemplated upon. Serious practitioners meditate until they gain realizations. However, for many of us including myself, we lack merit and claim to have done retreats merely by accumulating the 100,000 mantra recitations. When real meditators say they have completed their retreat, they mean that they have achieved realizations into the teachings. Retreat is very important. Even a ten-day retreat is better than not doing any.

First advice for those who wish to do retreat is that one must listen to teachings and study them well, including all the methods to realize the teachings e.g. if you wish to do retreat to train in concentration, you should know how to apply mindfulness.

You should know how to apply introspection. If you don't know these methods, then when the obstacles to mindfulness arise, it will interfere with your progress.

Next we progress to contemplating the teachings until we gain realizations. We may know the theory but if we don't analyze it within our mind to digest it thoroughly, we will not gain the realization of contemplation. Once we have gained the realization of contemplation, we then proceed to meditation i.e. to repeatedly reflect and analyse. When do we gain the realization of meditation? The moment we effortlessly practice Dharma day and night.

Let's refer to the Centre. You come here but find that the person who sits next to you always disturbs you no matter how hard you try to be patient, you can give up this seat and sit on the other side of the gumpa. You are engaging in Practice No: 2. Or if you see a particular person's face which disturbs your mind, don't look at this person and look at the Tara statue instead. If by looking at me you find it difficult, don't look at me either. But if you wish to listen to what I say, then just listen, you don't have to look at me at all. This is also the practice of Practice No: 2. And if you find the eastern side of the hall is not suited to you because you tend to fall asleep there, then change to the other side of the hall. Doing these with the motivation of wanting to cultivate, you are then practicing both Practice No: 2 (giving up the homeland) and Practice No: 3 (finding a conducive place). In time, outer and inner situations will no longer require one to

move here and there. It is necessary to apply the 37 Practices in our daily lives. We must gain the realizations. Otherwise, there is no purpose to practice.

What is the realization to be gained? Not being disturbed by anyone and not disturbing anyone. Rinpoche's energy is pervasive, he touches everyone's mind. Even after two or three nights of teachings, one is still bliss. But I don't have this ability. If I keep you any longer, you will have difficulty coping with it. In order not to disturb you, I have to start on time and end on time. This is also a practice, we all have to practice. That way, whoever comes here will always be happy. The feeling should be that the moment you leave this place, you feel like coming in again. That type of atmosphere must be created. Then this will be a conducive place. A Dharma centre is for dharma practice, so it is important to create that atmosphere. Every single being is important here, even an ant cannot be disturbed. If you are in puja and an ant is biting you, you can't kill the ant. Just take it outside. You can't sit outside, while the ants sit inside, isn't it? (Laughter). That is being unrealistic. This is where we apply our wisdom. We have to put the ant outside instead of smashing it because if you just leave it where it is, it will bite you and you won't be able to concentrate. If our purpose is only for self liberation, then we don't have to consult others as our purpose is self liberation. However, our purpose is that of the Mahayana, it is qualified by having bodhicitta. Why "Maha"? Maha means great because gaining ultimate happiness is not only you but for others too. If that is the case, we cannot make anybody unhappy. Everyone

has to practice. Even in the monastery, everyone from the Abbot to all the newcomer monks all have the equal responsibility to practice. Then we will be able to create a conducive place for the practice of dharma. Dharma practice is to bring joy, ordinary happiness right up to everlasting happiness, which is enlightenment. That is the aim of 37 Practices.

It's also stated in the Ornament of Clear Realizations (“Ngon tok gen”) that all the wise ones choose conducive places which are nourished by water, earth and other elements, have virtuous friends who are inspired towards Dharma and a place free from thieves and distraction. If, for example, one's body cannot cope with the conditions of a snow cave, one should not regard a snow cave as a conducive place. Most important is that one should stay away from objects that distracts us, that make our minds cling and grasp; that cause delusions to arise. Whatever generates attachment within us will naturally create the potential for generating hatred.

Great Dharma jewel, Lama Atisha also advised that until one has subdued one's mind and gained mental stability, one should reside in a conducive place for one's practice. Only then will it be worthwhile to return to normal society to share the unconditional compassion that one has cultivated. Otherwise, notwithstanding one's good motivation, an unsubdued mind interacting with ordinary, unsubdued beings merely generates delusions.

In various Mahayana scriptures, it is advised that this is not the time for us to enjoy having servants, disciples, friends, wealth and luxurious things. Rather, it is an important time for us to recognize how such distractions threaten our ultimate happiness and thus one should seek out a conducive place to cultivate our mind without disturbance and only upon achieving this, to return and enjoy them.

The greatest obstacle to enlightenment or even gaining a better future life, is the clinging to this very life's happiness. To overcome this, one needs to apply the antidote of practicing only dharma and residing in a conducive place. Sounds difficult, doesn't it?

By practicing only dharma, one is able to end this life with much joy, satisfaction and happiness. Dromtoenpa, the great Kadampa master who was the chief disciple of Lama Atisha, stated that this is not the time for ordinary beings to display all sorts of abilities but rather to reside in strict practice in a conducive place, striving to gain bodhicitta. At this moment, we are not sure if we are benefiting others or cultivating more delusion!

I often say that most people are like me, uncooked potatoes. When you eat uncooked potatoes, you will get indigestion and diarrhoea. In order to benefit others, one should be spiritually matured, well cooked, then one will be able to benefit others. Otherwise there is a danger of causing others to get diarrhea and sickness. (Laughter).

Geshe Potowa, another great Kadampa master spoke of a conducive place being vital to enhance one's concentration and perfect the practice of morality. Pure ethics is the sole cause for the precious human rebirth.

Without a conducive place, it will be difficult to train our mind actualize the extraordinary (bodhicitta) mind that is committed to save numberless beings from suffering.

Why were all the Kadampa masters so successful in achieving liberation in one life time? It's because they practiced in this way. They were very clear and straightforward about their practice. So this is a brief explanation of the third practice of dwelling in a conducive place.

 Verse 4

*Loved ones who have long kept
company will part,
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind,
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the
guesthouse of the body,
Let go of this life. This is the practice
of Bodhisattvas.*

Giving up this life, is the 4th practice. How do we give up this life? Giving up this life does not mean committing suicide! It means giving up the clinging to samsaric pleasures and use this precious human rebirth to practice dharma for higher purposes.

How does one do that? By first meditating on impermanence.

One begins by reflecting how this life, friends, family members, competitors, whoever likes or dislikes you, will soon be left behind. It is just a matter of time. Whatever wealth, fame, status, or even power over the whole world that one has, has to left behind at death. One's body, to which one has devoted one's life and attention to, that too will cease. Example, we constantly need to feed ourselves. When we are hungry, we complain. When we are too full, we complain. If you are short, you complain. If you are tall, you also complain. If you are fat, you complain and if you thin, you also complain. That is because you care so much

for yourself in physical form. However, that form is what we will have to leave behind at death. So why cling to this life that will end? Everything is going to separate from us. For most of us here, half our lives are already gone. Like myself, even if I live up to 70, more than half my life is already gone.

In fact no one knows when our lives will end. It can be any moment. Is there a continuance to this life? Yes! Every Buddha and every great master have given us proof and numberless reasons for there being continuance of one's life. And for how long? It could be many eons in samsara. That is the point. Birth in samsara brings at best, temporary happiness and much suffering. Therefore it's worth while to give up this life, not be attached to this temporal happiness and work for long term happiness. How do we do that? One has to practice Dharma.

When we engage in business deals, we think we are honest and fair but somehow it often involves much negativities. It is very rare to engage in purely virtuous business, something that only benefits others. So whatever possessions we gather, we do not necessarily deserve it all, as a part of it has come through the efforts of others. This in itself should also be a reminder to us to share whatever gains we have.

No matter how much we cling to our possessions, we have to leave them behind. Either we get robbed of them or have to leave them at the time of death. This is true, isn't it? We will definitely separate from our possessions. Nothing can stop this.

Therefore, the best antidote is to be satisfied with what we have and release this clinging mind of ours.

Bodhisattvas realize this and hence do not cling to this life's pleasures including one's dearest physical form and they optimise their lives by practicing dharma for the benefit of others indefinitely.

When we say we live a life of dharma, as a minimum, we are referring to having the motivation for next life time's benefit. One may then wonder what benefit from practicing Dharma in the present life! The answer is that by cultivating a good cause for one's next life time's benefits, it will naturally result in benefits for this life also. The reference to the next life time's benefit is because our attachment makes us cling to this life and go to every extent merely to gain benefit for this life. For us to be free from this attachment mind, it is helpful to think in terms of the benefits of one's next life time.

Such as when you do the Dzambhala practice of water offering, the merits gained should not be merely for this life's wealth but for one's next lifetime resources to be able to benefit of others. If you do Dzambhala practice for this life's prosperity, it will be a cause of samsara. Whether an act is a Dharma or non Dharma act depends on the motivation e.g. whether it's directed towards this life's gains or the next life. If only for this-life's purposes, it is not Dharma. This is a clear and strong statement.

If one does Dzambala practice dedicated to one's next life's benefit, with the intention to benefit all living beings as well, that practice is true and will bring wealth in this life. This is because through the power of motivation, through the power of the bodhicitta mind, one is able to hook the wealth from the ten directions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas even now. In ordinary terms, it may be difficult to dedicate for one's next life's purposes and not that of this life; similarly, it might be difficult to dedicate for the well being of others and not oneself. It may not sound realistic to you. But in truth, this manner of dedication is pure and by doing so, both living beings and oneself will gain the benefits.

Ordinary virtue and Dharma virtue are different. Dharma is virtue but not all forms of virtue are Dharma. It depends on the motivation of whether it is for this life or next life's gains. Be mindful of this.

Making offering or any form of generosity to others, respecting others and praising others, if your motivation mainly to gain benefit for yourself in this life, it is worldly. But if your motivation is for next life's benefit, then even if that person whom you praised disappoints you or criticizes, your mind will not be disturbed.

Q&A

Question: *Geshe-la, you said that actions for future life are dharma. What happens if some people who does something good*

but don't know about dharma nor about future lives. Is that person's good deed, dharma?

Ans: Doing good without any understanding of Dharma & future lives is ordinary virtue and a good result will follow but it will not become a complete cause for enlightenment. One can be excellent in social work or very generous but if your motivation is not, as a minimum, for the benefit of the next life time, then it's only an act of virtue for this-life's purposes and not Dharma. It definitely helps others but does not offer complete help. The best generosity is dharma. Even you offer the whole world to somebody, compared to one word of dharma, dharma generosity has much deeper impact. This is because Dharma is dedicated to everlasting happiness. This-life, worldly, ordinary help offers only temporary happiness. So if someone faces hunger and if you have both materials and dharma to offer, you should offer both. Then that act becomes very powerful. But if you only offer material help and not the dharma, there is still virtue being done and benefit given but not the ultimate benefit.

From the sutra called "Buddha's Own Words, it is stated that cyclic existence is like a cloud in autumn. Beautiful yet certain to disappear. Living beings and the process of birth, aging and death are like a drama, a display of forms and movements that lasts for only a while. It is very useful to find examples of the temporariness of this life, to inspire us to give up this life and to practice dharma full time.

From the moment we are conceived, we begin the journey

towards death. We work hard just to edge closer towards death. Don't you think so? Like the celebration of birthdays – they are interesting but when you think about it, you should feel discomfort rather than joy because we are getting closer to death. That is why it's so important to practice dharma. Lama Tsong Khapa advises us to balance our life and extract the entire teachings based on whom we are, where we are and what we are. The key is to transform our minds. In order to remind ourselves to give up this life and engage in pure practice, there are 3 basic points relating to death to repeatedly meditate on:

1. Death is certain. Without exception, we will definitely die.
2. Time of death is uncertain.
3. Only dharma can help at time of death.

Some further points for you to consider:

- There is no one, no matter how powerful who has not died or left this world.
- Our mind and our physical form all are contaminated products. So as long as something is a product, it has the nature to cease.
- Change is constant and momentary changes (though difficult to detect), happen. From the first moment that comes into being, it declines into a second moment and so on. We are like runners, running towards death.
- It is not definite how long our life span will be. In some world systems e.g. the northern continent, beings there live up to

500 years. Certain god-realm beings live many thousands of years. As a human being in this world, most of us will be gone by the age of 80 or 90.

- Our bodies are incredibly fragile. There are so many obstacles to life. When we drive there is danger. When we eat, there can also be danger. Even when we talk to people there is danger. If you think about it, there is not much value to this physical form because the most minor of conditions can make us sick e.g. when we don't get enough warmth, we get flu; a small pinch bruises our skin; we do not wish to look old, yet we cannot avoid it. One works very hard to get a bigger house. In fact, one room would be enough as this physical body only occupies a small bed. Yet one is not satisfied, so years are spent acquiring a bigger house. We constantly busy ourselves with meaningless tasks and at all times, inner peace is missing. Time soon passes by and half of one's life is gone. Then it's time to retire and who knows whether you will get to retire or not. One day you discover you are now 60 years old. What you wished for has not been accomplished or worse, has resulted in something totally opposite. This is why this contaminated form and samsara are unreliable.
- Due to karma and delusion, we have created many types of outer, inner and secret obstacles to lasting happiness. If you do not practice dharma right now, for sure we will encounter endless troubles which are the results of our negative actions.
- Friends and loved ones cannot save us from death. We invest

so much effort into this physical form, yet death cannot be averted. The consciousness will just leave. The moment the mind leaves the body, it begins to rot. Even your dearest one who used to touch you with affection, would not dare not touch you from that moment on. There are disciples who love their Guru and feel so excited to touch their physical form, like those who feel so blessed-out to hold the Guru's hands but think - when the time comes for death to manifest, how excited would one be then, to hold the hands of a corpse? It can be very difficult.

Why do I emphasise so much about death? In order to practice purely, there are two things that can inspire us, namely (i) death and impermanence and (ii) knowing the value of precious human rebirth. Between these two, the one which is more effective in driving us towards practicing Dharma is to meditate on death and impermanence. Those who are brought up in a Western culture feel uncomfortable to hear about death and impermanence. When you think about it, it scares you isn't it? But this type of fear is very good. It induces us to practice dharma and thus is not a bad form of worry.

In the "Buddha's Own Words" Sutra, it is stated that as long as our dharma practice is stained by worldly concerns and by attachment to this life, one's practice will never become pure dharma. Our practice may look like dharma activity but in truth, we would merely be gathering the causes of samsara. There is that danger. We are sure what kind of life we are going to take next life. Most

probably we will not take such a high rebirth with the excellent conditions of meeting the complete Dharma teachings. If we meet only Hinayana teachings but fail to explore the Mahayana and Tantrayana, we will be unable to extract the full meaning of taking the precious human rebirth and the Buddha's 84,000 teachings. On the other hand, if you don't have a chance to study Hinayana teachings and only focus on Mahayana teachings, you would lose the preliminary teachings of the Buddha. It would be like rose plant, where instead of watering its root, one only waters the petals. In the end, the plant will dry up. Likewise, if we meet the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings but fail to meet tantrayana, again enlightenment is not possible. The union of great bliss and emptiness is only possible based on tantrayana.

Lama Atisha repeatedly stressed on the importance of abandoning the clinging to this life. Failing to do so means we are living a life of only the eight worldly concerns. The past Kadampa masters and great Indian Pandits who achieved enlightenment within one life time frequently taught that if one forgets to meditate on death and impermanence for even a day, they would regard that day as wasted.

One might think, "I am doing this retreat to please my guru" and when such a person goes back to LDC, that person may expect to be praised or treated as special. Eight worldly concerns. If no one asks you about your retreat, you feel disappointed. Eight worldly concerns. If the Guru is close to someone new, one gets disturbed. Eight worldly concerns.

There was a great Indian mahasiddha who stated there is no single corner of this planet that can protect anyone from death, which comes swiftly. He voiced out there is no time for practitioners, whom he considered as his beloved sons and daughters, to delay in practicing Dharma as death can come at any time. He made this request with his palms placed together. In short, one should practice in this way:

- Cultivate the mind that remembers death spontaneously and at every moment
- Giving up this very life
- Practice only pure dharma

One tends to think, “I will not die today and will surely live until tomorrow”. With this thought, one then plans for tomorrow’s activities, accumulating more causes of samsara. And suddenly circumstances ends one’s life that very night. By cultivating the remembrance of death and impermanence, one’s Dharma practice strengthens.

 Verse 5

*When you keep their company your three
poisons increase,
Your activities of hearing, thinking and
meditating decline,
And they make you lose your love
and compassion,
Give up bad friends. This is the practice of
Bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 5 is giving up bad and negative friends. Who are bad friends? Those friends who encourage you to indulge in attachment, anger and ignorance. Those who distract you from Dharma practice are negative friends. Friends who tell you it is silly to develop loving kindness and compassion are bad friends. Those friends have to be avoided. What type of friends should we take as good friends? Whoever encourages you to practice the causes to achieve the liberation and enlightenment. Someone who is supportive of you cultivating the study, contemplation and meditation of Dharma teachings is a good friend because it is these practices that will result in your everlasting happiness. Whoever encourages you to develop good heart such as loving kindness and compassion is a virtuous friend.

Avoiding negative friends and cultivating virtuous friends are part of the practice of the bodhisattvas. There is a teaching called

“tsung” which counsels us to avoid befriending negative minded human beings because that will lead us to cultivating negative actions, increase negative emotions, cause good qualities to degenerate and in the end will only bring disappointment. This does not mean that we condemn negative friends! No. They are sentient beings who need our compassion and merits. But it does mean to avoid being in their company frequently because they influence our fragile mind towards negativity.

There is another teaching “Drenba nyensha”, which states that as long as an object/person is the object of one’s attachment, object of one’s hatred or object of one’s ignorance, then that is negative and should be avoided. Giving up the homeland.

Therefore, right from the beginning, one has to be mindful about the friends we gather. Lama Atisha advises us to ensure we engage with right friends and avoid wrong friends. Geshe Potowa cautioned that by mixing with negative friends, one not only destroys this life’s benefit but also destroys the benefit of one’s future life. This is because negative friends influence us to cultivate non-virtuous actions of body, speech and mind and from these come direct obstacles for us to practice dharma, for us to achieve lasting happiness and prevent us from being able to deliver real help to other living beings.

All the past great mahasiddhas have advised that if you really wish for happiness, you must rely on virtuous friends. If you don’t wish suffering, you must avoid negative companions. If a person

suggests to you that you should not attend virtuous activities but rather, ask you to indulge in intoxicants or non-ethical activities, that person is a negative friend to you. If one's negative friend is too strong in personality, then better to avoid that person. If you think you are unable to persuade that person to enter a more virtuous life and instead, you regard yourself weaker than that person, you should even run away! (Laughter) Whilst we cannot force anyone, it's always good to foster virtuous actions. If you discourage people from doing virtue, then you are their negative friend.

 Verse 6

*When you rely on them your faults come
to an end,
And your good qualities grow like the
waxing moon,
Cherish spiritual teachers even more than your
own body,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 6 speaks of the need to rely on the spiritual master, as stated in *The Foundation of All Good Qualities* by Lama Tsong Khapa. Devoting mentally, physically and wholeheartedly to the spiritual master is the root of all of one's attainments. The spiritual master inspires and helps us to enhance our virtuous mind, just like how the moon increases from the first day to the fifteenth day. The Guru steers us away from creating negative actions. Therefore relying on the Guru is one of the practices of bodhisattvas.

One should always view the spiritual master as the supreme virtuous friend. Why? Because one's spiritual master is rare to find and thus to be treasured and listened to. Secondly, a qualified spiritual guides us against committing negative action instigated by delusions and in so doing, protects us from lower realms. Therefore, being properly devoted to the spiritual master will lead one to Buddhahood.

A qualified spiritual master should as a minimum, be someone who has compassion, is un-biased, of pure ethics, more knowledgeable than oneself and seeks to benefit others more than himself. In particular, a Mahayana master must provide the complete teachings of the Buddha.

How do we correctly devote and rely on a spiritual master? There are two different aspects: One is through thought and the other is through action. First one should at least generate sincere faith in the master. Secondly, one should always remember the kindness of the master because one is able to receive Dharma knowledge from him with relative ease. When one has faith and a remembrance of the master's kindness, one can guard against seeing faults in the master. When you do not have faith, you quickly start to see faults. When you do not remember his kindness, you start to have expectations or question the spiritual master's actions or request. Example if your spiritual master ask you to donate "nasi lemak" to a beggar, you might challenge him and say why not donate "char kuay teow" instead. If your spiritual master advises you to behave because you are talking too much and you argue about that with the master, it is a sign that you as the spiritual son or daughter have no genuine faith in the master and have forgotten his kindness in teaching you. If qualified Mahayana spiritual masters like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche or His Holiness the Dalai Lama ask us to do any practice or work, we must say yes and do our best to fulfill the task. It is inappropriate to question the task before really putting

effort into performing it. When you question under in these circumstances, this means you do not have full faith as you think the spiritual master might lead you in the wrong direction.

Having understood the qualities of the master, generating faith is important. Faith equates with trust. Even in normal life, in order to accomplish something, we need faith to accomplish that particular action. If you do not have faith or trust in what you or others are doing, you may achieve part of the goal but entirely. Doubt becomes a hindrance.

In the sutra teachings, it is clearly stated that faith (based on valid reasoning) is the preliminary and initial practice which all practitioners should embark upon. Sometimes we misunderstand what “pleasing the spiritual master” means. We think we please the spiritual master with praise and with offerings. In truth, the spiritual master is pleased when one practices the Dharma, applying the master’s Dharma advice. If the spiritual master advises you to develop more compassion and you put more effort in compassion, you please the guru. Avoiding non virtuous and cultivating virtuous actions is pleasing the spiritual master.

Lama Atisha put it plainly when he said that there is no way one can obtain full enlightenment without relying on the spiritual master. Further, the Mahayanic realization of bodhicitta conjoined with the realization of emptiness, including the union of emptiness and great bliss of wisdom and method, can only be attained by relying on the spiritual master. So when we receive initiation

without a qualified tantric master, there is no way one can receive the initiation. And without receiving the tantric initiation, there is no way to enter into the deity's mandala and to practice the four kayas to achieve enlightenment within one life time. So in order to do that, you need a qualified tantric master who possesses the tantric vows and the initiation commitments and who has been initiated into the unbroken lineage of the Buddhas. It cannot be over-emphasised that one should rely in every way on the qualified spiritual master.

 Verse 7

*Bound himself in the jail of cyclic existence,
What worldly god can give you protection?
Therefore when you seek refuge, take refuge in
The Three Jewels which will not betray you. This
is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Taking refuge is the 7th practice. The door to liberation, whether one is of the Hearer, Solitary Realiser or Bodhisattva path, liberation is based on taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Buddha is the enlightened holy being such as Shakyamuni Buddha or Buddha Manjushri or the 35 tathagatas and as long as it is a Buddha, it is an object of refuge. The Dharma refuge is the direct realization of emptiness and the Arya beings who possess those direct realizations of emptiness are the Sangha refuge.

All the past bodhisattvas have relied on the Triple Gem because only they can protect one from falling into lower realms and bring one up to enlightenment. If oneself is not liberated from samsara, there is no way for that being to give full protection from samsaric suffering to someone else. Hence, it is vital that when we pay respects to earth protectors or worldly gods who have not even achieved arhatship, we do not make the mistake of taking refuge in such beings. We can engage in generosity and make offerings to such worldly beings but we should not take

refuge in them. If you take refuge , you break the refuge vow of taking refuge only under the Buddha.

There is no purpose in relying on or taking refuge in unenlightened beings or those not free from samsara such as earth-protectors because we need to understand that they themselves are not liberated from samsara, so there is no way they can liberate us from samsara. They themselves have to be liberated from karma and delusion. Some religions have the practice of animal sacrifices to gain instant success. Sometimes, such results occur but understand that such results are derived from the power of negativity, the power of a negative mind and negative results are thus inevitable. If we possess a strong virtuous mind, similar success can be gained. So both ways can be powerful. The negative way can be powerful, the positive way can also very powerful. But remember, the consequences from a positive or negative act follow quickly.

By taking dharma refuge, it requires us to preserve the vow of not harming others, including using harsh words. If one harms another being's peace of mind, we are in fact breaking the basic refuge vow against harming others. Therefore speak kindly and gently and never use indirect words to hurt others. That too is breaking the vow of taking refuge in the Dharma.

If we break any refuge vows, we have to question ourselves whether we are pure Buddhists. It's necessary for us to have refuge vows, as they are the foundation upon which we can take

other vows such as bodhisattva vows, tantric vows including the 253 ordination vows. Without having refuge vows, there is no basis to support the other vows. So we must first engage in the samaya of refuge.

Why is it that those great beings by merely reciting a simple prayer are able to cure or help people? It's due to the power of their mind and the power of their prayer backed by pure intention. In Nepal, there are some people with bad habits, for example, a good football player may, in order to enhance his luck during a football match, go to a god named Mahakali and perform animal sacrifices. He thinks the bigger the sacrifice, the larger the animal, will bring about better luck. Worldly gods are samsaric beings with strong grasping, are sometimes able to influence the mind of the player who made the sacrificial offering and he ends up playing very well and winning the game. However, the negativity arising from killing the animal soon makes itself felt in all forms of troubles to him. I have heard that some people have sacrificed up to 500 buffalos for worldly success but the heavy negative consequences soon manifest.

Question: *Is Mahakali one of the protectors?*

Ans: Mahakali is one of the Hindu gods. This is to be distinguished from Mahakala (the enlightened protector form of Chenresig).

In order to take refuge, there are two causes that must be accomplished: The rational fear of being born in the lower realms (due to one's recognition that one is trapped in samsara

and constantly creates causes for such lower realm rebirth); and faith in the Triple Gem of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

One can take refuge in the Triple Gem by participating in a Refuge ceremony. However it is not a matter of merely attending the ceremony and repeating some words. It is a matter of wholeheartedly relying on the guidance of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to attain enlightenment. Taking refuge involves vows and the person granting the Refuge vow should have received the refuge vows from an unbroken lineage and still possesses the vow intact. If a person does not hold the Refuge vow purely, then even if you go through the refuge ceremony with that person, it will not result in one receiving the refuge vow. You should therefore observe and consider carefully about the person from whom one is going to receive Refuge from. Merely knowing the ritual alone is not enough.

The purpose of refuge is to cross the ocean of samsara. Dromtoenpa said that to be free from the ocean of samsara can be extremely difficult because we are stubborn, set in our bad habits. We can barely help ourselves, let alone rescue others. Hence the need to take refuge in the Triple Gem and pray to be able to practice Dharma purely and only then, can one be a liberator of sentient beings.

 Verse 8

*The Subduer said that all the unbearable suffering
of bad rebirths,
Is the fruit of wrong doing,
Therefore, even at the cost of your life,
never do wrong,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 8 is to reflect on the suffering of the lower realms with negative actions as the cause. In this verse, one is introduced to the small capability being's renunciation of this life as his goal is obtaining a better future life (free from the lower realms).

It begins with the meditation on the suffering of three lower realms - the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms. The purpose of this is so that even though we are not in the three lower realms right now, our actions of body, speech and mind have created the complete causes to experience those suffering results and that if we wish to avoid such lower rebirths, we need to abandon non-virtuous actions, purify all the non virtuous actions and to avoid non virtuous actions in the coming days.

How do avoid entering lower rebirths? By practicing the ten virtuous actions, which is the principal practice of the small capability being and by applying the Four Opponent Powers practice, purify all the negative karma accumulated.

What are the 10 virtuous actions? The first set relate to actions of the body – starting with not killing and that includes insects, worms and germs. If one engages in the action of killing and then omit to purify the karma, the consequence is to experience the suffering of a lower realm rebirth. The second virtuous action is not stealing. The third is avoiding sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct here includes having sexual relations with persons other than your partner. During my consultation sessions, many situations of sexual misconduct are raised. This rule is not about prohibiting sexual conduct, it is prohibiting sexual misconduct. In a marriage, for example, if one does not preserve this vow to avoid sexual misconduct, many relationship problems will arise or one will always feel dissatisfied and finally be born in the lower realms.

The next set of virtuous actions relate to speech: Not lying, not engaging in harsh speech, not engaging in divisive speech and avoiding idle gossip. As long as one's words hurts others, it is using harsh speech. Sarcasm is also harsh speech. We call ourselves Mahayanic practitioners but if we cannot even uphold these 10 virtuous actions, we not only fail to be Mahayanic practitioners, we even fail in the small capability being's practice.

We tend to think that idle gossip is not a serious matter. However, if we are not careful, gossip will soon become a habit. And the fruit of that is to experience the sufferings of the lower realms. Right now, the sufferings of this human existence makes us

scream and cry out for painkillers. Should we be born in the lower realms of far more intense suffering, what will we do then? Panadol won't help then.

Next comes to the virtuous actions related to mind. Avoiding covetousness - It is through attachment and desire that one wishes in a grasping way, to possess what others have. Next comes avoiding ill-will - having the mind to harm others due to anger or dislike. Covetousness is due to attachment and ill will is due to anger. The 10th virtuous action is not holding wrong view. There are many categories of wrong views here. One example is having no faith in karmic cause and effect; disbelieving in relation to refuge or in relation to the Four Noble Truths. All these are to be avoided.

By engaging in the 10 virtuous actions, one can avoid a lower realm rebirth (animal, hungry ghost and hell realms). The 3 higher realms are human, demi-god and god realms. Within these three higher realms, the one with the greatest opportunity to practice Buddhadharma, to attain full enlightenment is the human realm. Therefore, as a minimum, we should motivate ourselves by practicing the ten virtuous actions for us to obtain the perfect human rebirth next life, to meet the perfect guru and meet the complete teachings of the Buddha.

Meditation on the lower realms requires one to know in detail what they are. In the teachings of the "Precious Garland" eight different types of cold hells and hot hells are described, each with

its own cause and manner of suffering. In the preta (hungry ghost) realm, there are various types of suffering of extreme hunger and thirst without any hope of food nor drink. In the animal realm, they live a life of fear and ignorance, devouring each other. Big animals eating smaller animals and so on. We might think that many animals have a peaceful life as they do not seem to have to worry about much. But in fact, animals have tremendous suffering like unimaginable fear, born from ignorance as they have obtained the contaminated physical form.

Why is it necessary to reflect and meditate on the suffering of the three lower realms? In order to persuade oneself to practice the ten virtuous actions. Even for us who claim to be Bodhisattvayana practitioners, when we forget to think of suffering. Only when we get into trouble do we seek the Buddha's help. When we are in a happy and excited state of mind, do we even remember Dharma? Do we recall the kindness of the Buddha then? Very seldom. But when we are in trouble, then we earnestly call out to the Buddha or Tara. This is a common habit – one only calls if help is needed; otherwise, one tends to neglect others.

Thus, if we do not frequently recall the suffering of lower realms, it is quite likely that we will constantly accumulate causes to fall into lower realms. Without question, the practice of ten virtuous actions is the main practice of the small capability being but is also amongst the principal practices for the middle capable being and higher capability beings.

The verse asks us to understand that negative action produces suffering. Simple as that. For this, one needs to know how karma works. In general, there are 4 points to consider when referring to how karma operates – (i) Karma is definite (ii) karma increases, (iii) one would never experience a result unless one has committed the cause for it (iv) whatever karma that has been accumulated will not disappear on its own, i.e. one will definitely experience the result.

- (i) Karma is definite. What action we commit will definitely bring about a result. We might think we have not committed any crime in this life but we cannot be sure if we have done so in a past life. If we have and if we have not experienced the result yet, like having a lower realm rebirth, then it is crucial for us to immediately apply the antidote called the Four Opponent Powers to purify it. Otherwise, a terrible experience could soon be at our door.

What about purification? Does purification work? From Buddha's own advice, it is stated that applying Four Opponents Powers can purify one's entire negative karma i.e. any negative karma can be purified before it is ripened. But once karma has ripened, purification practice is still useful in terms of reducing the pain. It can be experienced in one minute or instead of experiencing a lower realm rebirth, one merely experiences a headache in this life as a human. Hence, there are benefits of doing purification despite definite karma. Failing to do so will result in certain rebirth in the lower realms.

(ii) The second aspect is that karma increases. No matter how small an action may be, the impending result that act snowballs moment by moment. A big tree comes from a small seed. That illustrates the increasing nature of all karmic action, whether it was virtuous action or negative action. Be careful! Assuming we have done virtuous action, it is vital to dedicate in emptiness, like what our guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche does in his dedications. If we do not dedicate the virtues we commit, there is a danger that our next moment of anger will destroy the merits generated. Whilst karma has the ability to increase, it also has the ability to degenerate if we are not mindful. So for virtuous actions, we need to dedicate it in a manner so that will be preserved and able to continuously increase. Dedications facilitate this, especially if one dedicates with the bodhicitta motivation for the benefit of all living beings and their enlightenment.

As for negative karma, if we are quick to purify our negative karma, it will not increase. We might think that killing an insect such as mosquito or ant is a small thing. However, due to the factor of karma increasing moment by moment, if we kill an insect today and fail to purify it within 17 days, the karmic result will be similar to killing one large animal. And after another more time passes, it is equivalent to killing a human being. What type of suffering results are we going to experience if we fail to purify the karma of killing

a human being. Therefore being careful with ants is also important!

Killing is not to be taken lightly. Even killing germs. Those of us who take antibiotics, its main purpose is to kill the virus or germs. That is also killing and if you omit to do purification, after sometime it will become very heavy karma. Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is the best example. Rinpoche has diabetes and blood pressure. No matter how much we request him to take his medication but he refuses because he wishes to avoid killing. For many years, Rinpoche would do observation before he takes any medicine and after being certain that no beings would be harmed would he consume the medicine.

We see the doctor for every small sickness and are quick to ask the doctor for antibiotics. If we do this mindlessly, are requesting to perform negative karmas. Thus, the best thing is taking preventive measures – e.g. exercise to stay healthy, eat sensibly, have a happy mind. Less stress also helps for one's good health. Exercise such as prostrations will definitely help. As long as you have good health, you will not need to take antibiotics or medicine. As long as our action harms another's life, we cannot do. That is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. And if due to circumstances we do harm others, immediately purification is required because karma increases.

Q&A

Question: *Don't you think not taking medicine because it is killing germs a bit too extreme?*

Ans: That is why we sentient beings suffer constantly in samsara because we do not strictly follow the Buddha's advice, we make excuses and constantly accumulate negative karma. If killing does happen, there are purification practices to be applied. For the beginner, it is good to listen at least once to the straightforward teachings of the Buddha. That is why the number of Buddhist practitioners are limited because the teachings are direct and too profound. The more straightforward the teachings, the nearer to liberation the listener can be. The more strictly you practice, the nearer to liberation. I think we have much good karma to meet these teachings.

Question: *You spoke about the direct killing of sentient beings. What happens if a doctor prescribes medicine to cure a patient? Is it indirect killing?*

Ans: If the patient doesn't request anything from the doctor, the doctor doesn't have to do anything. As long as one wants to be free from every aspect of suffering, practice the 10 virtuous actions is a must. That is the only solution.

Question: *What happens if it's the other way round, where the doctor initiates medication due to the wish to save the patient's life?*

Ans: The doctor will definitely accumulate good karma if his motivation is purely to help the patient. The patient however

should also reflect – karma committed gave rise to sickness; and now he is doing to receive medicine that incur more karma through killing the germs. The doctor is participating in the killing but the direct cause is the patient’s wish and request for the medicine. There are causes and conditions. Doctors and medicines are different types of conditions. The main cause is oneself and one’s karma and delusions (which caused one to commit negative actions) giving rise to suffering like sickness. In order to eradicate suffering, one needs to eradicate the causes of suffering which are the delusions of ignorance, anger and attachment. Hence, the strong advice to do virtue and purification.

Question: *When you talk about killing and take the example of the antibiotics, it’s very profound and very deep. I think we should not dismiss it when I say it’s too radical a view and interpretations of Buddha’s teachings because when we try to cure ourselves is because we want to live longer and we want to live longer because we want to benefit other beings and when we take antibiotics in our body to cure ourselves the motivation is not to kill anything.*

In response, Geshela poses a question: Tell me, why do we have these germs in our body?

(Class answers): Because of past karma.

Geshela: That’s right. And who created the past karma? We did!

The Buddha says it is up to us. If we want to carry on suffering, go ahead and commit killing now, even with medicine. Then we set up the cycle of suffering again and again. So it is up to us. However, if we really want to cut the root of suffering, we need to practice the 10 virtuous actions to avoid the negativity or we need purify the cause. Further, are all cells beings? If they are not, then killing them is alright. But if they are beings, then it would be wrong to take their life. I'm raising this because I would like to know this because a life and a living-being are two different things. A tree is has life but is not a being. But if a cell is a being and germs and virus are cells, then we are not supposed to kill them as they possess mind.

Question: *If my stomach is full of worms, I have to de worm myself right?*

Ans: We cannot kill worms!

Question: *I once asked a Dharma brother whether it was alright to de-worm and he said that it is alright if one has the motivation to give the germs a chance to be born in a higher realm.*

Ans: If one wants to follow the Buddha's advice strictly, that answer is only an excuse for killing. We often use "good motivation" as an excuse. If we are not free from karma, we will constantly suffer. So one must take refuge and preserve the 10 virtuous actions. Lead a life this way and you are on your way to liberation.

Question: *So does that mean that we cannot take antibiotics or*

de-worming medicine at all?

Ans: I am suggesting that we should not take action mindlessly. We cannot kill casually. Since we understand karma, we need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of any act we do. If there are alternatives which inflict lesser harm to bacteria, then we should use that. But if there is no other solution but to take medicine which will kill living organisms, then one should set up the right motivation i.e. the motivation of preserving this precious human rebirth so as to cultivate enlightenment to be able to rescue all sentient beings and only after doing this, consume the medicine. Be aware that there is still negative karma but the motivation will give rise to some virtue still. There is not simple right or wrong. One needs to weight things out and apply wisdom through analyzing in this way.

I have met some newcomers to Buddhism at Kopan. They complained that when they went to Kopan, they hoped to escape troubles and did not want to hear more about suffering! Let's be clear here - the purpose of discussing suffering is to avoid its causes and having to experience suffering.

(iii) The 3rd aspect of how karma works is that one will not experience the result unless one has committed the cause for it: If we do not want to experience the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive suffering, we need to know the causes and avoid them. Common sense!

(iv) Once we commit the karma, the impending result will not disappear on its own. We will experience it. From the Dharma point of view, suffering has nothing to do with a god or external causes. Circumstances are merely conditions. The sole cause of all troubles is YOU! Oneself is the creator of all experiences. One's delusions causes one to commit negative karma and from that comes all our suffering.

One final comment on killing. If we kill a mosquito without much thought now, in future lives we will enjoy killing mosquitoes and other living creatures too. The more we kill, the more we like to kill. The more we steal, the more we delight in stealing. The more harsh words we use, the more we like to abuse others with harsh words. That is why without the discipline of the ten virtuous actions, if we do exactly as we please, we will become totally un-restrained and un-subdued minds. Then suffering will come to us endlessly.

Question: *For many of us in business, there are many situations where it is better just to tell a white lie, where one does not hurt anybody. What do the teachings say about this?*

Ans: If it involves the ten non virtuous actions, you accumulate negative karma. We cannot escape from the negative action (neither can we escape from positive action). If one does not apply purification practice to the lying, then not only will the corresponding suffering result be experienced but life after life, one will have the habit to lie and all the consequential results

like loss of merits, reliable friends and all sorts of suffering will arise. That is why purification is so important.

Question: *But what if that white lie did not harm anyone?*

Ans: The problem is that both gross and subtle karma has occurred. We cannot immediately see or know the impact of subtle karma. If we are omniscient and if we are sure that the white lie does not harm a single being, then it might be alright to engage in that white lie. But we do not have this ability to see subtle karma and its impact. Hence, as long as it invokes the ten non virtuous actions, no matter one's pure motivation, negative karma is committed, suffering results will follow. But if your motivation is so powerful such as being dominated by pure bodhicitta motivation like that of the Buddha, it is possible that the virtue gained may be more than the non-virtue from the white lie but then again, that would be rare and we need to be careful about doing non virtue using the excuse of having "good motivation".

Question: *Dengue is brought about by the Aedes mosquito.*

Ans: Dengue is due to our karma created. Dengue is all because of all us. The mosquito is only a condition. Who created dengue? (Class: Oh, this is a chicken and egg situation). Geshela: No, no, no. This is not a chicken and egg situation. It is karma which gave rise to dengue and the experience of it and who created karma? (Class: Living beings). Geshela: That's right. Without creating the karma in the first place, the result of dengue disease would not be experienced. So it is we who need to stop creating the karma

for disease but in case we have accumulated the karma in the past to experience dengue fever, then we need to purify now by quickly applying the Four Opponent Powers.

Mosquitoes do not necessarily harm us. Many help us as part of nature's process. We can help ourselves engaging in the ten virtuous actions and taking preventive actions (re-mosquitoes) like not simply throwing rubbish about, keeping the house clean, etc..

Question: *The newspaper reported that dengue has not affected certain areas like section 17 where the Centre is. If there is an outbreak in this area, surely the authorities would have to do something to kill the dengue mosquitoes for the sake of people living there.*

Ans: Even if the authority does the killing, it is still negative action. As far as law of karmic cause and effect, it's wrong. In the first place, we shouldn't create the cause for dengue to come to section 17 or anywhere. Secondly, if we have accumulated such karma, we should all come together to purify. Maybe dengue will still come to section 17 but not to LDC. Like the huge storm which occurred in the area recently. It did not affect LDC.

Question: *In the case of a judge, even though a murderer did not kill a member of the Judge's family, yet the judge still has to sentence the murderer in order to prevent other people from getting killed.*

Ans: If the victim did not exist, how could there be the murderer

to kill him? And what makes a person a victim? One needs to see the karmic connection in events. If one did not create the karma for murder to befall oneself, one would not be capable of being hurt by him. So we should constantly put effort into purification practices because we cannot see the various types of karma ripening. Purification is like using an eraser to remove written words.

In order to be a perfect Buddhist practitioner, correct understanding of karma is the key. When you talk about karma, you start with engaging in the ten virtuous actions because that is the root practice, the first step for us to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Question: *Would you say that the best way to become a perfect Buddhist, is to spend your whole life doing purification practices?*

Ans: One needs to cultivate both bodhicitta and wisdom to be a perfect practitioner. However, to achieve this, one needs to do purification practice because through that, both gross and subtle defilements which hinder the attainment of bodhicitta and wisdom realising emptiness, namely, the self-cherishing mind and the grasping to self & phenomena, can be eliminated. That way all suffering can be eliminated. No dengue fever. (Laughter)

Question: *Why is it there are more and more diseases – e.g. Aids.*

Ans: My very dear brother, Aids was unknown in the past, yet

now it has become very common. Why? People are becoming more and more careless. The fundamental karmic cause of aids is sexual misconduct.

That is why Lama Atisha said that the wise ones will never commit non virtuous actions. They close the door to lower realms. The most profound teaching is still about karma. For even if we have direct communication with the Buddhas, as long as we do not abide by the teachings on karma, the law of cause and effect, there is no way to escape suffering. We are swimming in the samsaric pit due to delusions of ignorance, anger and attachment. As long as root is poisonous, the fruit likewise be poisonous. While we have the ability to reason, we should use it to understand how karma works and the logic behind practicing the ten virtuous actions. This is how to free oneself from rebirth into the 3 lower realms.

Once you avoid the 10 non virtuous actions, you naturally engage in 10 virtuous actions and the door to a happy rebirth is assured. It is totally up to us what kind of karma we accumulate. Geshe Langri Thangpa who composed 8 Verses of Thought Transformation and fellow Kadampa master, Geshe Chekawa both made requests to Lama Atisha to give them the essence of the Buddha's teachings which would enable them to gain the realizations Lama Atisha had. Came the reply, "Cultivate the understanding of karmic cause and effect. It is the essence of my advice" . This means as long as one abides by the law of karmic cause and effect, one will naturally be able to avoid lower realms and obtain higher rebirth.

Without understanding and applying the teachings on the karmic law of cause and effect into one's mind and lifestyle, then whatever teachings one receives is nothing more than stacking up ice blocks i.e. when the sun-rays shine, everything disappears.

Reflect on the sufferings of the lower realms and know how to avoid such lower rebirths i.e. practice the 10 virtuous actions.

 Verse 9

*Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, pleasures
of the three worlds,
Last only a while and then vanish,
Aspire to the never-changing supreme state
of liberation,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

The 9th practice is to understand the overall suffering of samsara (not only the suffering of the lower realms as discussed under verse 8) **and aspire for liberation.**

Here, one will explore the sufferings of the higher realms in order to generate strong renunciation not only from the lower realms but from samsara. This means that even if we are able to obtain rebirth in Desire Realms such as human realms or in god realms (such as Form realms and Formless realms), as long as one attains rebirth within cyclic existence up to the 33 gods which reside at the Peak of Samsara, as long as one has obtained rebirth based on contaminated aggregates, there is no true nor lasting happiness. It is like standing on a bed of needles with bare feet. In fact we are already experiencing this level of suffering but due to lack of awareness and understanding of reality, we do not realize it.

What do I mean? Is one's present life that bad? We are able

to sense the gross suffering of suffering and the suffering of change but pervasive suffering is much more difficult to detect, yet it brings un-ending suffering. Merely having our bodies with the contaminated aggregates gives rise to discomfort and unhappiness e.g. sitting too long in the sun will make us feel hot; then we go under shelter and if we stay there too long, we feel cold and want to return to the sunlight. No matter how much we say we are happy with delicious food and comfortable beds, rebirth in samsara through karma and delusion is no less painful as sitting on the tip of the needle. Therefore, strongly resolve to be free from samsaric existence, not just for yourself but for others. Renounce samsara and strive to attain enlightenment for yourself and all beings. Bodhisattvas practice this way.

In the Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva interestingly pointed out that without realizing suffering, there can be no renunciation. Renunciation is about renouncing contaminated existence. When we generate spontaneous renunciation in our mental continuum, we gain the first moment of the first of the 5 Paths. We had previously concluded that we need to practice Dharma or else our lives are in danger. This means practising Dharma with the motivation of achieving peerless happiness for self and others (or in the case of the Hinayana practitioners/Theravadans, the motivation to attain nirvana). Then that becomes pure dharma. Otherwise, even when we commit virtuous actions e.g. giving food to the hungry but we do it with the eight worldly concerns (e.g. wanting praise and not criticism), then that act of generosity is virtue but is tainted and thus a cause of samsara.

Virtuous action can be a cause of suffering, if one is not mindful. This sounds very strange, doesn't it? This happens if our virtuous actions are contaminated with the 8 worldly concerns e.g. doing charity with a hope to gain praise. Or if our virtuous actions are in relation to objects which give rise to attachment, anger or ignorance.

Another example is a Buddha statue. The Tibetan word for tantra is "Ngak" and the meaning is "yee kiop". "Yee kiop" means to protect the mind from ordinary perception. This requires us to view the statue not as an ordinary object but view it in its purest state, as the living Buddha with all His qualities. Otherwise, if we merely view the statue as a holy object of beauty to be possessed by oneself, that would be ordinary thinking based on attachment and hence, admiring that statue becomes a cause of samsara instead of a cause of liberation and enlightenment. Whatever Buddha statue we have, we should feel content rather than think "Oh, my Buddhas face is not nice, so I must buy another one". There is no better Buddha outside. It is all about one's mind and how pure it is.

A Dharma text is a further example. Let us say, one has 2 scriptural texts and one is thicker than the other. One then offers a nice brocade cloth for the thicker text and neglect the thinner text. This shows that one does not have the pure mind to see that the Buddha's teachings as being equal and that the Buddha's teachings are his realizations. The discriminating manner of

paying homage to the 2 texts indicates that one's offering the brocade was based on the delusion of ignorance and hence a cause for samsara.

Offerings: If you are very innocent and you offer water only to Tara without offering to other Buddhas, then it is alright. But once you know you should offer to all Buddhas but you only want to offer to Tara because it is your "favourite" Buddha emanation, then that is ordinary, biased, attached thinking which will be a cause of samsara and not liberation. It's contaminated.

One prays and prays, yet nothing happens. That is because we have ordinary thinking and do not know how to pray properly, which is why nothing happens. We never think that a simple Buddha statue is the real Buddha. We go around looking for nicer statues to pray to, just like shopping for more possessions. We pray with worldly motivation, forgetting entirely about suffering sentient beings. That is why prayers our don't succeed. We communicate to our statues rather than communicate with the Buddha, failing to see our statues, no matter what material they are made of, as the real Buddha; neglecting all other living beings. So how does one get blessings with such a improper attitude?

If one is able to talk to the Buddha from one's sincere heart, one does not even need a statue. That is how the great mahasiddhas of the past practiced. Many did not have even a single statue. You might then ask the question, "So why do we need so many

holy objects?” It is because we ordinary practitioners need frequent reminders of the Buddha, his qualities and realizations. Our minds are unstable. The minute we turn away from a holy object, we forget what they represent. We forget about karma, we forget about respect. So when one sees Tara, then one remembers the need to practice and eliminate the obstacles to practice. Otherwise, one simply forgets.

Question: *You mean to say that if we look at all our Buddha statues here and some images are more beautifully done than others, we can't even think that way? It would be non virtuous?*

Ans: You can say that the artist of this Buddha statue is not as good as the other artist. But you should not point your finger at the statue and say “This Buddha is not nice looking” (because your subconscious mind is still referring to the Buddha image). Instead you should say the artist who did the statue did not do a good job. The point here is that our minds are mistaken in the first place. We do not see statues as real, perfect, Buddhas who are flawless; we only see the gross, ordinary forms and proceed to comment on the ordinariness. We fail to hold pure view.

Question: *We need to offer equal offerings to all Buddhas, right?*

Ans: Yes. As long as we have equal respect towards the Buddhas in all forms, it is beneficial. But if we place the statue we regard as of “lower quality” on the side and put the better one in front because we discriminate and regard it as “better”, that thinking is wrong.

As a reminder, verse 8 here is about meditating on and abandoning the sufferings of samsara. We need to thoroughly understand the subtlety of pervasive suffering. Only then will it be possible for us to achieve nirvana. Otherwise our subconscious mind is still tied to contaminated existence. We may chant tons of mantra, wanting to be free from samsara yet allowing the subconscious mind to be attached to this life and samsaric pleasures. If we continue this way, we can never be free.

Therefore, it's very important to rejoice in all your past good karma to have such a luxurious environment, good families, your good qualities and offer them and dedicate it to your liberation and enlightenment and similarly to all beings. Or as a minimum, dedicate it for the next life time's purpose. This way, the causes will be created for you to have better and more meaningful life, with wisdom, with wealth and health.

We do Dzambala practice because we want wealth. It is fine to have wealth. The problem is that we devote to Dzambala's with worldly aspirations like "May I have great wealth soon". This thought is contaminated because it is based on attachment towards possessions. Contaminated practice cannot possibly produce wholesome results. Therefore, remember to at least dedicate for the next life to be better but better still, to dedicate towards one's Buddhahood, THEN one's Dharma activities will bear fruit.

You do not need to visualise all the Buddhas nor do elaborate practice. Just think with a sincere heart, “I need wealth, I need a job, good health so that I have the conditions to practice and attain everlasting happiness in order to benefit numberless beings.” Make this a sincere thought. This frees one’s actions of earning a livelihood, of gathering wealth from the 8 worldly concerns. If you pray with the great motivation in this way, then anything is possible. Any prayer can be fulfilled. Dzambala will never grant wealth to a self-centred person. Buddha’s help can never reach a selfish person. Therefore, if you carry out Dzambala water offering for this life’s purpose, with attachment which is a cause of samsara, do you think Dzambala will grant you wealth? NO WAY! Do you think Medicine Buddha will grant you health? NO! You think Manjushri will grant you wisdom? NO! Tara will enhance your life such as your job or wealth? NO! If we are serious about Buddha’s teachings, we will get no where if we carry out our actions with delusions and the 8 worldly concerns. The surest way of accumulating wealth and prosperity is by the pure practice of dharma.

Q&A

Question: *You mentioned that as long as one is motivated by the thought of everlasting happiness, one’s wishes will be fulfilled. Do you think everlasting happiness has different meanings for different people?*

Ans: When I talk about everlasting happiness, I am referring solely to enlightenment because apart from that, there is no everlasting happiness. Even the Solitary Realiser practitioners

may regard their goal as everlasting happiness but it is not. Only full enlightenment equates with everlasting happiness.

Question: *Dzambala is described as the Buddha of wealth and hence, people pray to Dzambala for wealth/riches OR is Dzambala a Buddha of wealth in a sense of abundance of merits?*

Ans: Dzambala appears as the essence of the ten directions of Buddhas and bodhisattvas' realizations of wealth for the ultimate purpose of enlightenment, not merely for accumulating riches to increase one's possessions. Praying to Dzambala with the motivation to attain Buddhahood has the effect of enhancing one's level of material and spiritual abundance in terms of enlightenment. This should be well understood.

Question: *Then why don't we just say "pray to Dzambala for enlightenment"?*

Ans: Enlightenment is everlasting happiness in every aspect. I am just using a variety of different words. Everlasting happiness, Buddhahood, enlightenment, omniscience; the state of the purity of the five aggregates are synonymous. These different words have the same meaning.

In order to obtain nirvana, we need to fully understand the first Noble Truth which is truth of suffering. In order to eradicate the truth of suffering, one needs to understand the meaning of the cause of suffering (which are delusions and karma). One then concludes that in order to eradicate suffering, one needs to eradicate the causes of suffering which then requires one to

eliminate ignorance, anger and attachment and the karma that these produce. Most of us do not realize that we are suffering. We think we are enjoying our lives. We think we are in good shape when we are not. If you really want to be free from samsara then you must investigate and meditate on the state of your life, beginning with thinking about the uncertainty of life, even with regards to relatives and friends. Today's friend can become tomorrow's enemy or this morning's enemy can be tonight's friends. Husbands and wives hope to sustain or increase the happiness of their relationships but often, they end up in disappointment. What suffering indeed. In relationships, first there is the thought "In this life, I will definitely stay with him or her and pray that in the next life, I will again only be yours and you only mine. You are the most beautiful, wonderful person in the whole world." Then one month, one year, three years later, things change and one then laments, "You are the worst person in the whole world. You are the opposite of what I thought you were." This is samsara. Samsaric pleasures leave one constantly dissatisfied. It's like drinking sea salt water, the more you drink, the more thirst one becomes.

Likewise, with ones aggregates. You value your body so much. How hard you work for your face, how much money spend on your bodily form. You are a servant to yourself and then death comes.

We have to think about all these scenarios and appreciate who you are, who your family or friends are and transform all of that

into conducive conditions to practice dharma. If one can do that, then there is the real possibility of meeting loved ones in positive situations right up to attaining Buddhahood together. That is how wisdom and method can come together. Father and mother can be wisdom and method. In fact when we get into the practice of tantric yoga, this understanding on the union of wisdom and method is necessary.

Our life goes up and down like the share market. Much suffering comes from the selfish, desirous mind. Selfish because you only want to win. When you see the stock market going down, you want to sell but when it suddenly goes up, we greedily hold on hoping that it will go higher. Similarly, our emotions go up and down, suddenly happy, suddenly upset, suddenly excited, always overwhelmed with emotions. We feel depressed at having few friends but get tired when having too many friends. The mind is contaminated, our aggregates are contaminated. That is why it is so important to understand what contamination is. The contamination is called samsara, an existence that is like sitting on a bed of needles. There is no peace and happiness there.

Some people question why bad things happen to good people. It not because that one has done everything wrong in this present life. Because mind is a continuum, we need to realize that causes have been created from many past lives. In this life, we may be a human being but did it occur to you that in past lives, we have been born as robbers or crocodiles or a torturer of beings? All our actions (of body, speech and mind) leave an imprint in our

mental continuum, which ripens over time and when it does ripen, the results are sometimes joyful and sometimes painful. Sometimes poverty strikes and it is because one has committed stealing in past lives or one has destroyed the lives of others, so in this life, one faces obstacles to one's livelihood.

There are times when one does an action with pure motivation and yet, others criticise oneself. One suffers low esteem wondering why people always misunderstands oneself. In fact, it may have nothing to do with one's actions of this life. It is because one is experiencing one's past karma where one has done exactly that to others. Understanding this, instead of feeling disturbed, reflect on the potency of karma and immediately engage in the practice of purification. That will help.

You might notice that a butcher you know seems very happy, rich, living to an old age. If one doesn't have Dharma study, one might think it is good to become a butcher. Here, you need to understand that the happy butcher you see is enjoying the fruits of past good karma committed, it is not coming from his present killing of animals as a butcher. The moment the butcher finishes this life, in future lives, he will have to experience short lives; sickly lives; lives which are ended through being killed by others; have animal lives like crabs which are caught and killed as food; born as sheep in Australia which are slaughtered; born as a prawn born in Malaysian seas and cooked. Karma. And this is directly related to being a butcher.

Therefore, we need to put effort in cultivating mindfulness and introspection to allow us to use our lives fully and with great benefit not only to ourselves but to others as well. They also help to protect us from making our spiritual practice turn into practice which creates more causes for samsara rather than liberation – for example – if we display our Buddha or Tara images as a decoration or with worldly pride, that intention itself creates the cause for samsara & sufferings. This does not mean that we should not have any Buddha images! That is wrong conception. If we offer extra flowers at the altar to impress visitors, wrong conception. We are not offering to Tara, we are showing off. Do you think this is offering with a sincere heart? It is useful to check our minds carefully even when having Buddha images or engaging in any Dharma activities.

When we obtain the solitary realizer and the hearer realizer states which are called nirvana, where one has effectively renounced samsara and the causes of sufferings (delusions). This is also known as the lower and middle capable beings' liberation. This is the state of peace where there are no sufferings at all – the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive suffering all cease – one is able to remain in blissful tranquility and one can dwell in total peace without disturbance for years and eons.

However, as a Mahayanic practitioner, we should not be attached to this notion of dwelling in nirvana enjoying peace for oneself. What about the countless beings tortured in samsara?

Do we just ignore their hardships? Therefore, we must cultivate bodhicitta and work for others to gain liberation and to achieve full enlightenment. As long as we are unwilling or unable to renounce nirvana's peace for oneself only and work for others' liberation instead, we will not obtain Buddhahood.

Sufferings take all forms and shapes. Let's take the example of an enemy. We tend to think that an enemy will be an enemy forever. It is not true. The enemy of today can be a good friend of tomorrow or vice-versa! This happens because we have delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance. Thus, we cannot rely on delusions as they cause us endless suffering. During one of my consultations, one couple complained that their health and wealth were declining because their neighbor had put up a chakra. They then put up a mirror on their house to reflect the image back and felt that things changed for the better. So I asked them to prove to me that their action had produced the "better result" and why they thought that way. So we debated until they concluded that perhaps their better fortune may not have been because they placed the mirror. This was just their grasping mind. It was their karma to encounter their problem.

A grasping mind works this way: If we project in negative manner, the view we perceive will be negative. Sometimes I feel negatively about a person but it later turns out that the person a good and truthful person. There are a lot of things happening in our lives where we project wrongly, so we cannot simply judge people. That is why the Buddha cautioned us that

if we as ordinary people judge others, it will lead to bad results because we normally judge people incorrectly and almost never praise others good qualities. Karma then accumulates and the consequences follow.

Dissatisfaction is another form of great suffering. First we wish for a house. Having got one, we then think of a another bigger house. Or we just bought ourselves new clothes and then we feel it is not enough and more clothes are needed. Or food – we think about our favourite food and once it appears on our table, our mind instantly thinks of what else one enjoys eating. It is like the favourite food we had earlier dreamed about was not even there on the table! Our mind is totally un-tamed. Then relationships – a source of much anxiety and unhappiness. The reason is we never practice appreciation and contentment.

Dissatisfaction is a very deep and intense form of suffering. The whole purpose of practicing Dharma is to pacify the suffering of dissatisfaction. Even in the case of Dharma practice, if we treat Dharma practice like a possession, like something to be greedy about, then it will not be a cause for liberation but a terrible cause for more samsara. Therefore, if one only knows Om Mani Padme Hum and one recites it with full faith and conviction that it contains the entire 84000 teachings of the Buddha, that is contentment; that is the satisfaction mind; that is a form of realization.

If we allow ourselves to be plagued by dissatisfaction in our

practice such as first chanting Mani prayer and then thinking, “Oh, chanting Mani prayer seems to have no effect on my problem, so maybe I should switch and chant Tara mantra instead”, this can be very dangerous because it comes in the category of abandoning Dharma. When praying to the various forms of the Buddha – Shakyamuni Buddha, Chenresig, Maitreya Buddha – one should regard that all are omniscient and are thus the same. There is no need to practice partiality such as respecting certain Buddhas and doubting other Buddhas.

Loneliness strikes many people. They feel left out, lost, abandoned. There is no need for this. The best companion is the Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni himself stated there is not a single atom that is not Buddha. Thinking this way is hugely beneficial. Beneficial for accumulating merits, for purification of negative karma especially purifying impure mind and impure projections and for being protected with the guidance of the Triple Gem. By merely thinking and being reminded of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha will clear all obstacles, including harms from human, non humans, spirits.

To practice the good heart and Dharma purely, there are 2 causes - seeing the true nature of our samsaric existence and the sufferings of the 6 realms and understanding how the precious human rebirth can be used to overcome samsara. If we do not use this human rebirth to be mindful and to cultivate the methods to eradicate the delusions, it is a great waste.

Let us briefly discuss the sufferings of the 6 realms of samsara to see if we wish to linger there –

The hell realms: Without mindfulness and Dharma practice, we have caused the death of many beings or we freely engage in anger, committing causes for a hell realm rebirth. Forced by karma, this rebirth can be in various forms of terrifying suffering – such as born in a place of knives, blades and saws which are so sharp that when our body merely touches them, our bodies are shredded into thousands of pieces and each single piece experiences tremendous suffering; one collapses from pain only to be resurrected to re-experience the same torturing sufferings. This is just a small example.

There are cold hells too, where one's entire existence is one of bitter cold, with constant feelings of being pierced by the extreme cold. One's entire body is ice and all around are huge ice mountains.

There are no words to express the hell realm sufferings. So do we think we can afford to create negative karma to born in hell? We cannot. We must ensure that we do not commit any negative karma which will throw us into the sufferings of hell. Another example is Cho, the island that melts. If our karma throws us into this hell, we will experience the island melting into molten liquid and our bodies are thrown into this burning liquid and stirred by sharp sticks and thorns. Can we afford to take such a kind of rebirth? No. So we need to be serious about taking care of our karma.

We might think, “My life is going well right now why should we worry about hell realms and such?” Remember that we have accumulated countless karma in the past which will bear fruit in soon and in the future. It is just a matter of time. You can now see why purification is so important. And why avoiding killing and eliminating anger is the key.

The preta (hungry ghost) realms: Pretas suffer indescribable hunger and thirst and this rebirth comes from miserliness and greed. Pretas have huge stomachs and skinny throats with knots in them such that they cannot swallow any food. Even liquid is difficult to go through and they are always hungry.

Being generous will prevent one’s rebirth in the preta realms. Make offerings to all – from divine beings to normal sentient beings. If you see a beggar and you have 2 plates of food but you refuse to share your food, this kind of holding back is the miserliness that will create the causes of a preta rebirth.

Miserliness via speech easily arise and is very dangerous For example if somebody is offering food to the beggar and one happens to be nearby and says, “Oh this is their karma. Let them be. Don’t bother” . The throwing karma from this, is rebirth in the preta realm.

Generosity can be generosity of giving material help, of giving protection from fear and Dharma generosity. Generosity in giving

whatever food or possessions we are able to share, is the first kind of generosity. If somebody wants to lend someone in need some money and you stop that loan out of narrow mindedness or because you do not like the person asking for the loan, you create the karma to be born in the pretas realm because of miserliness.

If someone is afraid for his life due to being chased by a mad killer and comes to your door, and having understood the danger to this person life, you lock to door and fail to offer him protection from fear, it is miserliness and the fruitful cause to be born in preta realm. Of course, when giving such protection, there is also the need for wisdom e.g. it would be unwise to place yourself between the killer and this person if the result is to get both yourself and him killed! Whatever we do should have both compassion and wisdom conjoined.

Dharma generosity is the supreme generosity. Whatever Dharma knowledge you are clear of, be willing to share that knowledge when you are asked for it. If one withholds Dharma understanding by giving the excuse that one is not a senior, that is miserliness in Dharma. It is heavy negative karma to purposely withhold Dharma eg. due to selfishness.

We must guard against miserliness for it will lead to a preta rebirth, where one is tortured by illusions such as seeing lakes of drinking water in front of you but when you get there, everything turns to lakes of thorns and poison; or seeing a mountain of

food but when you arrive, it is just a massive pile of skeletons. It is a state where one's hunger is intense such one tears at one's stomach which bursts but one does not die and merely experiences great pain or one's thirst is so extreme that one will go to the extent of wounding oneself to suck one's own blood to gain some fluid. A terrible consequence.

Just close your eyes and picture the realms I have described. We have all created causes for such rebirth, so can we delay engaging in Dharma and purification practices?

We often see pictures of starving humans in newspapers. Think how fortunate you are. Generate compassion, recite prayers for them, include them in your dedications. Meditate frequently on the sufferings of the realms and resolve to free all beings from suffering. Prayers with the proper motivation and dedication definitely work.

Q&A

Question: *There is the idea that since we can purify negative actions, why not just commit the (non virtue) which is enjoyable because one can still purify it. What are Geshela's views?*

Ans: Are you really enjoying it or setting yourself up for disappointment and suffering? This is the whole problem with the delusion of ignorance. We don't realize the suffering nature of what we call enjoyment; we don't reflect on the true nature of our contaminated existence. So we indulge in negativity and mistakenly think it as enjoyable and as happiness instead

of realizing that ordinary happiness is nothing more than the suffering of change in action.

Continuing with the discussion on the sufferings of the lower realms, we next come to the sufferings of the animal realm, the suffering of great fear due to ignorance and being constantly hunted and eaten by larger animals.

The human realm sufferings is well understood by all of us, so I do not need to elaborate on them.

Next comes the suffering of the demi-god realm: They are always aggressive and fight with the god realm beings but always lose the battles, get wounded and die in battle but come back to life to again experience war and loss. Such suffering.

Finally, the god realms : Life in these realms is very luxurious. Whatever they desire with their sense, they instantly receive. They have a very strong grasping mind of permanence and live as if their lives will go on forever. It will not. Their lives as god realm beings is only for as long as the karma to experience it keeps them there. Due to the luxury enjoyed there, they have no interest in cultivating Dharma. Their bodies have lovely fragrance and have a glorious appearance. However, as their karma for the god-realm rebirth declines, they begin to see signs of decay; a rotting smell emerges; their radiance fades and begin to gain visions of their next rebirth, which will be a lower realm (because their merit to experience the god realm is finishing). It

becomes an extreme state of anguish and despair for the dying god realm beings.

From all the above, you can see that there is suffering in all the 6 realms. That is why we must cultivate to rid ourselves of samsara.

It is only with the precious human rebirth that there is a chance to practice in order to escape samsara totally. The causes for a precious human rebirth is avoiding the 10 non virtues; upholding vows like refuge vows, vows of individual liberation or bodhisattva vows or tantric vows. If one fails to uphold vows well, it will be impossible to gain the precious human rebirth.

Question: *I know someone who is actually very kind hearted person but he is a skeptic, so when I talk to him about the suffering of coming back again and again, he says “What’s wrong with my life? I like my life very much and I don’t mind repeating my life over and over again .”*

Ans: From ordinary point of view, if one is enjoying life, it is OK but it will not last. Will one be content with this? From the Dharma point of view, an ordinary life means one is still trapped in samsara; vulnerable to the suffering of change like loss and aging; the suffering of suffering like sickness and subtle pervasive suffering.

Question: *Oh yes, this guy has cancer.*

Ans: Oh! So on top of his suffering of sufferings (physical pain

from cancer), he does not mind coming back again and again to experience cancer again. Going through so much gross suffering and yet regarding it as enjoyment. That is really karma. That is why I previously said that some butchers enjoy their jobs because of the past, strong ignorance that blocks their awareness of the true nature of their existence.

Question: *So how we help such a person?*

Ans: Use examples to illustrate to him how ordinary life experience contains various aspects of suffering that lead to dissatisfaction and hardship. However, that a happy and meaningful life is possible and that we need to know what to adopt and what to abandon in order to achieve this. Without such knowledge, one will continue to commit all sorts of negative actions which will bring painful results and even if one is not experiencing a difficult life right at this moment, it is just a matter of time where those negative results will rush in like a flood.

Question: *Smoking - Some people die of lung cancer even though they never smoked in their whole life? How come?*

Ans: When we say “whole life”, we are talking only about this one life. Every being has had numberless lives, committing numberless causes for heavy illness and short lives. So one needs to think of karma. Some people mock Shakyamuni Buddha for having omniscient mind, yet having no power to save people from cancer. Buddha taught how karma works and what we can do to overcome sufferings. But people totally forget about karma and do as they like and then blame others when the results arise.

This is the problem. Some great masters at the end of their lives, purposely and willingly experience serious health problems like cancer etc and they use that as an opportunity to practice purification and more than that, to engage in a most powerful practice called Tong Len, the meditative practice of taking on the suffering of others and giving all goodness to sentient beings. Through engaging in this practice for their whole lives. They are able to build up a kind of energy that is able to relieve the sufferings of others.

Hence, the teachings describe a wise man as one who is able to see that worldly pleasures are temporary and are in the nature of suffering, equal to the suffering of the lowest hell and acquaints himself with the methods to overcome all suffering.

Question: *Some people say that they can afford to create bad karma because there are purification practice to help them.*

Ans: First of all, if one does not create any negative karma, one would not even need to put effort to purify it, isn't that right? Secondly, death is certain but time of death is uncertain. What if one suddenly dies before being able to do purification practice? Once a living being falls into the lower realms, it is almost impossible to do virtue because sufferings in those realms are too intense, so what then? Best is to avoid creating negative karma.

Question: *My understanding is that even if you do purification practice, you still need to experience the consequences of what you have done?*

Ans: Any karma that has not yet ripened into a result, can be purified i.e. one need not experience the karmic result.

There are two types of karma, definite karma and indefinite karma. Indefinite karma can be purified to its root through purification practices. Definite karma refers to ripened results but there is still benefit in doing purification practice for ripened results because by doing so, it will diminish the intensity of the suffering result. Suppose we committed one of the 5 heinous crimes (spilling the blood of a Buddha, killing an arhat, killing mother or father, causing a split within the Sangha community) to experience sufferings in the lowest hell and the duration of remaining in hell was to be eons, by doing purification e.g. applying 4 opponent powers, one will be born in hell but one might only stay there for second. That is the benefit of purification practice.

Question: *Let's state a scenario. I steal tonight but manage to do the 4 opponent powers not to steal for the next 6 hours. I fulfill the 6 hour promise and steal again in the 7th hour. Am I applying the 4 opponent powers practice?*

Ans: For the karma to be purified, one should have a strong resolve not to steal again. The time period in the 4 opponent powers practice enables us to carry out our resolve in a firm and realistic way but it does not mean that one should do the practice just in terms of watching the time. If one has the repellant thought of avoiding stealing, then one should simply generate the resolve not to steal again, rather than rely purely

on the duration of non-stealing. Otherwise, we will not be able to progress.

Question: *During initiations, we are required to take commitments. We cannot say “Rinpoche I will only try my best”, so we take the commitments which are promises to do certain practices. 10 years ago I started to take initiations from Rinpoche and received lots of commitments. Last year Rinpoche came again – to take the initiation would mean even more commitments, which I find hard to do, yet not to take the initiation is also wrong. So what should I do? (a) Is not taking an initiation wrong and (b) Can we return the commitments to Rinpoche?*

Ans:

(a) There is no wrong or right in taking or not taking an initiation.

It is a matter of individual choice and one’s ability to fulfill the commitments and uphold vows. If one takes the initiation and practices the commitment well, there are many benefits. If one does not take the initiation, there is a loss of opportunity to purify and generate merits. But to take an initiation and not fulfill the practice and uphold vows and samayas, is very serious heavy negative karma. When we think of the rarity of Dharma and in particular Mahayanic Dharma and more so Mahayana Tantra, in combination with the precious human rebirth, if we do not take the opportunity to do these practices now, there will be virtually no opportunity to do so in the future.

(b) There is no such thing as returning commitments. We need to clearly understand the purpose of initiations and commitments. It is not just reading the sadhana. The purpose of commitments is for us to habituate the meaning and essence of the sadhana which includes generating strong refuge and bodhicitta to gain enlightenment for all beings; then reflecting that to achieve this, one needs to engage in the practices of guru yoga and purification. For Highest Yoga Tantra sadhanas, one should do the meditation on the 3 kayas and their meaning, constructing the self and front generations to transform impure view into pure view. That is the real purpose of sadhana.

That's why we need to study Dharma to establish a firm foundation for the more profound practices related to initiations. Example - What is guru devotion? What is guru yoga? Guru yoga means seeing the Guru as inseparable from the Buddha-deity. Let's take Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche – Rinpoche's enlightened mind is inseparable from the enlightened mind of the 10 direction Buddhas. See this and generate faith in this. If one cannot do even this much, then frankly, even reciting the whole sadhana 100 times is not complete Dharma practice.

The reason why I am saying this is that sadhanas and the words and pages of sadhanas are a temporary support, like a walking-stick for an injured man who cannot stand up firmly. Once the man is able to stand up and walk, there is no longer a need for the walking-stick, right? In the same way, reading through the

sadhana pages is not the main point for practising. The main point is to understand the Dharma teachings within the sadhana and meditate on those points, such that there will come a day when you no longer require the sadhana pages but are still able to do the sadhana practice with profound meaning and benefit. This was the advice from HH Dalai Lama.

Otherwise, is there benefit from merely reading the sadhana? There are many holy words there but do they move your heart or bring any realizations? That is why despite our having taken 100 initiations, we are still here, stuck in samsara. Or the practice of self generation - we read the self generation verses loudly but do we ever meditate on emptiness at that time? Do we meditate on dissolving into emptiness and arising in the pure, divine form or do we just mouth out the words? If we meditated properly on emptiness, the delusions of anger, attachment, ignorance, tiredness would never arise. But we know for ourselves how we are. We need to analyse closely whether we are really doing Dharma while engaging in sadhana practice.

HH Dalai Lama once scolded the audience during a Kalachakra initiation. He said, "When I give preliminary teachings for 3 - 4 days, you people do not attend. Yet today when I give the initiation, everyone is crammed here, to the point of there being no place to even stand. This is all wrong thinking!"

If you intend to take the initiation, if you wish to be a good practitioner, you should attend the preliminary teachings first

and only then take the initiation.

Without a clear understanding of the 3 principle aspects of the path i.e. renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness, there is no way to properly receive the Bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. Those are based on the 3 principles. In tantra, if someone is not Yamantaka but you think he is Yamantaka without understanding emptiness, it is a mistaken conception, delusion. Without purifying our ordinary conceptual mind, without cultivating the 3 principle aspects of the path, there is no way for us to become Yamantaka.

That's why the tantric path is so powerful because while in this ordinary form, one is able to attain enlightenment through the 3 principal aspects of the path and working with the inner nervous system of channels and winds.

Question: *Do you mean to say that if one does not have a guru, one cannot attain enlightenment?*

Ans: Yes. If there were no Shakyamuni Buddha, how would one attain buddhahood? He is the Guru. In one of the scriptures, it is said that the Buddha made a promise that he would always appear in the ordinary aspect of Teachers, so that living beings can communicate and interact with him and be guided to liberation. That is why one should see one's Guru as inseparable from the Buddha. There is a valid reason for it.

Question: *There is a remedy if one breaks one's initiation*

commitments? i.e. by doing self-initiation practice?

Ans: We need to ask ourselves why we are taking the initiation in the first place? If it is to gain enlightenment, one should be prepared to put full effort. If we are advised to recite a mantra 21 times, we do it.

Also, I would like to share the advice that if one makes a promise to do the initiation commitment and then fail to do it, that would be a cause for vajra hell. It's not a threat. It is simple logic. Let's think through this one – why is there this threat of vajra hell, when after all, whether one practices or not, the Triple Gem will always wish sentient beings well and would never throw them into hell. One needs to understand this advice from the correct perspective – firstly, due to ignorance and lack of mindfulness, we have already committed endless causes since countless past lives to gain a hell rebirth. Initiations and commitments are given to enable us to live virtuously and train, so as to escape hell rebirths. However, if we abandon the practice, it would be akin to throwing away the protective-armour, whereby we will have to experience what our karma had already created the causes for, namely a hell rebirth.

Why we must take refuge in the and not in worldly gods? Because worldly gods themselves have not escaped samsara. They are in the same prison as we are. How can they help? They too have anger, attachment etc and once you pray to them, you must pray all the time to them because of you miss one day, they will be disturbed and harm will come to you like create conditions for

sickness and loss of wealth etc.

Question: *We take initiations with good intention but sometimes we get so busy that we do not do the commitments and forget to purify. Does it mean we are going straight to hell ?*

Ans: Any negativity that is not purified will bring negative results. So here, if one does not do the purification practice in failing to honour the commitment, then yes, hell realm rebirth is coming. Hence, purification practice is strongly advised.

If we do not take any initiations but live Dharma-virtuous lives and purify negative karma, one can gain enlightenment but that will take 3 countless eons (whereas one can gain enlightenment in one lifetime if one lives a life of pure morality, upholds all vows and practices of the highest yoga tantra path). But do know that respective negative karmas require their respective, specific antidotes. For example, the karma of anger needs to be purified by patience; or killing needs to be purified by restraint from killing and saving lives. General virtuous action will not purify all forms of karma.

Question: *Taking initiations are a must?*

Ans: If one seeks to become a Buddha within one lifetime, then it is necessary to take the highest yoga tantra category of initiations.

Question: *For a beginner like me, I often get confused because there are so many types of initiations. What should I do?*

Ans: One should cultivate familiarity with the foundation teachings of the Buddha. Then one should find out what the initiations are about and what the commitments are before taking them. The confusion is due to us, not the Lamas because it is we who request for the initiations. All true Lamas never order you to receive initiation. They will check on the suitability of granting the initiation and the persons taking them. They emphasise on the preliminary teachings on Lam Rim so that the person seeking initiations gains the foundation teachings of the Buddhdharma. Tantra requires clear understanding and willingness to live a life of Dharma. But what do we do? We grumble when the Lamas take hours to teach on Lam Rim before giving the initiation. We complain that we have come for initiation but the Lama cannot stop talking. This is totally wrong view. Without renunciation bodhicitta and emptiness, there is no way to properly receive and practice tantra.

Having chased the Lamas for initiation, when you are asked to do commitments, you complain you are too busy!! When you are faced with an enemy, all your remembrance of the Guru, of Dharma, of yourself as the self-generated Buddha-deity, disappears! That's why the frequent recitation of mantra is so useful. The meaning of the word "mantra" is mind protection. Protecting the mind from ordinariness and keeping it in the divine state with all the qualities of compassion, wisdom, patience, skilful means.

 Verse 10

*When your mothers who have loved you since
time without beginning
Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?
Therefore, to free limitless beings
Develop the Altruistic intention
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice no: 10 is to cultivate bodhicitta.

By understanding life, death and rebirth, karmic cause and effect, interconnectedness with all sentient beings in relation to your happiness and suffering, we conclude that all living beings have been our mothers through countless lives and have provided immense kindness for us throughout. We therefore need to remember the kindness of mother sentient beings and generate the determination to repay their kindness. The ultimate kindness we can offer is to lead them to enlightenment. This practice underscores the first method of cultivating bodhicitta – the 6 cause and one effect method, beginning with seeing all living beings as having been one’s mother, remembering their kindness, repaying that kindness, generating unconditional love, cultivating great compassion and generating the altruistic attitude to take responsibility to bring all beings to enlightenment. The result is bodhicitta.

Therefore, it is easy to see that without sentient beings, there

is no enlightenment because there would be means to practice, no means to close the door to samsara. Hence the kindness of living beings is immeasurable. At the same time, countless living beings are trapped by ignorance, delusions and sufferings. Compared to those numberless beings, your rebirth – the precious human rebirth of all the freedoms and endowments – has the potential to attain perfection, Buddhahood. If we do not utilize this life to repay the kindness of living beings through the cultivation of bodhicitta, our lives are hollow and meaningless. One should thus make a supplication all the time to be able to follow the footsteps of the bodhisattvas.

 Verse 11

*All suffering comes from the wish for
your own happiness.*

*Perfect Buddhas are born from the thought
to help others.*

*Therefore, exchange your own happiness for the
suffering of others*

This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

Practice no: 11 is the practice of the exchanging of self for others, the second method of cultivating bodhicitta.

The source of everlasting happiness comes through cherishing others. It begins with shifts in one's daily life, finding ways to bring happiness to others, then dedicate strongly for their ultimate welfare. Shantideva advised that if one wishes to be free from samsara and its entire web of suffering, one must cherish others over oneself. This is the practice of the Bodhisattva.

Babies and little children do things only for their own comfort and happiness. "Babies " here refers to ourselves, we adults. Due to self interest, babies and children get easily upset when their self-centredness is not attended to; whereas Bodhisattvas and Buddha work effortlessly for others and are in a constant state of bliss.

Before we are able to cultivate bodhicitta - before we can use

the 6 - cause –and-1 effect method (verse 10) or the exchanging of self for others method stated in this verse - we need to establish equanimity, an attitude of non-discrimination towards everyone. In our normal life, we tend to cherish family & friends, abandon enemies and ignore strangers. To actualize bodhicitta, one needs to put an end to this discriminating mind. There is no bodhicitta if one selects to help some beings and not help other beings. Giving equal, unconditional love and help is the foundation of all Bodhisattva practices.

The practice of tong len is part of the exchange of self for others practice. In tong len, one uses meditation to visualize taking on the sufferings of others and mentally transfer the happiness of oneself to others; we take on their hardship and we give them our virtues. All this is done during the tong len meditation.

Let us analyse: In one's ordinary life, are we really able to transfer our virtues, good karma health, prosperity to others? It is impossible. Is it possible to wish that others' sufferings ripen upon oneself? Impossible. Only Buddhas and Arya bodhisattvas can take the sufferings upon themselves. However, whether one can derive this benefit, whether one can feel the effect of having our afflictions removed in this way depends on whether one has faith and conviction in the Buddha and whether one has established the cause for this to happen. Hence the actions and response of ordinary beings is important. Many actually through ignorance, lack of wisdom, knowledge, reject such help and do not adopt the teachings on karma etc.

This fact should inspire us to attain bodhicitta faster, to accumulate the necessary extensive merit to become an Arya Bodhisattva and best of all, to attain Buddhahood itself. For only then can one truly benefit numberless beings.

This practice of taking (the suffering of others) and giving (our happiness to others) is a very powerful method to develop your heart. It is a mighty practice that requires some courage and fearlessness. Whenever tong len practitioners get sick, they immediately use their sickness as a tool of cultivation – how? By visualizing the sufferings of sentient beings merging with their sickness and then through the same meditation, sending out good health and happiness to sentient beings. Very effective. If oneself is sick or facing hardship, that is the best time to engage in tong len practice. After all, one is already sick, so meditating on taking on the sickness of others will not worsen one's sickness. This is an important point to reflect on - if one does not have the karma to get more sick, one will not get more sick from doing tong len. And if one has the karma to get more sick, it will not be on account of doing tong len! Through logic and reasoning, one can see why tong len should be engaged in, as the benefits for others and for the practitioner are immense.

If we catch the flu after sitting next to someone with the flu, it is because we have created the cause to catch the flu. After all, there are many people who work in hospitals or visit hospitals come into contact with germs of all sorts of infectious diseases

but they do not get infected. This is because those persons did not create the karma to contract those particular diseases. For us to avoid sickness – the ordinary way is to keep clean but that alone will not determine whether sickness will befall you. Ultimately, the way is to purify negative karma and avoid creating new negative karma which will bring sickness, loss and all forms of suffering. Tong len practice combines both purification and generating merit.

Therefore, tong len practice is not about the literal exchanging of your karma with that of sentient beings. Through one's meditation motivated by the wish to benefit others in priority over oneself, this powerful mind is able to influence the conditions of others – for example – a person is sick but through the wholesome energy of your tong len practice directed at him, that person suddenly meets the perfect doctor or encounters the very medicine needed to heal him or ease his pain. You can become instrumental in their finding what they need to alleviate their suffering. Therefore, do not worry. Our virtuous practice can reach them but their suffering and karma cannot affect us.

However, if the above explanation does not totally remove the fear within you to do tong len, then one can perform tong len in another way. Think this way instead: Whenever one gets, let's say a stomach ache, think , “May this stomach ache that I'm having be sufficient to remove all sufferings of living beings so that they don't have to endure hardship”. It helps. It brings relief to others. It strengthens our mind at the same time.

Once in a while, even though we are in samsara, a feeling of happiness comes over us for no apparent external cause. This sensation may not last long but it is definitely felt and is one of calm joy, especially when you think of your Guru who has been in the past lives, present lives and future lives, who has given to you the knowledge of the entire Path for you to attain liberation and enlightenment. Do you want to know why this subtle profound feeling of happiness arises? Because the deepest part of you feels the protection, the unconditional love, the unwavering security provided by the Guru, by the Triple Gem – like an unexpected gift that has just been opened.

Upon feeling this, dedicate that blissful sensation to sentient beings that they too may experience this and be released from every form of suffering.

Our lives in samsara is like a big a roller coaster ride. Until we are enlightened or at least become Arya beings, our lives go up and down, are painful, uncertain. Tong len enables us to meaningfully deal with life whether it presents positive circumstances or negatives ones.

Shantideva gave his advice very plainly – he said that one should regard all other beings like oneself and regard yourself in the situation of others. Only then can we overthrow the self-cherishing mind and cherish others. We need to realize that sentient beings, no matter how pleasant, unpleasant

or insignificant they may appear to us, they are the root our enlightenment because they permit us to practice cherishing others, the core of bodhicitta practice.

If you want to practice very extensively, then you can practice like this - whenever you experience mental happiness, mentally offer that joy to others. If you get a windfall like a promotion or a good meal, do your best to offer happiness to others in the same way and dedicate it for all beings ot have everything they need for happiness and enlightenment. However, we need to apply wisdom even when being compassionate e.g. sometimes, we are so anxious about bringing food to poor people, that we forget to feed our own children on time! Or sometimes, we allow ourselves to be abused or taken advantage of. Both compassion and wisdom are needed.

In modern world relationships e.g. marriages, there are situations where initial love declines to the point of divorce and then the fight for possessions becomes very bitter. If one party in this marriage is a practitioner of this 11th verse, the even if the other party demands for the entire possessions from the marriage, the practitioner would offer it up. However, one needs the strength of mind to do this. It is a great opportunity to transform the other party's grasping mentality into the practice of cherishing others. Again, one has to assess the circumstances and apply wisdom.

Then there is the matter of organ donation: When you are ready

to do so without a mind of regret, then do it. If you have doubt, don't press yourself. Participating in this kind of generosity requires the unshaken mind of giving, of helping others selflessly. There is so much merit, much more merit than offering material gifts. If somebody is dying from the lack of blood and if your blood type is the only one that matches the patient, if you do not give when you are in a position to do so, it is selfish.

The generosity of offering limbs and life is illustrated in the well known account of one of the deeds of the Buddha in a past life, when he was a prince in Nepal. While walking in jungle, he saw a tigress with 4 cubs, tortured by hunger. The tigress was so hungry that she was about to devour her cubs – seeking this, the prince (Buddha) asked the tigress not to commit the killing of her cubs and out of great compassion and bodhichitta, offered his own flesh to her and her cubs. At first, the tigers did not dare not come near. The bodhisattva prince urged them to consume his flesh by saying, “I offer my entire body in order that you may live and by the power of my prayers, by consuming my flesh, you will not commit the negative karma of killing and I pray that this be the connection for you to meet me in my next rebirth when I come to reveal the Dharma and you 5 tigers will be my first disciples”. With that, the tiger family consumed the bodhisattva prince. The place where that happened is called Namu Buddha in Nepal and is one of the holy Buddhist sites.

The importance of confidence and not having regret in giving up one's limbs is very important. This is shown in the story of the

great scholar Aryadeva. One day, during his journeys, he met an old blind lady who asked for one of his to enable her to see. Filled with compassion, Aryadeva did so and upon her receiving his eyeball, she (a spirit in disguise) threw it to the ground and smashed it to bits. Upon seeing this, Aryadeva felt strong regret at giving her his eye as it was now wasted. Had Aryadeva not regretted his loss, through the power of his practice, his eye would have been restored through self generation but due to his regret at his own virtue, he remained blind in one eye. Hence, offering of limbs requires one to have stable bodhicitta, confidence in giving up one's limbs and never to regret the act of giving.

My late master Geshe Lama Konchog was often approached for interviews about his life, as he was known to be a great mahasiddha and Kadampa (lojong) master who was un-attached to worldly concerns, to himself, to this life. Geshe Lama Konchog would repeat this answer each time he was asked, "I have nothing to tell. I am in this samsaric world where there will be good parts of one's life and bad parts. If I speak of only the good parts, there is danger of pride arising. If I speak of only the bad parts, those who have faith in me will be disappointed. So, the best is just to state facts. No is no greater story than the story of the Buddha, of Milarepa. There is no need to know who I am. The question is, have you practiced seriously? If you want to know my story, then it is the fact that there are 2 dogs in Kopan. One is called Gomchen and the other is Mahakala. I am no different from these two dogs." Geshela was never

going to reveal his qualities and his response was indicative of a successful practitioner .

Kadampa master Geshe Chekawa wisely advised that whatever merit one has, one should offer that to all mother sentient beings . Whatever suffering all the mother beings are enduring, indirectly or directly, secretly take it upon oneself. Realise that whatever the faults you see in others is a reflection of yourself. Whatever good qualities you have are all due to others giving you opportunities to practice virtues of every kind, even though you may have acquired these qualities through enduring hardship. Good qualities did not come about because you are smart or great. Rather, it is because others made your virtues possible. In this way, all living beings are extremely kind to you.

We should feel very fortunate to have now encountered the two principal techniques to cultivating bodhicitta, including the tong len practice.

 Verse 12

*Even if someone out of strong desire
Steals all your wealth or has it stolen
Dedicate to him your body, possessions,
And your virtues past, present and future
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Practice No: 12 is to transform one's mind in order to see that all harms received are opportunities to cultivate virtue.

This verse says that whenever receive harm from another through anger, attachment, ignorance, dark practices, whether directly, indirectly or through the use of a third party, we should transform our troubled mind and instead of giving room for anger to arise, to reflect that such harm was possible only because of one's past negative action and in having to bear this hardship, it clears that karmic debt.

We should think how one has been miserly in the past, so the thief who stole your possessions is enabling us to finish and clear away that karma. We are now released. Otherwise, the negative karma of miserliness would have multiplied, leading us into even deeper trouble, including rebirth in the lower realms! Therefore, we instead of feeling angry at having one's possessions stolen, think of how the thief has offered us the opportunity to escape the lower realms. Thinking this way will allow us to properly dedicate our experience to the person who harmed you. The

moment one is able to do this, one generates mountains of merit and purifies mountains of negative karma.

This manner of mental transformation is not easy. However, this is the bodhisattvas practice and any practitioner who is inspired into this practice is a cause for celebration.

The great Shantideva said that when one receives harm, one should at that moment feel from the depth of one's heart that it is a great gift not only in terms of clearing negative karma but also enables one to practice patience, humility and most of all, by having your object of attachment stolen, it lessens the number of objects that one clings to and thereby closes the door to the lower realms. All the holy ones hold the view that one receives gifts, one should never have the kind of joy that is influenced by attachment because that so-called happiness is dominated by attachment, which is one of the root causes of samsara. Therefore, whilst we cannot steal, when we are stolen from, one should think this way. When someone strikes your ego or steals your attachment objects, if one looks at the situation properly, it can be transformed in a practice for liberation.

This does not mean we throw everything away and invite thieves in! Of course we have to take care of our belongings, including knowledge, our merits, our inspiration to become Buddha but we need to take care of these with detachment, not with attachment. And when a thief does invade our stronghold of possessions, regard him as rescuing us from attachment and we

need to repay that kindness by dedicating the purification or at least, by not generating hatred towards the thief.

There was once an Abbot of Sera Je monastery who advised the monks to have loyalty towards their monastery but with detachment. Does that sound contradictory? No it is not. The meaning is that if we do anything for the benefit of temporary happiness of oneself, then it is attachment-action. If the purpose is to benefit others as a priority, then it is without attachment. Similarly, if one does something which generates pride, as opposed to generating inspiration towards virtue, that too is deluded action.

We can extend this analysis to any form of harm that we might receive e.g. sickness, loss, etc. Nothing happens without our creating a cause for it. Remembering the law of karma is very helpful when one is faced with problems. It helps us to manage our emotions in a steady way, prevents us to generating anger and fresh causes of trouble and is a very effective way to clear off karmic debt.

That is why the Buddhhadharma teaches us to be mindful of all our actions of our body speech and mind. Karma is constantly being committed. If one steals an object with intention and rejoicing at the end, the complete karma of stealing arises right there. Objects include even flowers in a park. Once we realize we have taken something without permission, we should immediately return it. That is why Buddha Sakyamuni and his Sanghas have

very limited possessions – it is to cultivate non attachment plus it is to limit the circumstances under which things could be taken without proper permission even unintentionally. Carelessness can also give rise to theft and is within the karmic theory. That is also why Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche once advised that whatever books are borrowed from LDC must be returned! (Laughter)

Nowadays people use karma as an excuse. If anything goes wrong, we blame it on karma. That is not right. It is like taking Dharma as an excuse. There is nothing cannot be achieved but our putting in enough effort to create the causes and conditions.

Hence, in our daily lives, whenever we receive offerings, praises, service from others – if we do not properly offer them first to the Guru-Buddhas, if we accept them for ourselves alone, it is a karmic debt which will multiply and then there is the danger of them becoming a rope that ties us to samsara.

Way back in 1998, while studying in Sera, I had some savings. I wanted to offer these savings, including the accrued interest, to my gurus when I met them. I deposited money with a local businessman hoping to gather more interest. Before depositing the money with him, I made mandala offering with that money to the ten direction Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Gurus, thinking that may this act pacify the poverty of sentient beings. Later, the businessman ran away and I lost all my deposit. The day I heard about his running away, I checked my own mind whether I felt any loss or not. I honestly felt that I did not lose anything

because had already offered that money it to my gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas when I made mandala offering and thus there was no need to feel any sense of loss.

Whatever one has - wealth, friends, health - first offer it to the 10 direction Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and one's Gurus from your heart. This way you accumulate vast merits. Further, even if your wealth, health or friends separate from you, you won't suffer as you have already offered them away. Similarly, if you offer yourself and every aspect of you, if you get taken advantaged of, you will not feel abused or hurt. Not an easy practice but you can see how much mental suffering is eliminated through this practice.

Whether one lives a lay person's life or a monk's life, the clinging mind towards whatever possessions one has can arise and therefore, we should make it a habit to always offer whatever we have & receive to our Guru-Buddhas to combat attachment and at the same time accumulate the merit of generosity.

 Verse 13

*If someone tries to cut off your head
When you have not done the slightest wrong,
Out of compassion take all his misdeeds
Upon yourself
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Practice no: 13 is about transforming suffering into one's spiritual practice.

This verse means that even though one has not committed any crime nor harmed others but one experiences terrible events like having one's limbs cut off, instead of generating hatred towards those who commit such harms upon you, to contemplate deeply on karma and the causes and effects and view the person giving harm, with compassion.

This practice of compassionate transformation is the practice of bodhisattvas. As the causes of happiness are limited and those for suffering are infinite, we can use experiences of suffering caused by others (who do so under the influence of delusions), in one's cultivation.

There are various types of patience. The patience of willingly enduring suffering is where we experience it without causing disturbance to others. One is able to do this when one has no grasping at temporary contaminated happiness and is not

discouraged by the pain of suffering. The strength of mind required for this is plain to see.

Let's take the circumstance of a crazed man trying to kill you or kill another in front of you. In both cases, one has the responsibility of generating compassion towards the crazed man because he is dominated by delusions. This is the moment to practice the patience of not retaliating against someone who harms you or harms others. This does not mean we should not try to save oneself or others but rather, not to retaliate and generate hatred towards the harm-giver. Again, one has created past causes to encounter such a situation and to respond angrily is merely to create fresh causes for suffering in the future. This manner of reasoning for patience can remove hatred and anger within you and within others too.

When one is faced with suffering, it is the best time to be reminded about temporariness of samsaric happiness and instead, aim to cultivate one's mind for lasting happiness, to overcome samsara. It also helps for one to reflect how many people are tired, frustrated and tortured by their own lives to the point where they can no longer cope with their suffering and hence act out their lives with anger and ignorance. Through compassionate understanding, we will be able to do the practice of giving and taking. By adopting this approach, we create the causes to be free from all suffering.

 Verse 14

*Even if someone broadcasts all kind of unpleasant
remarks
About you throughout the three thousand worlds
In return with a loving mind
Speak his good qualities
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Nothing hurts our ego more than criticism. **Practice no: 14 is to return sincere praise in the face of slander.**

Any form of criticism or gossip affects us. When one comes across this situation, immediately think how one has in the past, done exactly the same thing to others and in so doing, one has planted the seeds to reap this bitter fruit. As the antidote, look for good qualities in others and especially, the one who is criticising you and express praise for his good qualities. The text “Precious Garland” explains that it because we have used harsh words on others in the past that has ripened into our receiving criticism, scolding and be the subject of gossip. Therefore, through understanding this, we can lift our own spirits and realize that hearing criticism or scolding is a rapid purification of our black speech karma and avoid replanting such seeds by offering sincere praise instead.

Praise and fame rarely helps us to accumulate merits. In fact, they tend to cause a degeneration of our merits because they

activate our delusions. Accordingly, one should live a life never being attached to nor yearn for praise or fame. Only the foolish and immature hunger for these. For Buddhist practitioners, chasing after praise and fame is spiritual suicide as it destroys past good karma and instigates us to commit negative action again and again. As the saying goes, “On the mountain of the pride, one finds no water of knowledge, no realizations.’

Lama Atisha gave brilliant, practical advice by saying that whenever we hear unpleasant words or hurtful gossip about ourselves, one should simply reflect that those words are merely hollow echoes.

Geshe Langri Thangpa author of the great mind-training text “8 Verses of Thought Transformation”, was a great practitioner of patience who had earlier received lots of negative comments. Lama Atisha was a stunning scholar who received much admiration from his peers and foes alike, yet he once commented that he lived his life treating the sound of praises given to him as filthy mucus being hurled at him. He said that there was no essence in words of praise and was thus never attracted to it. At the same time, one should never be disturbed by criticism. The supreme practice was to cultivate stable bodhicitta.

In conclusion, we need to practice restraint and patience; learn to praise others in a sincere way and not be disturbed by anything that injures one’s ego. This is the foundation of transformational thinking.

 Verse 15

*Though someone may deride and speak bad words
About you in a public gathering
Looking on him as a spiritual teacher
Bow to him with respect
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Practice 15 is to view your critic as a spiritual teacher who will enable you to develop good qualities through adversity. Bow to him with respect.

Bodhisattvas never let their minds get disturbed by criticism or slander. Even if someone were to broadcast to the world about one's faults using harsh or cutting words, Bodhisattvas regard this as a great test of their ability to subdue ego and pride. Due to their understanding that the ego is the real enemy by chaining one to samsara, they view their critics as their spiritual masters who will strengthen their practice towards enlightenment.

This becomes a lesson to us that in our daily life, if we receive criticism or negative words, instead of getting upset, we should cast our mind to how the bodhisattvas practice verse 15. Such kinds of adversity strike directly at the ego, which is a big favour to a practitioner. Ego resists wisdom because it seeks self-preservation. Thus, whatever words hurt the ego is the best mantra.

My Guru always used to say that if a teaching or a piece of advice hits the ego, then it has served a useful purpose. If it does not achieve that or worse, if it nourishes the ego, then the teaching or advice has failed in its purpose.

We have to be smart when undertaking verse 15 as a practice. One has to be wise to know what the real target is. It is the ego. This means that one accepts harsh words as a weapon to break the ego. Otherwise, there is the danger of our getting more angry at being scolded and if that happens, one would have lost the point and committed fresh negative karma. Harsh words are a powerful puja, which pacifies the hindrance to our spiritual development. Therefore, people who injure your ego are rare and valuable; they be treasured and cherished as one's Guru - as the most important person in your life. Put the effort to repay his kindness as he has propelled you towards enlightenment.

Think about this - if somebody constantly praises and flatters you, you might get lazy thinking there is no need to improve; worse, it poses a great danger to you because it distracts you from challenging your ego. Flattery merely generates more pride, so never cling to flattery. Lama Atisha said "The supreme spiritual guru is the one who strikes at the ego". The supreme instructions are those which declare the negativities of ego.

Difficult conditions are the best conditions to inspire oneself to practise the dharma. It might sound strange but it is definitely true because it is mostly when we encounter pain and obstacles

that we remember the Buddha and sincerely search for the cause of our misery. When we are well and comfortable, we forget about karmic law and effect and the need for virtuous behaviour. By encountering obstacles, including those which threaten your life, it will awaken you to practise dharma now. Friends, possessions, family cannot save you but Dharma can. One must practise right now without a second's delay because there is no certainty of the time of death.

My late master mahasiddha Geshe Lama Konchong meditated in a cave for 26 years. After 12 years of meditation, he went into the village for a while. He wore worn old robes which were tattered and torn and he looked ragged, with long hair and was dirty looking. The moment he passed through the village, one family purposely dusted their mattress so as to mock him and discourage him from getting near them simply because he looked strange and poor. Some threw stones at him whilst others treated him like beggar and even sent dogs to chase him. As Geshela passed the homes and despite their poor treatment of him, Geshela would raise his two hands in respectful prostration towards them. Geshe-la later explained that when one practises Dharma whole heartedly, one would be able to overcome disturbing conditions without allowing them to un-settle one's mind and instead, inspire oneself to practice further.

In the end, the villagers came to realize that he was a true and sincere practitioner. Everyone then started to treat him like a Lama and a most loving grandfather. However, there was one

lady who wanted to harm him by offering him poisoned yoghurt. Geshela hesitated at first saying that it was polluted but decided to consume the yoghurt because the lady said that she would not leave until Geshe-la agreed to drink it. Geshe-la then consumed the yoghurt. He then called all his students, as well as the ill-minded lady to come in the front of his hut. Geshela then vomited out the yoghurt he had just eaten and as he the yoghurt fell onto the rock, the rock cracked. This was how potent the poison was. All his students witnessed it and till today, the cracked rock is still there. Through the power of his practice, Geshe-la was not hurt and his mind was not at all disturbed by the deed. The lady who brought the poisoned yoghurt confessed and later became Geshela's disciple. This action taught them never to do such negative actions as well as the glory of bodhicitta.

Many serious practitioners go through immense hardships and difficulties. It is not that one is practicing Dharma wrongly that gives rise to negative conditions. On the contrary, even when one's practices are good, obstacles can arise because we are still within samsara.

Question: *If I offer poison to the Master because of my ignorance, I still have to bear the negative karma, isn't it?*

Ans: There is still negative karma but in this particular case, it may not be very heavy karma because due to the power of the enlightened practitioner, it did not cause serious harm. In this case, it is fortunate that it happened to such holy being.

Question: *But in the Bodhisattva's vows, killing parents or holy beings can cause us to go to hell. How about in this context?*

Ans: Yes unless you quickly do intense purification practices.

Question: *But in the case of the tiger family, the Bodhisattva offered his flesh?*

Ans: Yes, the Bodhisattva offered his flesh but the tiger family still committed the action of consuming his flesh due to their hunger. In the case of the lady who offered poisoned yoghurt to Geshela, it was delusion and ignorance of the lady which led her to do the horrific deed. But through the power of Geshela's compassion, she would still experience negative karma but at a lesser level.

Like the story of misleading a hunter. You lie to a hunter regarding where his prey went in order to save that being's life. Lying is negative karma but saving a life is a virtuous deed and of greater weight than lying.

The conclusion is that the harm-givers are dominated by delusion, so practitioners understanding this ought not bear hatred towards the harm-giver.

Question: *Does that mean that great practitioners are not heavily affected by their past karma?*

Ans: In Tibetan, the word "Chopal la shek" refers to ordinary actions manifested by highly realized beings with a virtuous purpose, will not create negative karma e.g. if they show any

form of unsubdued deeds e.g. being angry and strict with students, those are merely manifested deeds to benefit the students. Even though according to ordinary perception this may be regarded as poor conduct, it will not create negative karma for the realized beings because when they perform the act, there is no delusion operating.

For example, let's talk about karma in relation to attachment - let us say that one realizes that one has not purified one's attachment to a beautiful object. To purify the attachment effectively, one should look for that beautiful object, assert strong mindfulness to analyse one's attachment and upon noticing the arising of attachment, apply the antidote directly on the spot. For that purpose, some great practitioners manifest their negative karma on purpose or intentionally e.g. in the form of sicknesses (cause by past karmic imprint).

When Geshe Lama Kunchong was diagnosed with cancer, there was conflicting medical advice. Some students said he should go for operation, some felt he should not. The doctor advised that he should go the operation. Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and HH Dalai Lama both advised not to go for the operation. Upon further checking with astrologers, they observed that his life was supposed to be over 20 years ago but due to his intense White Tara practice, he was able to control his life as he felt it was more beneficial to live. Anyway, the doctor attending to Geshela was certain of his diagnoses and urged that the operation be performed. So, Geshela was sent for the operation. Instead of

taking 3 hours, the operation took 6 and half hours and the doctor could not find the cancer cells and wondered if they were within the stomach. Eventually, the whole stomach was removed. Geshe-la's only concern was his ability to continue doing his daily practices during this entire episode. He said that if he could not do his practice the next morning, it would be pointless for him to live on. When the next morning came, it was nearly impossible for Geshela to perform his practices as he had tubes all over him. The first word he uttered was "Khantom" meaning "prayer" even though he was heavily sedated.

Despite all these complications, Geshe-la expressed that he was very grateful in having gone through the arduous process of cancer treatment. He said it was the best part of his life as it enabled him to do tong len practice. He felt that everything was perfect. He requested us to buy gifts for the doctor and thanked the doctor for all the opportunities for practice. He then held a party for all those who encourage him to go for the operation (even though the operation caused him so much difficulty).

Geshe Lama Konchog used to be very strict. When I as his attendant closed the door, I had to ensure not to make any sound. If there was a sound, he would reprimand me. If I accidentally toppled anything over, he would sometimes throw a vajra at me. It was a very tough life with him. The doctors warned us that there would be side effects to his cancer treatment. We would have to be patient and understanding during this period. For Geshela, despite the immense hardship, he became a completely

different person. His strict demeanor changed. He was calm and unaffected by his hardship. When I did chores for him, there was no reprimand but instead, Geshela was very forgiving. He told us that when he was a child in the monastery, he received the honourable name “Lama Koncho” meaning ‘Lama Refuge’. And this name was given to him by his seniors. Even to this day, my other teachers in Sera Jey Monastery tell me how extraordinary he was and that he was a real “Lama Jewel”. He was one of the great Geshe of Tibet in 1959 but when he was about to celebrate that, the Red Army invaded. So he had to leave Tibet. Although he did not get to graduate as Geshe, no one doubted his stature and qualities of a full Geshe. Therefore he was named as Geshe Lama Konchog. Like the past Kadampa masters like Dromteonpa and Chekawa who did not go through monastic exams, their virtues and realizations made them respected as great teachers, likewise with Geshe Lama Konchog.

He advised me never ever to study merely for the title “Geshe” as that was not the right motivation for engaging in study. I used to think that I did not want to become a Geshe. However, I realized that in this mundane world, being one made a lot of difference. Even with my classmates, I was shocked how this word works. Yesterday I was just an ordinary monk and the next morning after receiving the Geshe degree, people’s reactions to oneself changed. Just because of a title. This made me understand the danger that this could pose to my practice.

The great Kadampa Masters like Geshe Chekawa and Langri

Thangpa taught that those beings who harm you through meanness and harsh words, treat them as Gurus because it is they who provide the opportunity to practise patience most perfectly. This practice is not just Mahayana teaching but is practiced by all practitioners of Buddhadharmā.

In the Bodhisattva practice, all the harm-givers are the object of respect or object of compassion. In Tantrayāna, this practice is even more important because it requires one to transform ordinary perception to pure view. For example, to transform our view of the harm-giver into the Buddha. Or when someone expresses anger towards you, see that person as Yamantaka who is destroying your negative karma and your defilements of anger. Even in the ordinary act of consuming food, one should transform all food and drink into nectar.

 Verse 16

*If someone whom you dearly cherish like your
own child
Takes you for an enemy,
Then, like a mother whose child is sick,
To love that person even more
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Practice no: 16 requires a great heart of patience in the face of betrayal and disappointment.

There are situations where we have put effort into helping someone with good motivation. However, this person returns your kindness with harm. It is painful to experience this. However verse 16 guides us to view the harm giver as a suffering being, trapped in delusions, thereby committing negative action and incurring many harmful causes for himself. A mother seeing her child struggling with difficulties would never abandon the child because she understands that the child is under the control of the difficulties and thus needs her help rather than her scorn. One is thereby encouraged to view a harm-giver in this manner. This is taught in the sutra called Ornament of Clear Realizations by Maitreya.

I once had a conversation with a Christian family. They had been seeking help for some months but we were only able to communicate last week. The mother had kidney failure and a

skin disease requiring blood transfusion. She was a kind and gentle woman but after the blood transfusion she became wild and irritable, resulting in her having major quarrels with her daughter. During these fights, the mother would scratch the daughter and the daughter would bite the mother's hand. The daughter was frustrated and wanted to leave the family. The mother called the police as she was in total confusion and did not know how to manage the situation. The police intervened and were able to persuade the daughter to remain to care for the family.

Late one night, I received a desperate phone call as the whole family was in turmoil. I spoke to both mother and daughter, listened to them but also reprimanded them for treating each other in the way they did. The mother exclaimed she was not in control of her emotions as she felt as she was someone else. After advising them, I asked them to hug each other and love one another and think that the fault did not lie in the person but the delusion and that past karma was forcing them into their behavior. Thus, they should not get angry at each other but rather have empathy and compassion for each other.

When a person hits you with a whip, are you angry at the whip or the person who wields it? Of course you will fault the person holding the whip because the whip was under the control of the person. Similarly, when a deluded person betrays or harms you, you should see that the person is being controlled by delusion and karma. So if you want to label something as "enemy" or

the culprit, the enemy/culprit is the delusion, not the person. What is to be eliminated therefore are the delusions. In the case of oneself, this can be done via purification practices and applying direct antidotes to the delusions. In relation to others, one should hold firm to this Dharma understanding and not be swayed by anger towards the harm-giver.

Question: *How did that Christian family approach Geshela since Geshela is a Buddhist monk?*

Ans: That was very interesting indeed. Although they are Christians, the met Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and regarded Rinpoche as their guru. And somehow from the blue sky, they saw Rinpoche in me.

There was a lady who suddenly developed negative thoughts of Dalai Lama because they felt that if His Holiness loved Tibet so much, he should not have left Tibet when the monks and nuns were being tortured and abused. They said they could not stop themselves from thinking this way and were seeking an answer from someone who had great respect for Dalai Lama. When they raised the question with another Tibetan Buddhist practitioner whom they knew, they were chased out and this made them even more disturbed.

So I did my best to explain. I said with compassion, that it would have been impossible for Holiness to bring along 6 million people with him, as he himself had difficulty escaping. Moreover, had Holiness remained in Tibet, one would not have had the

opportunity to easily meet him as we do today. I could see that her confusion was due to her compassion for the suffering of Tibetans during the revolution. Unfortunately however, that good intention turned into negativity towards the Dalai Lama as if he was the cause of the suffering. This was definitely due to ignorance. Thus, people who are deeply affected by delusion require our understanding and our compassion to care for them and clarify matters for them.

Let us take the example of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche , who is a living aspect of bodhisattva action. He gives extra attention to those who are strongly affected by afflictive emotions. We cannot get jealous, thinking, “How come he never sees me, never praises me. Never spends time with me.” This is totally wrong thinking. Our Gurus, Rinpoche and HH Dalai Lama, they always pray for there to be no trouble-makers in the world but if they encounter such people, they willingly bring them into their mandala and treat them as the closest, dearest one not because they are perfect but to prevent them from becoming more wild and harmful to others. That is why it is a bodhisattva practice. That is how HH Dalai Lama and our Gurus are changing the world through their power of compassion.

HH Dalai Lama himself commented that he used to live a veiled-life in Tibet, largely unseen by people , giving teachings only once a year. Since his exile, he was able to share his knowledge with many people. Holiness shared that despite harm being inflicted on oneself, one should see the advantages of hardship e.g. the advantages of

exile and that one should never retaliate in anger nor plot revenge nor try to win by negative force. Compassion was the answer; treat everyone as one's best friend brother or sister.

So when we meet a very difficult person, we can "lighten" the difficulty of the situation by seeing the harm-giver as a child who is misbehaving but not committing a serious harm. If we grasp onto someone as an enemy, we will suffer more. Lama Atisha says having such an attitude will enable us to have endurance in spiritual practice. If we allow disappointments to unravel our minds, we will be discouraged and give up our practice.

When people get angry towards us and our calm explanations are not helping, the next best thing is just to listen without responding and know when you are right according to Dharma. Your silence may help that person to cool down because sometimes, when you try to say too much, more negative thoughts will come to their minds and the distress escalates.

The transformation our mind into seeing harm givers as needing and deserving of our compassion is a great spiritual practice.

Therefore, whomever you have helped or have hopes in, if they end up harming you, right that moment is the chance to practice and in that way, one should see such persons as the ultimate spiritual master. If we succeed in this practice, we get closer to our goal of Buddhahood and thus should have gratitude towards harm-givers for that opportunity.

 Verse 17

*If an equal or inferior person
Disparages you out of pride
Place him as you would your spiritual teacher
With respect on the crown of your head
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.*

Practice 17 is the instruction to regard those who harm you through ill-will and jealousy as one's spiritual master. There are people who get jealous because one has more wealth or more knowledge or is better known etc. Although such people can be said to be of low Dharma realisations, when we do receive harm from these beings, instead of responding negatively, regard them as our spiritual masters because they compel us to train in the bodhiattva's conduct.

If we have a photo of such a harm giver, we should put the picture on our crown with respect. Or if the person needs help that you have the means to offer, offer it to him. In this practice, if you know such a person needs a car ride, offer him one, even though you are having a black face in doing so! (Laughter).

Speaking frankly, we tend to be more accepting of high-positioned people bossing us around than accepting bossy behavior from people we regard as "lower" than us. In this practice however, whoever tries to take advantage of you, you should have much

equal respect for them as your guru, as the Buddha and think that they have purposely manifested disagreeable behaviour to firm up your practice.

Lama Atisha pointed out that the “I” and the self-cherishing mind that focuses on itself and neglects others, is like useless corpse and one should get rid of it. Rather, be a source of joy to bring them to enlightenment and this means treating difficult beings as a treasure that is as precious as one’s own heart.

Geshe Chekawa highlighted a common mistake of ours, namely we treasure the Buddha more than mother sentient beings. Great practitioners treasure mother sentient beings more than Buddha because it is they who have been our mothers in countless lives, it is they who present challenges and hence provide us with the opportunities to cultivate and attain enlightenment. For this reason, sentient beings are not higher but are equal to the Buddha for the fruits (of virtue and eventual enlightenment) that they produce within us.

Receiving harm from others is due to one’s past karma. By having a heart to benefit those who harm us, we preserve the vows and samaya of the mind-training teachings.

Some people will find these teachings impossible to practice. They may even ridicule it. Many people do not have the karma to be able to cope with these teaching. Yet, we should regard ourselves as incredibly fortunate to meet these teachings and

the advice of all those great bodhicitta practitioners. Although carrying out these mind-training advice can be very difficult to engage in because our ego is being attacked, there is an immense amount of benefit from it, as we will gain bodichitta and have strong imprints on how to live the life of a true Kamadapa master. Rejoice.

 Verse 18

*Though you lack what you need and are
constantly disparaged
Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits
Without discouragement take on the misdeeds
And the pain of living beings
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 18 has two aspects – it guides us on how to transform failures into the path and how to transform our conditions of prosperity into the Path. Both these situations create instability in our merits and if we are not careful, could become causes for us to have lower realm rebirths.

If one has never possessed wealth or even if one has achieved wealth and position but due to our committing all forms of negative karmas, one experiences loss of wealth and position, it is an unbearable situation. If on top of that, one receives frequent criticism, blame, bullying and suffer sickness and encounter harm-givers, mockery by others - all these are mental and physical tortures heavy enough to drive one to give up practice and even seek to end one's life. Verse 18 is advising that should one find oneself in this lowest stage of one's life, instead of giving up life & practice, muster the energy to use this terrible situation to generate compassion for the suffering of all beings and do tong len practice. By mentally taking on the poverty and

hardship of every single sentient being - with a brave and loving heart - and then dedicate that for oneself and all living beings to achieve Enlightenment, it will build up great courage and strength. This is how the Bodhisattvas transform their failures into the spiritual path.

For those of us who have good conditions of health, wealth and success, if any kind of obstacles to this enjoyment arises, one should steady oneself and remember tong len – mentally give all of one's good conditions to others and take on their worries and hardship. Doing this will be one of the key causes to actualize the Bodhicitta mind.

In admiration of this practice, Shantideva declared if there were no suffering, there would be no renunciation of samsara and if there were no renunciation of samsara, there would be no Path. If there were no Path, there would be no Enlightenment. What Shantideva was advising is that one should never be discouraged by obstacles in our lives because without them, there would be no Buddhahood, no lasting bliss.

Lama Atisha pointed out that failures and degeneration of all kinds experienced by us are the most powerful of purification practices. Therefore, when experiencing such, one should drum up the mind to aspire towards attaining bodhicitta to rescue all beings from samsaric sufferings.

What we normally do when we meet failure is to get angry, curse

heaven and earth and all things in between, get discouraged. We need to do the opposite. Rejoice because a situation of failure & loss is a significant stepping stone to enlightenment, IF we know how to transform our minds in relation to failure; if we view it as purification; as a chance to practice tong len. In that way, all disasters happening in one's life become conducive conditions for practice and precious as one's guru. One should acknowledge the painful experience and see its potential for our development. The sufferings we experience are like a broom which clean up our karmic dirt. That is how to transform failures into the path.

Whenever major troubles come our way, we tend to be more serious about practice. When things are going well, our remembrance of Dharma fades. There are very few practitioners who practice when they are wealthy or happy. Only when things fall apart, do people search for Dharma and when they do get "serious" about practice, it is not always with pure, correct Dharma motivation! If our Dharma practice is stained by the 8 worldly concerns, it remains a cause for samsara.

Hence the Kadampa masters expressed the view that if notwithstanding joy or hardship, one's mind remains in a stable contented manner, it shows that one is a valid practitioner. Conversely, if notwithstanding our knowledge on all the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha we are unable to transform suffering into the path, one will not be considered as a valid practitioner. Sometimes, one feels happy in one moment and unhappy in the

next and later, unhappy again. Who is the great deceiver? Who is playing tricks with your mind? It is the delusions hidden deep within our consciousness.

Suffering is always contaminated but in the case of happiness, there is contaminated happiness and un-contaminated happiness. Contaminated happiness is that which is experienced in samsara, temporary and deceptive because it does not last. Uncontaminated happiness is the happiness beyond samsara.

The happiness achieved by the Solitary Realizers when they achieve Nirvana, is uncontaminated happiness i.e. beyond samsara but not necessarily the ultimate happiness because ultimate happiness is only when one achieves full enlightenment.

The aspect which the great realized beings like our Gurus display such as aging, sickness, death – it is all like a TV show – are merely manifestations revealed to serve as a teaching to us. Pure Dharma practice is not easy.

Q&A

Question: *If we do our practices everyday sincerely and partake in Dharma activities regularly, that will be creating causes for enlightenment, right?*

Ans: Everything depends on our mind when performing any activity. We are drawn to beautiful altars, beautiful holy objects, perform thousands of offerings, do charity, carry out hours

and hours of meditation, prayers and supplications and make dedications, yet if we are not careful, if we are not mindful and do not check our minds frequently, there is the danger of the 8 worldly concerns creeping into our practice, which then becomes the cause of samsara and not enlightenment. What a great waste. The actions may bring some temporary joy, wealth and even enable us to meet qualified Teachers but will keep us stuck in samsara. Hence we need to contemplate deeply on how we are engaging in practice and the state of our mind while doing them.

***Question:** Guru devotion is the main practice to perfect the Path?*

Ans: Serving the Guru is regarded as one of the greatest practice of accumulating merit and purification of negative karmas. However, even there, the same caution and need for mindfulness is needed. If one's devotion is for the purpose of gaining knowledge or to be physically near the Guru, these are all the cause for samsara. Will it bring happiness? Well, seeking Dharma knowledge will bring some happiness, some virtue but is it Dharma? No! It is worldly virtue. And the result is? Samsara.

In modern days, there are so many complaints about stress and unhappiness. People feel they are losing their happiness when in actual fact, there is no real happiness in samsara at all. It is just that the grasping mind is unable to let go of the mistaken idea of happiness e.g. having a nice new house and then finding out that repairs are needed, burglaries happen – these are

examples of how worldly happiness is actually the suffering of change i.e. the joy soon changes to suffering. And yet, ordinary people mistake having a new house as real happiness and cling to it. We cannot let go. THIS is the problem.

When Dharma teachers talk about the suffering nature of ordinary happiness, many people get unhappy. They say, “What bullshit are you talking about?” What word is this “bullshit?” Anyway, these people lack merit and thus cannot digest the teachings. We only want to hear sweet-worded teachings. We do not want to hear the plain truth. All praises of samsara and worldly joys are categorized by the Kadampa masters as deception.

Although one has to be skillful in encouraging people into doing Dharma virtue, it is nevertheless necessary to pinpoint the faults of deluded action. We must realize who we are, how we are and strive for liberation. Otherwise we are fooling ourselves. That is not right.

All suffering experiences are like a great Guru, teaching us the disadvantages of samsara and encouraging us to seek liberation. Pain, suffering and failures are the perfect conditions for the great practice of patience and generating true renunciation. Of course, we do not seek pain and suffering but when they happen to us, we should seize them as perfect conditions for practice. In this way, all hardships are a precious jewel ornament for the true practitioner.

 Verse 19

*Though you become famous and many bow to you
And you gain riches to equal Vaishravana's
See that worldly fortune is without essence
And do not be conceited
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 19 is about conquering pride and seeing ordinary fortune and fame as deceptive and unstable.

One may have a beautiful form, wealth, health, good friends, fame, many admirers who are devoted to you and may even take you as an object of worship. Be wise to understand that this is due to past good karma (that will get exhausted unless one engages in proper Dharma practice) and all these are unstable, contaminated and transient like dew on the grass. Like the skin of a snake which will be shed, these things have no enduring essence – instead, they will only bring about pride and an arrogant mind.

Instead, follow the way of the Bodhisattvas who utilize all these gains and good conditions to benefit others through their generosity of material wealth, generosity of protection and generosity by practicing the great practice of generosity ; generosity of possessions, generosity of Dharma, humble and seeing themselves as the lowest of all.

Pride in ordinary beings often leads to a bossy attitude, soon followed by harsh speech and coarse conduct. Scolding others, using one's wealth to show off, looking down on others, taking advantage of others, ridiculing others, criticising others, using one's position to manipulate others to one's own benefit, even at the cost of harming others. These actions are express tickets to the lower realms.

The Bodhisattvas are entirely the opposite. They use all the knowledge, beauty and wealth they have and combine these with the quality of humility, compassion and wisdom in the service of others.

The minds of us ordinary beings are fragile. Even a small praise presents the danger to oneself becoming arrogant and daring enough to perform all sorts of non-dharma actions of body, speech and mind, causing misery to others and ultimately, to themselves. When this occurs, they will be born in the lower realms and even if due to some strong past positive karma, they escape a lower realm rebirth for one time and gain the human rebirth again, that rebirth will be one of great hardship, filled with poverty, ugliness and despair. Therefore, we need to exercise great caution in not giving pride a chance to arise.

Whenever we hear praise or receive fortune, our mind starts to experience excitement. Lama Atisha warned that when this excited mind manifests, pride is arising and at that moment, it is important to recognize it and immediately apply the antidote to

pacify that 'excited mind.' One antidote is to remember death can come at any time. Strong mindfulness is required to curb pride. If pride breaks through, it will become a great obstacle to the cultivation of compassion.

When one is wealthy or successful at one's job, it is a result of our past good karma. If we fail to use it in a meaningful way like benefitting others, it will exhaust the past merits and simultaneously create new negative karma to experience poverty (due to not sharing with others and having a clinging attitude towards one's wealth or success).

Likewise, with knowledge. Never look down on others. Use what you know to be of service to others.

Bodhisattvas conquer their pride by placing themselves as the lowest of all and placing others in priority over themselves; living a life with great respect to ALL other living beings. One should practice like that. Lama Atisha possessed the greatest knowledge, yet he lived a life looking out for others. He regarded the street dog as a higher object of respect than himself. The rationale was that since others provide us the opportunity to gain Buddhahood, why shouldn't we take them as supreme and worthy of our respect?

One should never with pride, hope to become the leader of all the leaders. Rather, one should always hope to be the servant of all. There is a good reason for this – humility and serving

others enables one to acquire great knowledge. On the other hand, a person who is crowned by pride is blocked by ignorance and self-centredness. There is no way for even a single drop of knowledge to seep through the fortress of arrogance. So if enlightenment is what you seek, place yourself last and regard yourselves always in the service of others.

Never think you can earn respect by using wealth, position of power. Doing this is nothing more than politics and has nothing to do with Dharma. One should earn respect by putting others on one's crown and being kind to others. That is the recipe for real peace of mind.

Even with strangers – one should see them as one's supreme object of respect and compassion. Offer a genuine smile and that will bring happiness to that person. There is no cost to us to do that. Or within the family, if we could show respect and use sincere, gentle words to each other, how enjoyable family life would be.

Here is a useful simple practice to do: Whenever one experiences happiness, including small samsaric happiness, immediately recite OM AH HUM and offer that momentary happiness to the Gurus and Buddhas. That is a great tsog offering. Or if during meditation, one experiences great bliss, again OM AH HUM and offer it to the Gurus and Buddhas for the liberation of all living beings. This is a short yet effective way of accumulating great merit.

Whatever experiences we encounter in life can be transformed and offered. That will make one's life meaningful.

 Verse 20

*While the enemy of your own anger is not subdued
Though you conquer external foes,
they will only increase
Therefore with the militia of love and compassion
Subdue your own mind
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.*

Practice 20 focuses on taking the object of anger and of attachment into the Path.

There are 4 types of transformational practices that can be applied in one's day to day life:

- (i) Transforming undesirable experiences into the Path
- (ii) Transforming the two obstacles to the practice of patience
- (iii) Transforming failure, as well as success, into the Path
- (iv) Transforming one's object of hatred and of attachment.

Verse 20 is about the 4th kind. In essence, what the verse is saying is that for us to be free of enemies, we have to subdue our own minds. The real enemy lies within us and is not an external person. If one is able to eradicate the angry mind, it will bring about the cessation of all enemies. If you want to be free from a smoky kitchen, we should first eradicate the fire. If there is no fire, then would be no smoke, isn't it? So, the fire is within us.

The fire of anger conjures up our perceptions of “enemy”. When we extinguish this fire, peace will arise and we will be able to regard every single living being as one’s friend. By eliminating the angry mind, all enemies are eliminated.

Until now, we have always regarded the enemy as something outside of ourselves. That is a total mistake. The creator of enemies is one’s own angry mind. If we do not subdue our anger, we will continue to experience enemies and harm-givers for many eons and many lifetimes to come. There would be no way to escape.

How do we fight with this inner enemy of anger? We need a strong army and what nature is this army? First, we need the inner troops of pure, unconditional love. They are then backed up by the troops of great compassion. These armies lie within one’s own mind, which take full responsibility to free all levels of sentient beings’ suffering.

These two inner troops are the antidote to one’s anger. Bodhisattvas know how to deploy them and constantly engage them in the battle to conquer anger, the source of much suffering and negative actions towards others.

One should not think in terms of subduing outer enemies or friends and strangers. Rather, subdue one’s anger. It is stated in various teachings that the more you try to destroy outer enemies, the more of them arise. This is because you have missed the birthplace of your enemies – the anger that lies in one’s mind.

As in the world, if you start one war, most naturally, it will bring on a second war. If you initiate war on another country, they will defend and hatred will naturally arise within the people on both sides and war becomes endless. Outer wars begin because we never waged the inner war against ignorance and anger.

That is why his Holiness Dalai Lama goes round the world saying that the final solution and protection for all countries is not in engaging in war. It is to look into oneself and subdue one's own selfish interests. Otherwise, destruction on a massive scale becomes inevitable.

Generally, there are numerous methods to subdue one's anger but one of the most effective to subdue one's mind is to see the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of practicing intelligent patience; generating great compassion towards all living beings, including oneself. Some people are frustrated with themselves, to the point of suicide. Suicide bombers arise due to heavy ignorance and anger; suicide is due to self-hate. Both types of persons commit the offence of taking life. I cannot emphasise enough how critical it is to practice compassion. The Mahayana teachings are based on compassion. There is a verse, "Great compassion is of crucial importance at the beginning, during the actual process of intensive practice at the middle level and important at the point of obtaining the fruits of the result."

Great compassion with the responsibility to free all beings

from suffering and lead them to enlightenment, is how you differentiate the Mahayana from other Buddhist traditions. If one does not earnestly practice great compassion every moment, one is not qualified to be a Mahayana practitioner. And when one possesses this great compassion, it becomes the foundation for practice in the resultant path of the Vajrayana.

Then how about the Hinayana practitioner like the Solitary Realizer and Hearers, do they have great compassion? They have compassion but do not have great compassion. This means that they have the thought to wish all beings to be free from sufferings but do not have the mind to take the responsibility to liberate all beings. Their goal is self-liberation. What then is this “great compassion”? The “great” refers to protection i.e. the compassion which protects and this means oneself taking full responsibility to eradicate the entire suffering of all living beings equally and by oneself alone. That is Great Compassion. That is why “Maha” appears in the term Mahayana. “Maha” or great flows from the great strength of the mind needed to pursue this path. Mahayana practitioners in the Lam Rim teachings are the Higher Capability beings.

Although one must respect the Hinayana tradition as the Mahayana shares a common foundation of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha, one disadvantage of is that when the Hearer or Solitary Realiser attains the peace of nirvana, where all samsara is destroyed, they remain in stable meditative concentration without even a slight movement for eons. In this

manner, it is difficult for them to benefit the numberless beings who are still struggling in samsara. That is why the Mahayana teachings were taught, to enable Buddhas to arise to benefit countless beings.

Due to karma, different beings will have differing affinities with Teachers and guides to help them attain liberation. If you choose a path where you attain Nirvana but remain in meditative concentration for eons, it means that those beings who have karmic connection with you with regards to their liberation, will have to wait eons to gain that liberation. The more you delay, the more they suffer in samsara. This is why the Mahayana teachings urge its practitioners to abandon the peace of nirvana. The words “abandon nirvana” makes it sound as if nirvana is a bad thing. Clearly it is not. The point is that one should not aim to nirvana only but rather, out of bodhicitta/great compassion, one seeks to liberate all beings from suffering and lead them to the state of blissful enlightenment. That is the context of the words “abandon nirvana”. This is an important point.

There is the danger of misunderstanding when we talk about the differences between Hinayana (or we should say Theravadans in present times) and Mahayana. In order to become Buddha we need to cultivate Hinayana practices also like the Four Noble truths and Vinaya vows. Without gaining the initial renunciation of seeking a better future life or renunciation of samsara, there is no way we can cultivate the highest form of renunciation, namely the renunciation of suffering for all living beings, as

explained in the Bodhisattva's path.

Great compassion is important at the beginning as it performs the function of a seed. It is again important in the middle when one is engaging in the practice of the Six Perfections, as it acts like fertilizer and nutrients for the seed. At the time of the ripening of fruit, great compassion is again important because it allows one to manifest blessings to countless sentient beings. The importance of great compassion at all stages of one's practice is vital to bear in mind.

Subduing one's mind is the key to all happiness, success, liberation.

Buddha's essence teaching is never to commit negative actions, commit wholesome actions and subdue one's own mind.

 Verse 21

*Sensual pleasures are like salt water
The more you indulge, the more the thirst
increases
Abandon at once those things which breed
clinging attachment
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 21 is to abandon pleasures of the senses which give rise to attachment. We may own the entire Desire Realm's treasures such as objects which delight our eye sense, beautiful sounds, the sweetness of candies, beautiful clothes and have companions who comfort but understand that these are all in the nature of exhaustion and decline, holding only the promise of eventual dissatisfaction. Exactly like salty water. The more you drink, the more you want it yet it can drive you insane and take your life in the end.

Look at how we are – after spending effort, time and money on visiting one country, we immediately think of the next holiday. After gaining one new friend, one seeks two new friends but when this new friend disappoints oneself, the thought to abandon this person quickly arises.

When we receive RM100 profit, we instantly think of how to get RM1000 profit and when we succeed, we go all out to achieve

RM100,000 profit and in the end, lose RM200,000 and incur all sorts of negative karma.

There is nothing wrong with gathering wealth and possessions, provided one is able to transform them into conditions for one's spiritual development and generation of inner peace and happiness. But it often does not happen that way. In most cases, if we gain profit or win in a competition, instead of transforming them and offering them to the Buddhas and sentient beings, they inflate our ego and activate our delusions further. There is a saying, "The higher they rise, the harder they fall"- the person who receives praise and winnings is very brittle. One little tap and breakage happens.

Similarly with food. The mind is never satisfied. You only have one small stomach which is easily filled. But it seems like when we have more money, there is the urgency to fill and stretch the stomach. If you are contented with a small bowl of rice and plain soup, life becomes simple and good. Even plain rice tastes delicious. However, when you are used to eating richly and in difficult times you have to eat less, you feel miserable and lowly. It need not be that way but you created that situation because your allowed desire to fuel the dissatisfied mind. We perceive that good food will bring us happiness without realizing the role of one's own mind in determining happiness or unhappiness. As food is contaminated by samsara, it is suffering in nature and the day we realise this, we are filled with dissatisfaction and disappointment. What suffering.

Bodhisattvas being wise, live very simple lives. They focus on developing their mind with enlightenment as their goal. When they have possessions, they transform them into conditions for practice. If we are smart, we should follow this example.

A contented mind provides one with stability and peace. At the same time, it provides the confidence to help those in need. This is how Bodhisattvas act, never exhausting their positive karma, continuously accumulating good causes for enlightenment and live happy, satisfied lives. They know very well now objects of desire are a hindrance to their liberation. Objects of attachment distract and imprison us, denying us the very happiness we are trying so hard to gain for ourselves. Those who are attached to their material possessions are no different from those who drink salty water hoping to satisfy their thirst which will never be quenched.

Therefore, there are hundreds of reasons for renunciation. What does renunciation mean? It means to appreciate what we have, to enjoy without clinging, to realize that this precious human rebirth is capable of the greatest achievement of all i.e. Buddhahood. Worldly possessions offer us very little. There are accounts of past great practitioners who were rich and possessed a great deal but they understood the impermanence of worldly objects and thus did not cling nor attach to their possessions and whenever they lost their possessions, it did not disturb their minds.

For an ordinary practitioner, misplacing a beloved writing pen can send one's mind into turmoil. Why? Because one's mind has labeled that pen as "mine" and right there, the attachment rises to cling to it. When the pen is lost, one feels the separation and the mind gets totally disturbed. See for yourself, how even a small desire object like a pen can cause that much suffering.

The great Shantideva who spent his whole life practicing bodhicitta and composed one of the most stunning treatises on Bodhisattva practices, expressed that one should not just renounce this-life's worldly achievement but also the future lives world achievements because worldly thought i.e. thinking of this-life's purposes only, harms one's spiritual development.

One needs to be clear about what is Dharma action. If we do anything for the purpose of this-life's gain, it is not considered Dharma action. As a minimum, one should renounce this life and aim for a better future life (avoiding the lower realms). However, in aiming for a better future life, if we do that in terms of gaining happiness within samsara, that too would not be pure Dharma. One should seek liberation from entire samsara, not seek for more happiness within samsara.

What's wrong with samsaric happiness? It has the nature of degeneration and suffering. The Buddha does not wish this for sentient beings. That is why the Path is all about how to gain ultimate, lasting happiness. Samsaric happiness eventually

ceases and brings on the suffering of loss/change. Ultimate happiness is an endless continuum. Therefore, if we fail to transform possessions and all the things we receive as objects of “happiness” into the spiritual path, they will be cause of continued suffering.

If someone with a sincere heart offers a gift to you and you get attached to the object or feel proud or have a grasping mind towards it, it become the total cause of suffering. Whilst the person who gave the gift gains merits of generosity, if you as the recipient are not mindful and allow grasping towards the gift to arise, it will become the fruitful cause of suffering.

Some people enjoy alcohol or wine and give the reason that it brings relief, calm and is even good for physical health! I do not know about this. Buddha says that if you take the lay vows against intoxication, do not consume alcohol even from the tip of a straw.

Question: *What about the small amounts of alcohol that is passed around during some pujas?*

Ans: Buddha’s general advice is not to even taste alcohol because of its consequences on an undisciplined mind. As for your question, one needs a very firm understanding of emptiness before using alcohol, even though in small quantities and while touching the alcohol, one should not see it as an intoxicant. Trained tantric practitioners have taken initiations and vows and do transformation practices. However, this requires proper

preliminary study and disciplined practices. Only when those are stable, should one partake in this. Otherwise, best to use black tea, which everyone can take as a blessing. It is consecrated by prayers, so transformation has already been commenced.

Alcohol has a strong damaging effect, so if you cannot manage it, better not to taste it at all. But if your mind is disciplined and are train to transform, it has great benefit because there is a connection with the nerve channels. Same with garlic which is regarded as a black food. For tantric practitioners who practice yoga, garlic has a great effect on their yoga but again, underlying study, discipline and transformation techniques are necessary.

Such as the unification practice, without emptiness realization it is not allowed. And even when performed, it is through meditation on concentration and emptiness. There is no actual consort. Many people misunderstand tantra. They look at pictures of Guru Padmasambhava with consort and think is it all about ordinary union. This is totally wrong concept and has a very negative effect against Vinaya. It is all about the perfect understanding of the Dharma, of emptiness, of stabilised concentration. That is why Lama Tsongkhapa purposely lived his entire life as a celibate monk who practiced unification practice through meditation and gained enlightenment in one lifetime. That had nothing to do with ordinary human having ordinary aspect of being in union. Additionally, he practiced the most profound highest yoga tantra practice, combining practices of mother tantra and father tantra, without reliance on the ordinary aspect of unification.

It is all through your concentration to drive the great bliss and from there, activate the most subtle mind. Using the subtlest mind to concentrate on emptiness mind, it becomes the most potent method to eliminate even the most subtle defilements. That emptiness mind is applied as a direct antidote to eradicate the mistaken concept of true existence. Eradicating defilements with the wisdom of emptiness that was made possible due to a vast store of merit accumulated engaging in the Bodhisattva deeds, is how to become a Buddha. The meditative-unification practice facilitates this within one lifetime. Without highest yoga tantra initiation practice at the final stage, enlightenment is not possible.

There was one practitioner who was a family man, in Singapore who was a very devoted practitioner of my late master Geshe Lama Konchog. He had a good understanding of Lam Rim and had taken an initiation before. He and his wife came to visit my master. He thought he would please my master by informing him that he would like to practice tantra more seriously with his wife during the union practice of great bliss and that by so doing, he would like to be closest disciple of my master by achieving enlightenment within this very life time. Do you know what my master said? "GET OUT right now!!". The couple were shocked at this and had no choice but to leave. Seeing their shock and confusion, I requested my master to provide an explain to the couple.

One week later, they were permitted to visit my master again. Geshela advised them, "If you wish to go to the 'lovers hell', then

you go ahead and do tantric unification while having ordinary union with your wife. As husband and wife, you can carry on whatever you wish to do but don't ever think of combining that with deity yoga. You are not qualified. Have you gained at least, the direct realization of emptiness or not. You don't even have renunciation, so there is no way to even consider what you suggested to do".

Lama Atisha strongly advises that as long as there is attachment in our minds towards anything, it must be abandoned. If it is to remain with you, it must be transformed. If you attach and cling onto a stalk of flower, it is the cause of samsara. If you admire the beauty of the flower and offer it sincerely to the Buddhas with a OM AH HUM, then it is virtue. There is nothing wrong with enjoying objects provided it is done without attachment.

How does one test oneself as to whether the mind has attachment to an object, let's say a beautiful flower? If someone takes the flower away from you or criticises the flower and it troubles your mind, it means you have attachment to the flower. Or if a new object comes to you and what you once treasured now seems uninteresting, that means your mind has attachment to the new object. Or if you have a sense of loss when the flower wilts, that is the attachment mind – all these states of mind are the fruitful cause for samsara.

The same test can be applied to one's children, friends, property, even one's holy object. - as long as one's mind gets disturbed

when there is any interference with those precious objects, be aware that attachment lurks in our mind.

Some people protest and ask, "How can you ask me to give up attachment. Objects of attachment bring me lots of excitement in my life". So, here note that there is a difference between excitement due to inspiration and excitement due to attachment.

Excitement due to inspiration is to aspire to develop unconditional love for all beings. This type of love, is totally different from ordinary attachment love. It is unconditional and focused on being of benefit to all living beings without partiality.

Ordinary love however, although expressed as care for another, is directed at satisfying one's own desires and needs. It is self-centred. Excitement is limited and it will definitely end by the suffering of change. Therefore, Dharma practitioners must apply this practice of unconditional love towards all beings as well as one's personal relationships. Then there will be ever growing love which will carry on right up to full enlightenment.

In today's world, there are lots of relationship difficulties and misunderstandings - mostly because of the unsatisfied mind. Husbands do not understand wives. Girlfriends do not understand boyfriends. When they first got together, it was a case of "I will die for you" and "You will die for me". At some stage, whether through misunderstanding or through natural death, separation

comes. Then suffering arises. This is because the so-called love was selfish love, not unconditional love.

Therefore, view all samsaric pleasure as indulging in drinking salty water. The sign of achievement of a great practitioner is to have a mind of being able to let go and one of contentment. We can check our own spiritual health – there is no need to check with the Gurus. Am I a contented person after I learn Buddhadharma? If one is grasping more, then something is not right with your practice.

To actualize realizations, one requires both knowledge and merit. Accumulation of merits however is far more important than knowledge. Having infinite knowledge without merits is nothing more than becoming a storehouse of information. A computer or CD disc may contain all the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha yet it will never gain enlightenment. One may only know OM MANI PADME HUM but when one combines this with single pointed conviction, faith and aspiration to lead all beings to enlightenment, it can bring you to enlightenment. So that is the essence.

It is said that it is not the matter how long you have practiced Dharma or how many masters you have met and or how many initiations you have received. Even if the master is a simple person, living a life no better than a street dog, if that master can subdue you and help you transform your mind into Dharma virtue, he is the enlightened Buddha.

Remind yourself frequently that all the objects of desire are like a fire flame – they will burn you. The more you cling to it, the deeper it burns. Sounds like everybody needs to become a monk! (Laughter). The main point is that whatever you possess, understand impermanence; appreciate it but do not cling.

There are two types of bodhicitta, namely. Conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta. Cultivating conventional bodhicitta involves engaging in both the aspiring mind of bodhicitta, as well as the engaging mind of bodhicitta, taking action to benefit of all living beings. Next is how to cultivate the teachings on ultimate bodhicitta. This largely relates to meditating on the lack of inherent existence of the self and of phenomena (the outer world and one's aggregates). To do this, one needs to train in meditative concentration to be able to actually gain the direct realization of emptiness.

How and when does one do meditation on emptiness? The best time for meditation is at dawn around 3am. Anytime between 3am - 6 am is best. Sit in meditation posture, clear your mind with breathing meditation. Make your mind tranquil. Reflect on the 'I' - analyze whether that is truly existent or not. If it truly exists, it should solidly exist and should exist within one's aggregates. So let us check. Analyze from one's crown to the toe. Is the crown the 'I' ? Is head the "I "? And so on. Peel away the layers. Through that analysis one will come to the conclusion there is nothing that one can point to and declare that as the "I

“. Hence the I does not inherently nor independently exist.

When you say the words, ‘My heart’ right there, you have already mixed up subject and object but we continue to cling to one solid ‘I’. Next, we tell ourselves, “Can my mind be “me”?” Think about it. Is one’s mind static? Unchanging from one moment to the next? No. One’s mind is constantly going through momentary changes – one moment thinking of our home, the next minute what is happening to my daughter studying in America; one minute thinking of Kimchi noodles and next minute thinking of getting home. Within one moment, there are hundreds of minds occurring, so which one is ‘me’? So if one thinks one’s consciousness is me, the question then is “Which one is me?” If we tell ourselves that the mind that was thinking of the daughter in America is me, does that mean that the mind that was thinking of Kimchi noodles was not me? Contemplate on this.

Using the above method of analysis, one will come to the conclusion that the “I” does not exist within the 5 aggregates nor apart from the 5 aggregates. When one meditates deeply on emptiness, there will come a time when one enters the state of subtle concentration. One experience that will be encountered then is a sense of floating in space like a balloon but this is still not an actual realization; it is a signal of deepening concentration. When this signal arises, pursue the meditation and pass through that level of concentration into a deeper level of concentration and eventually actualize the realization of selflessness.

There is an account of a practitioner in Tibet who was meditating on emptiness while his master was giving instructions on emptiness meditation. That practitioner then entered a deep level of meditation and when he reached the stage of analyzing whether the “I” exists or not, he experienced this floating sensation, like going into a faint and his hand clutched at his Tongga (the Sangha’s upper robe) and at that very moment, he realized emptiness saying “Ahh, emptiness exists dependently and not inherently.”

So, the moment you see every single thing as totally empty, like space, it does not mean that one has realized emptiness. Up till that moment, you have only realized dependent- existence. However this is an important milestone because it is said that “ If one does not actualize the meaning of dependent existent, on the true nature of phenomena, one will not actualize the meaning of emptiness”.

 Verse 22

*Whatever appears is your own mind
Your mind from the start is free from
fabricated extremes
Understanding this, do not take to mind inherent
signs of subject and object
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas*

Practice 22 is on how to train in ultimate bodhicitta i.e. bodhicitta with emptiness. This requires one to view self, others, outer world, inner world, whatever as the object of perception, as being projections of one's mind. Nothing exists independently on its own side. In this way, both the subject (perceiving mind) and object (the perceived phenomena) will be free from the two extremes, namely free from the extreme views which hold that things exist inherently and the extreme view that nothing exists at all.

The thought which holds onto something that does not exist as existing, is a mind that falls into the extreme of eternalism. The thought which holds the view that nothing exists at all is the mind that falls into the extreme of nihilism. These two extremes are very important for emptiness practitioners to be aware of and to **avoid**.

There are two types of self. One is existent self and one is non-existent self. The existent self is that which arises dependently;

the non-existent self is that which exists independently, on its own, inherently, regardless of any other factors. Unfortunately, we ordinary beings constantly and mistakenly believe that the non-existent self is the “I “. For example, we often say “I have this problem”. “I am sick”. This “I “is actually the non-existent I. Yet we always support the non existent ‘I’; we always assume that non existent ‘I’ is the real “I “and that our whole purpose of life is to serve this (non-existent) “I “. We are completely fooled by the grasping, ignorant mind - the root of all confusion. It is this grasping mind which has deceived us and locked us into samsara due to its a wrong perception, its inability to see that all perceptions are projections of one’s mind.

In my younger days, I was once in Hong Kong. While there, I received junk email which said that “You have earned a prize of million of dollars. Please send us your contact address”. What joy! I felt happy and started to plan what I would do with the winnings. I was so excited that I did not dare share this news even my master. I was busy thinking whether I should send the money to a Singapore or Hong Kong address. I had no bank account. So I had no choice but to tell one lady in the HK centre about my “prize money” and she told me, “Oh its nothing, it’s just junk email”. So here we can see that I was being fooled but I had no idea that this was happening. I was focused on the non existent “I” .

On another occasion, I was about to leave for Nepal and I received another email saying that I won a car and that I could

collect it within a week. One week's time, how could I manage that, I thought? I had to leave for Nepal but on the plane, I was thinking about how I had lost the chance of getting a car. I was totally fooled by this non-existent 'I'. If I was aware of these two different kinds of 'I', I would be at least more cautious. Within that short period, I had generated so much craving mind. One can see how much negative karma can arise through attachment and believing in the "I" which is non-existent.

In a similar way, everyone is tricked into believing in the non-existent "I". We are a slave to the non-existent 'I' i.e. the "I" that is a mere mental projection of one's mind that is affected by delusion and karma. This non-existent "I" appears in a very solid manner to us. When somebody criticizes this non-existent I, we get hurt. It is so unnecessary. Thus, we need to find a way to fight this mistaken view. We are besieged by the danger of losing the greatest opportunity to obtain enlightenment due to our being fooled by this non-existent 'I'.

How else does this non-existent I harm us? For many of us, we raise prayers to fulfill our wishes. Sure, it is worthwhile to pray, it is virtuous to pray and prayers definitely work. However, this non-existent "I", this ego I, fools us to pray this way "Please let me have success, please bring me happiness. Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha". No thought of others at all, only of self benefit. Praying this way only results in your accumulating complete accumulation of causes for samsara. Will there be happiness? Yes, some contaminated, temporary happiness. Will that be cause for lasting

happiness, for enlightenment? NO. Why? Because this non-existent 'I' tricked you into cherishing only yourself, chained you to this life's purposes. If you have been praying this way for your entire life, then your precious human life is gone. Rebirth as a human will be 99% unlikely. All because of the treachery of giving into this self-centred, non-existent "I" which is fertile ground for attachment, hatred and ignorance to arise.

Now coming to the "existent-I", This "I" never gets hurt because it understands that the "I" arises dependently in the manner of causes and conditions; it exists as an imputation of the mind. This allows you to handle criticism very differently from one's normal reaction of hurt and anger. The I that understands that it does not exist independently but dependently, will react to criticism this way "Oh, this criticism is the result of past negative karma done by me, so why should I get angry with this person? Also, the criticism is made against the non-existent, merely-labelled I, so why be upset?" Done. Anger has no chance to fester. Or, if someone praises you, the I which understands dependent-arising thinks, " This is due to past karma and this person praising me will accumulate merits, wonderful, I rejoice" and "These words of praise are made in relation to a merely-labelled I, so it has no real substance".

If you live a life with this "existent-I", i.e. the "I" that realizes it comes about in dependence on many factors, it will cut clinging to the ego-I which views itself as solid and "real" and to be defended and cherished over all others. This is why

understanding of emptiness is absolutely critical to know and meditate on.

The false, non-existent “I” which comes from a mind that is ignorant of dependent arising, never appreciates what it has. It only wants more and more and remains dissatisfied. When in sickness, if one can transform the sickness through reflection on karma or the fact that there is no inherently existing I that is being harmed by disease, one can better cope with the suffering being experienced.

Those who understand karmic law of cause and effect tend to have stable strong minds. If good things happen, they enjoy but are not dominated by delusional clinging; if bad things happen, they are not depressed because they understand karma. For those who understand karma and emptiness, they can achieve liberation. This is how we should live and practice.

How does the false, non-existent “I” come about? Through delusions and the mind’s action of putting labels onto everything that it encounters. Let’s say the mind encounters an object. We call that object the base. Once the mind meets a proper base, it very quickly puts a label e.g. “chair” or “flower” or “stranger”, “friend”, “enemy” depending on one’s mind’s view towards that object. That object/person does not have any inherent characteristic of these labeled-items and is totally dependent on how your mind perceives it. There are several Buddhist philosophical schools which discuss in depth, the topic

of emptiness/selflessness. One school says that the object truly exists in the manner of the label; another school refutes this and states that the label needs a proper base but it does not mean that the base/object truly exists in the manner of one's label. A more detailed study of this will be later covered in the subject of Buddhist Tenets. Here, the most important point to note is to be free from the 2 extreme views.

Therefore, when we do emptiness meditation, we have to analyze whether our views are falling into the 2 extremes of eternalism or nihilism. Choose the middle way which is the correct view on emptiness and is the view held by Shakyamuni Buddha. Only using this view enable one to directly eradicate all defilements and progress towards Buddhahood.

Once we have familiarize ourselves with the meditation on the emptiness of self as per above, next comes the meditation on the emptiness of phenomena. Realisations of both emptiness of self and of phenomena are necessary for enlightenment.

To attain liberation and freedom free from samsara, it is sufficient to apply the antidote of wisdom realizing the emptiness of self. For full Buddhahood, one needs to realize the emptiness on phenomena.

How does one actualize the wisdom realizing the emptiness of phenomena? Let's take this book. It exists due to causes and conditions. Next, contemplate whether the book exists on its

own, in the manner you are seeing it? Or has it come about from a combination of factors of the proper base (a collection of sheets of paper, the shape, the words) and the mind's mental label of "book"? We will see that everything we perceive comes about in the same way, namely, of the mind projecting a label onto something it meets. The object does not pre-exist as having a particular characteristic. It arises when mind meets the right base and imputes a name, a label onto that base. So you can see how the mind that thinks that things truly exist (on their own, without factors, the involvement of mind); that the "I" truly exists and is thus mistaken due to the delusion of ignorance.

The "truly existent mind" is the ignorant mind and is the principal obscuration to attaining omniscient mind. When I see this microphone, it appears as truly existent. I close my eyes and I can still see this "truly-existent microphone". I never reflect about causes and conditions and mental labels that gave rise to "microphone". It simply appears as a self existing microphone. This is how dangerous and deeply embedded the grasping, ignorant mind is.

Once we realize this, everything we encounter, we should adopt the same method of analysis i.e. that the "I", all outer and inner phenomena do not inherently exist but arise due to dependence of many factors including mental imputation. Using this method, when someone does something that would normally hurt us, we are now able to realize that due to past karma and delusions; that one's mind is merely projecting negatively and this will

bring much relief to you. This is how emptiness becomes the most powerful form of transformation from suffering into happiness. Emptiness is the most powerful mantra for any kind of hindrances because you understand the true nature of what is happening. You are aware of it and you know how to deal with it. We have fear and upset only because until now, we did not know how to deal with situations.

Start your morning with detachment. Think how life is marvellous that day. Use that waking time to reflect and meditate on how everything is dependently-existent. With it, one will be able to transform every life situation into one of calmness and happiness. Everything will start to make sense and you will know that if anything goes so badly, you can do something about how you experience it. One should never give up on this. When faced with problems, think “Today was difficult because the causes and conditions created a situation which upset me but it is not permanent and not truly existent. It is dependent on factors and ultimately my mind. So I can change how I experience it”. This method can be applied in business, relationships and even on the spiritual path. Take all obstacles into our Dharma practice and the best ally is using emptiness to analyse every situation. This is how the Bodhisattvas practice.

When meditating, you can reflect - your mind is spacious, colorless, shapeless; your thoughts are also colorless; your disturbing mind is also colorless, shapeless; your attachments are also colorless and shapeless; your anger also colorless and

shapeless. Meditate until you feel you are virtually disappearing, empty within and remain in that state. This helps to cool our disturbing emotions. It is very effective. Once our mind is quiet and stable, we then use that concentration to contemplate on the Buddha's teachings at a deeper level, which will eradicate delusions and bring total freedom.

We need to refute that products do not come about by self-cause (if they come about by self-cause, then cause and effect will need happen simultaneously, which we know they do not). Instead, phenomena are a dependent arising.

When any kind of incident happens in our life, whether pleasant unpleasant or neutral, try to see it in the context of emptiness. See it like a mirage, illusory like a rainbow. It appears but there is nothing solid there. Through emptiness meditation, one will be able to overcome creating causes of samsara through attachment, hatred and eradicate the ignorant mind.

 Verse 23

*When you encounter attractive objects
Though they seem beautiful
Like a rainbow in summer, do not regard them as
real and give up attachment
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.*

Practice 23 advises us to view objects of attachment as like-illusions.

Whenever bodhisattvas encounter any objects which activate their 5 senses and give rise to attachment and grasping, they transform those objects by seeing the lack of inherent existence of those objects. They train themselves to see them as mere rainbows which display beauty but have no inner value. Objects of attachment could range from close-ones, loved ones to objects of distraction such as beautiful sounds or colorful appearances.

Bodhisattvas practice through reminding themselves that the objects which bring about attachment are illusory and that it would be pointless to strive to achieve satisfaction from them. All suffering comes from grasping and clinging to people and objects which enhance the emotional, deluded mind. Further, this clinging will cause an immense amount of negative karma which in turn will compound the suffering that is to come.

Therefore, the way to handle any object of attachment, is to see it as illusory like a rainbow.

 Verse 24

*All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a
dream*

*Holding illusory appearances to be true makes
you weary*

*Therefore. When you meet with disagreeable
circumstances*

See them as illusory

This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

Practice 24 is to see all unpleasant situations as like a dream.

Similar to viewing all objects of attachment as illusory, likewise, see all object which activate anger or displeasure, as like a dream of one's beloved child dying i.e. unpleasant yet only a dream. It does not mean that this painful dream will materialize. It is a method to train our minds to see all things unpleasant as illusory too. By doing so, when we meet difficult circumstances including the 3 types of suffering of suffering , suffering of change and pervasive suffering and indeed the entire samsaric existence and all its troubles, we protect ourselves from misery by viewing them as like a dream. By adopting this technique, the tension and suffering from unpleasant situations will reduce and can be eliminated altogether.

When one encounters any form of suffering, one can reflect upon oneself as a magician and the suffering in the form of a

magician's stick whereby through the power of prayer, one transforms the stick into an elephant. Although this might sound like child's play, it has the positive effect of allowing your mind to work with the suffering and handle it, rather than be paralysed by it. If you grasp strongly at the problem, the greater its hold over you and the heavier the suffering experienced.

Another method of dealing with sufferings is through applying one's understanding of karma. Understand that this situation has a cause and that purification practice can help one to lighten and eradicate the problem, will prevent one from giving up practice and feeling hemmed in with no way out. There is no need to cling to problems. Even problems are like a magician's illusion. See all problems as a stage-performance of karma. This allows you to gain a level of detachment from the situation. Shantideva therefore advised us that we need to understand that samsaric perceptions are false and therefore one must see them as illusory.

This is where meditation helps. Try to first contemplate and then meditate on how things lack inherent existence. Everyday, just 5 minutes of this meditation on the lack of inherent existence, on cause and effect – extremely potent weapons to deal with any difficulty one is facing.

When I have consultation sessions, sometimes situations are quite painful to hear of. When I put myself in their shoes, I too want to cry like them. But I don't and instead of allowing

sadness to overcome me, I inspire myself to offer help. When one generates compassion, one needs to guard against allowing the difficulty of others' situations drain one of energy. This is how to offer help with a positive mind.

Every morning, one should at least reflect – “How lucky I am to be alive. Whoever sees me , hears me, touches me, dreams of me, may that be the complete cause of their happiness/inspiration up to the everlasting happiness of enlightenment”. If on top of this, one is able to contemplate or meditate on bodhicitta and emptiness, that would be the best practice.

Outside the meditation session (the post-meditation session) i.e. in ordinary life, one should engage in practice of 6 Perfections introduced by bodhicitta mind, aspiring to achieve this for the purpose of achieving enlightenment for all living beings.

 Verse 25

*When those who want enlightenment must give
even their body*

*There is no need to mention external things
Therefore without hope of return or any fruition*

Give generously

This is the practice of the Bodhisattva

Practice 25 is to practice generosity.

There are 3 types of generosity - generosity of giving material possessions, generosity of protection and generosity of dharma. The bodhisattvas they live a life for a purpose of helping sentient beings – before they can arrive at the stage of being able to offer their limbs away, they must first practice the generosity of possessions.

When giving one's possessions, mandalas, water-offerings etc one needs to carefully check one's motivation. If while giving, one is having a clinging mind , then one is not performing complete generosity. One should give without hoping for anything in return and with an attitude that totally lets go of the grasping to the object. With kind of mind, when you separate from the object/possession, it does not disturb you in any way.

The above practice can be applied at the time when one is approaching death, to reduce the clinging to this life and to this

body. From now on, plant strong imprints of virtue and of letting go, so that at the time of dying, one's virtuous mind will be able to continue this way of thinking and seek out a higher rebirth.

Whenever we perform any act of generosity, we need to make sure it is based on the Dharma. If while performing generosity, one holds a worldly view or a negative view, it would be a great waste. For example, you have given some money to a beggar. Then you discover that the beggar was not a genuine beggar and you regret giving, the virtue of your act of giving is negatively affected. When you give, give it totally and with good motivation; do not concern yourself whether the recipient has applied your money to good use. If we give with expectation, that is conditional giving and is not generosity at all. The virtue arises at the point of unconditional giving, not at any time nor in relation to the object being given.

HH Dalai Lama says one cannot look down at beggars because they enable one to practice generosity. So some people get frustrated when making offerings to beggars because of their behavior or how they use the money given. If you are practicing compassion, give with respect and totally let go.

When Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche does generosity, he does not look at the money – we all know Rinpoche. One day I was with Rinpoche who wanted to make offering costing a few rupees. I only had a single 1000 Nepali Rupee note. Rinpoche took that to acquire the offering and forgot to return the change (Laughter).

As one's mind is fragile, train one's mind to not be concerned after one has performed an act of generosity. Remember the story of Aryadeva that I previously related? He gave his eyes to an old lady but when she smashed his eyeball on a rock, he regretted his giving of his eyes. Had he totally let go of any expectation on how his eyes were going to be treated, he would have healed but as he did not apply wisdom on that occasion, he remained blind in one eye.

Rinpoche is amazing , when you make him an offering, do not be surprised to see the next person going in to see him come out with what you had offered! One should not feel upset. Feeling upset is merely being attached to your gift.

Generosity in giving protection refers to giving Dharma protection, protection from fear (e.g. rescuing and liberating animals; doing hospice service to protect patients' from their fear of death). If you intend to confer refuge vows, you need to preserve the refuge vow everyday. It is a big responsibility. Likewise, when you take vows, e.g. 5 law vows, Sangha vows etc.. It is best if the vows are given face to face. Generosity of protection can be from inner or outer hindrances , including elemental disasters.

Generosity of Dharma is sharing advice of the spiritual path. However, one needs to have a responsible mind when sharing Dharma knowledge. If we give wrong information without caring whether our information is correct, it could mislead others on

the spiritual path, delaying their liberation for eons. One should make sure one has a reliable source of reference e.g. from Buddha's scriptures or commentaries of faultless masters like the Nalanda Pandits, Lama Tsongkhapa etc. These days there are so many books which look appealing but might not reveal the actual nor complete path.

The Kadampa masters held the view that the supreme generosity is generating great compassion towards all living beings. This does not require any material offerings as it is purely mental, straight from the heart, seeking liberation and ultimate happiness for sentient beings. One needs to cultivate this mind everyday. Just praying once to Tara or Chenresig for compassion is not going to enable one to generate compassion within oneself. Compassion has to be imprinted into one's mind many times everyday in order for it to take root.

Meditation on the sufferings of the lower realms in great detail is one effective method to generate compassion. It strikes fear into one's heart as one would not wish to gain such rebirths but when one realizes how many beings are constantly cultivating causes for such lower realm rebirth, one's heart is moved and compassion begins to arise. If one is able to do this meditation 1,2,3,4,5 times a day, the compassion which started as a rehearsed or practiced compassion becomes genuine, spontaneous, effortless compassion.

 Verse 26

*Without ethics, you cannot accomplish your own
well being
So wanting to accomplish others' is laughable
Therefore without worldly aspirations
Safeguard your ethical discipline
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice no: 26 is about upholding morality.

Living a life of morality, is a practice of generosity towards living beings – there are 3 kinds of morality – the morality of abstaining from negativity; the morality of committing virtues and the morality of working for the welfare of all living sentient being. There is the morality of avoiding the 10 non virtues; of upholding all vows. Living in any categories of the vows plants the basis for us to close the door to the lower realms and helping others to follow this path, is a generosity of Dharma towards them.

Many years ago, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and a group of monks went to Lawudo Cave. I was part of the group of monks. Rinpoche was due to leave in 3 days time. When it was time to leave, Rinpoche decided to give extensive oral transmission, which lasted for hours. And on our way down, whenever Rinpoche saw any frogs or insects along the way, he would stop to chant mantra onto them. We did not get a chance to sleep. The entire day and night was spent blessing

frogs and bugs (laughter), doing prostrations to the 35 Buddhas, circumambulating stone stupas along the way. Then Rinpoche wanted to lead Guru Puja with a 10 minute meditation on each word of the Guru Puja (laughter). The monk who was in charge of getting Rinpoche down from the mountain and to the airport to catch his flight was in panic. There was no time left. Rinpoche had to be at the airport by the next day. To remind Rinpoche of the need to hurry along, he purposely sat in front of Rinpoche, saying "I truly respect Rinpoche.." (Laughter).

When the next morning came, there were over 100 Sherpas gathered, pleading with Rinpoche to bless their homes. Rinpoche agreed and blessed every single house and hut; more prostrations.... All of us were in panic and anxiety but Rinpoche was very calm and gentle, taking time to benefit every single sentient being that he encountered. This is how Rinpoche exemplifies morality.

To complete this story, Rinpoche was late for the airport but somehow, the aircraft waited for him!

 Verse 27

*To Bodhisattvas who want a wealth of virtue
Those who harm are like a precious treasure
Therefore towards cultivate patience
Without hostility, this is the practice of the
Bodhisattva.*

Practice 27 is the practice of patience. There are 3 types of patience: (i) The patience of not retaliating towards those who harm you; (ii) the patience of willingly enduring suffering (iii) the patience of discriminative awareness of the Dharma .

Whenever Bodhisattvas encounter harm givers, they guard their minds against a single moment of anger towards the harm-giver. They achieve this through carrying out all 3 types of patience – firstly by seeing the faults of getting disturbed and retaliating because they know that one moment of anger will destroy the accumulation of 1000 eons of merit. It is that serious. By willingly enduring suffering with the understanding of karma, it will strengthen the past accumulation of patience and bring about a very calm state of mind. By having discriminating awareness of the Dharma means understanding the 3 yanās (Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana) as not being contradictory and having the understanding of the lack of inherent existence (emptiness) which cuts through grasping at an inherently existing “I”.

In these degenerated times, one must wear the amour of patience because we are constantly facing the risk of allowing our anger to wipe out one's hard-earned efforts at generating virtue. Mahasiddha Gombawa advised that the successful practice of patience comes from humility. When someone scolds you, instead of instinctively fighting back, one should reflect on whether there was any truth in the scolding – if there was no truth in it, there is no need to be upset since it does not apply to you; if there was truth in it, one should wisely accept it since it is valid.

So the purpose of generating patience is to subdue one's irritable and coarse attitude of body speech and mind, which brings harm to others and to oneself and replace it by the Awakened One's body speech and mind.

 Verse 28

*Since Hearers and Solitary Realisers who
accomplish only their own good
Strive as if to put out a fire on their head
For the sake of all beings make joyful effort
Toward the source of all good qualities
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 28 is all about joy - the delight in helping sentient beings.

When Bodhisattvas engage in virtuous action, their involvement is absolute to the point that even if their hair were on fire, they would not be distracted! Such is the depth of their enthusiasm in persevering in the service of sentient beings. There are 3 types of effort, amour-like effort, joyful effort of gathering virtue and joyful effort in serving sentient beings.

Armour like effort is needed to avoid becoming oneself discouraged. Due to being tortured by delusions and suffering since beginningless time, sentient beings are not always easy to help and thus one needs to protect oneself against losing the inspiration to benefit them.

Joyous effort denotes serving beings without any sense of being forced to do so and that one does it with a happy heart, understanding the purpose of the effort. Therefore, engaging in

Dharma activities, in spiritual practices, in the 6 Perfections and serving living beings – all these are only meaningful when done with such a happy mind. By doing so, a tremendous amount of blessing in one's heart arises. How do we drum up this level of joyous effort? Master Gombawa advises the practitioner to meditate on death and how death can come at any time. Without reflecting on death, we are lulled into a false sense that we have a lot of time to do virtue. We do not. When we meditate on impermanence, we do that on the basis of reflecting how each moment that arises begins the cessation of that moment. Consequently our whole day, our whole life is made up of momentary arising and cessation, hence death is inevitable and we must not waste our time.

 Verse 29

*Understanding that disturbing emotions are
destroyed
By special insight with calm abiding
Cultivate concentration which surpasses
The four formless absorptions
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 29 is the need to develop the power of concentration.

In this verse, the practice of concentration refers to cultivating physical and mental pliancy; cultivating higher qualities and cultivating concentration for the welfare for all living beings.

The purpose of concentration practice is not to keep the mind numb and blank. There is nothing to be gained for oneself from such a mind, let alone help other beings. The purpose of developing concentration is to be able to use it to gain realisations into the Buddha's teachings, which are the tools to gain liberation and enlightenment and then to help all beings to achieve that too. During the stages of concentration practices, one gradually gains physical pliancy, a light, blissful state which allows the practitioner to pursue the meditation and eventually gain mental pliancy where one does not get distracted by tiredness, mental irritation, delusions. The mind that finally gains direct realizations of emptiness is achieved by this mind.

Of course, if one meditates on Tara's holy face, it will bring blessings and bliss as well. However, that in itself is not the direct antidote to ignorance which is the grasping to inherent existence of self and of phenomena). Only wisdom realizing emptiness is the antidote to ignorance.

One should not under-estimate how deeply implanted ignorance is. Even when one approaches Buddhahood, such as the Mahayanic 10th Bhumi level of practice, all gross delusions have long been eliminated but the subtle grasping remains. This subtle grasping does not manifest when one applies the antidote of meditating on emptiness but it is a seed that is not easily uprooted. Persistent effort at emptiness meditation is still needed to finally remove the last stain of this poisonous seed namely, believing in inherent existence and when this finally eliminated, omniscience, enlightenment, Buddhahood is secured.

Once you reach omniscience, you can relax! (Laughter)
Enlightenment sees the end to contaminated mind and body. One accomplishes the rainbow body, is able to emanate vast forms to help and guide countless living beings.

Having gained physical and mental pliancy, the second aspect of doing this practice is to gain the higher abilities such as clairvoyance which enables one to know what is needed to guide sentient beings, as each being is different from another

and requires different types of guidance. The third aspect of concentration relates to serving sentient beings e.g. engaging in tong len practice, offering of one's possessions, limbs, protection, Dharma – all these can only be effectively done if we have a steady, concentrated mind that remains unshaken by an emotional, up-and-down mind.

Conducive conditions are needed to cultivate concentration. Since most of us are easily distracted, it is best to avoid any place that will distract your senses or stir up emotional states – stay far away from mobile phones, cars, newspapers. Armed with good motivation, an accumulation of merits, instructions from a qualified master and a conducive place, engaging in concentration meditation for 6 months can bring about the achievement of the concentrated, calm-abiding state or samatha.

Question: *Can we meditate on a mantra only?*

Ans: In order to meditate on a mantra, one also needs concentration. Remember always however, that the purpose for this practice is to be able to benefit others. Put extra effort in cultivating the 6 Perfections. Then one's actions in benefitting others can become like a waterfall's sound which is consistent – no matter how strongly the wind may blow, there is only one rhythm, one consistent beat, day and night without interruption.

 Verse 30

*Since the five perfections without wisdom
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment
Along with skilful means, cultivate the wisdom
that does not conceive three spheres (as real)
This is the practice of the bodhisattvas.*

Practice no: 30 is to strongly cultivate the wisdom realising emptiness.

Completeness in cultivation is necessary for the ultimate fruit of Buddhahood to be harvested. If one cultivates the first 5 perfections (generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort and concentration) without cultivating the wisdom perfection, no enlightenment is possible.

The emptiness of the 3 spheres refers to the emptiness of the 3 aspects (of action) e.g. in the act of giving, the emptiness of the 3 spheres are the emptiness of the giver, the emptiness of the act of giving and the emptiness of the recipient. In this way, when we perform generosity, it will be pure as there will no clinging to whatever is being offered. The merit derived from this will be immeasurable. Here, we can straightaway see that adopting the view emptiness of the 3 spheres in all our virtuous actions (the act, the do-er and the recipient being empty) generates great merit and enhances our wisdom.

Every action of body, speech or mind that we perform at any time including acts in relation to the 6 Perfections, we need to constantly hold the view of the emptiness of the 3 spheres. Only in this way, can we chip away at the deeply embedded ignorance that believes that self and others inherently exist; that inner world and outer world inherently exist. Therefore every practice we do – whether offering water, flowers, incense, service, etc we must simultaneously hold the view that the 3 spheres are empty.

There are 3 categories of wisdom: The wisdom of understanding (having knowledge and skills to help sentient beings) , the wisdom of understanding ultimate phenomena (wisdom realizing emptiness) and the wisdom of the needs of sentient beings (knowing what kind of teachings and antidotes are needed for respective sentient beings).

Through cultivating wisdom, one breaks the bond to ignorance, negative actions and endless sufferings. It is the supreme wisdom that is the complete antidote to ignorance and when we conjoin this wisdom with bodhicitta, all defilements can be eradicated.

 Verse 31

*If you do not examine your errors
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one
Therefore, always examining your own errors
Rid yourself of them
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.*

Practice 31 is to examine one's own conduct for faults.

This serves as a warning to all practitioners who lack mindfulness or who are proud about their so-called Mahayana practice. Such people may outwardly appear impressive as real practitioners, yet inwardly, they are filled with delusions and harmful intent.

The bodhisattvas always look into themselves instead of looking at others. They check each moment of their actions of body, speech and mind actions to see their own faults and to check whether delusions are operating. Upon discovering the smallest aspect of delusion being active in their minds, they immediately take remedial action to stop it. This is how to practice. Otherwise, no matter if we are regarded as a great scholar of the Dharma, if one fails to implement what one has learned, the label of “practitioner” is a false label.

It is easy to determine whether one's action is right or wrong: Does it bring peace and virtue to others? As long as it disturbs the peace of mind of others and also of oneself, it is a fault.

Shantideva strongly advised that one should always put effort to recognize one's faults, rather than focus on the faults of others.

We Mahayanic practitioners claim to practice great compassion, yet the moment we are criticised by others, the budding-Bodhisattva in us vanishes and in his/her place comes a crazy, upset, retaliatory sentient being. If we are really Mahayanists and even more so, tantra practitioners, we must live a life of virtue, humble, sweet in thought, speech and action and avoid hurting others, endeavouring only to bring happiness to others and treating others with respect.

It is not the matter of whether a person is rich or poor, ugly or beautiful, old or young, for even a one year old baby should be the object of one's respect. We have to make sure not to cause even one tear-drop from a baby. We have to make sure that we are not the cause of an old man with a walking stick, to fall. We are often too self-absorbed. We think of ourselves all the time – thinking how strong we are; how smart we are; how hardworking we are; how our problems are more important than others' problems. Worse still, we develop samsaric pride in thinking that one is Mahayanic practitioner or a Tantric practitioner and hence, superior to others. What a great failure! If one harbours these kinds of thoughts, one is a total failure.

Watch yourself, not others. We must ensure that we do not hurt others. When Buddhas and Bodhisattvas take forceful action which may offend afflicted sentient beings, they do it without

any delusion affecting their minds. For us ordinary beings, our forceful methods even in the name of “helping others”, is often mixed with delusion of anger, attachment or ignorance, so we can never justify causing hurt to others. Therefore, one can see how critical this practice of observing one’s own faults instead of others’.

In simple words, don’t point a finger of blame towards others, point it towards oneself. Even if one is experiencing an unfair, suffering situation involving another person – who is the one committing offence and who is the victim? Are you the victim? Check carefully. Who created the karma to experience this trouble? We are not talking about creating the cause today or yesterday – we have come from beginningless lives and have committed all sorts of actions. Once we reflect deeply, we can see our role in creating all the happy and unhappy experiences that we meet. Cause and effect. We must take those teachings like a prescription for sickness. Otherwise, how can we get healed?

When one is able to guide one’s body, speech and mind, one will not hurt anyone. However, we need to be realistic. We cannot expect to be able to do this right now. So, starting from today, we remind ourselves to be more mindful and try our best not to hurt anyone with actions of our body, speech or mind. We must start from somewhere and start now. Otherwise, even if one offered an entire house full of water bowl offerings and still blindly hurt others, there would be no beneficial result from the water-offering practice.

In past lives, one has criticized one's Dharma brothers and sisters, so in present life, one faces slander and harsh words from everyone, as well as become a hindrance to meeting virtuous friends. Without virtuous friends, leading a life of virtue becomes difficult and all our hopes will falter and endeavours fail.

One of the techniques to avoid creating bad speech karma can be extracted from this story: In Tibet in 1959, some of the Communist officers regarded Dharma as poison, as if a single recitation of OM MANI PADME HUM would be as terrible as swallowing a cup of poison. These officers decided that to prevent people from this "poison" by importing chewing gum for people to consume in order to occupy their mouths and hold them back from reciting Mani. Prior to that, there was no chewing gum in Lhasa. But from that time, it became readily available. Applied to the situation of avoiding bad speech karma, if one's mind is too weak to prevent oneself from engaging in negative speech, chew gum!! (Laughter).

"Benefitting others" is not just hollow words. By preserving morality, one helps others and one guards oneself against disrespect and criticism. Having others criticize us is not only bad for oneself but also bad for the one committing the criticism. Hence if we conduct ourselves in a manner that attracts criticism, we have also participated in making others commit negative speech karma which will send them to lower realm rebirths. Hence, a single negative action results in a waterfall of negative

actions by many people, with everyone gaining unimaginable suffering in the end.

One's mind is like wild elephant that is destructive. Our mindfulness and introspection act like a rope to tie the wild elephant and prevent uncontrolled damage. Do not worry about others, whether they have faults or not. The issue is one's own faults.

 Verse 32

*If through the influence of disturbing emotions
You point out the faults of a Bodhisattva
You yourself are diminished, so do no mention the
faults
Of those who have entered the Great Vehicle
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 32 caution ordinary beings against criticizing higher practitioners. There is heavy negative karma in criticising practitioners of the Hearer and Solitary Realiser paths; there is even heavier karma in criticising Bodhisattvas; on top of that is the gravely heavy karma of criticizing the Buddha and the heaviest karma is criticizing one's Guru. Why is the Guru listed on top? Because it is through him that one receives the Buddha's teachings and the means to liberation and enlightenment. Negative action towards the Guru therefore the most serious.

I know some Westerners who are Buddhist teachers, teach Guru Devotion as the last topic in the Lam Rim, instead of teaching that topic as the first topic, as appears in the Lam Rim texts. They feel shy to teach about Guru Devotion first as they feel uncomfortable to reveal the teachings which require the disciple to regard their Guru as inseparable from the Buddhas. There is much benefit to doing this and great blessings arise from it to support one's Dharma study and spiritual cultivation. Another thing is they

skip the teachings on the sufferings of the lower realms, the hell, hungry ghosts and animal realms. The teachings on guru devotion and the sufferings of the lower realms are amongst the most effective and inspiring for us to practice Dharma seriously and purely. If one does not have a deep understanding of these two topics, no matter how much you talk about Bodhicitta and Emptiness, they will not make much sense; they will not touch the heart.

Nowadays, it seems that Dharma teachers are starting to teach according to what they like to hear and not the complete Buddha's path. If a teacher gives advice from the Buddha's words which displeases you or is inconvenient for you to adopt, you retort, "That's just rubbish". If the teacher pinpoints your faults, you get upset. This is not right. The Buddha's teachings are not to soothe your ego; they are to wake you up and set you on the path to real happiness.

The verse refers to the harm from disturbing emotions. Criticism is dangerous activity and the root of this are the delusions of anger, attachment and ignorance. And these breed other heavy delusions like jealousy – a bomb that threatens our merits and makes us commit much negative karma such as causing misunderstandings and abandoning others. Therefore, Mahayanic practitioners have to keep a close watch not to allow jealousy to surface.

There is a danger of mixing up jealousy with inspiration, like

thinking, “I want to get near to Rinpoche, what’s wrong with that?” . Or “I want to get near to Rinpoche, so why is that person taking up so much time with Rinpoche?” This type of emotional thinking comes from jealousy. Instead, you should feel rejoicing. You should wish for this other person to be able to stay with Rinpoche two more hours, even though he has already been there for five hours. The antidote for jealousy is rejoicing. If your mind rejoices and is truly inspired, you will not be disturbed but rather, admire the person’s closeness to the teacher. On top of that, you make a strong prayer in your heart, how wonderful that close connection is and may I have such karma too. By praying, you create the karma for it to happen. But if you feel upset, then instead of being with Rinpoche, you might not even have a chance to see Rinpoche for one second. In the end, you become the victim of your own jealousy.

Most husbands and wives are jealous. This happens when the “love relationship” is based on attachment. If it were true love, jealousy would not be able to operate. For example, if a wife is the jealous kind, when her husband talks to another lady, the wife would not be able to concentrate on her own conversation with others because her eyes would be fixed on her husband to see how long he talked, what expression he made. Inside, filled with jealousy and attachment. So much unease and upset is caused by disturbing emotions. Recognize them and apply the antidotes without delay.

To practice rejoicing, we can start by learning how to praise

sincerely. If we cannot do this with a living person, then at least praise the Buddha and his qualities.

When we are right in the middle of a disturbing emotion, it is very difficult to handle one's mind at that time. That is why we have to practice and train our minds in recognizing the delusions, analyzing their faults and understanding the suffering that delusions bring, the antidotes to be applied and familiarize our minds with all these points through meditation. This would be a complete manner of training the mind against delusions. This is the purpose of meditation.

 Verse 33

*Reward and respect cause us to quarrel
And make hearing, thinking and meditating
decline.*

*For this reason, give up attachment to the
households of
Friends, relations and benefactors
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Practice 33 is to practice non-attachment.

The Bodhisattva lives a life giving unconditional love to all, yet they do so with non-attachment. Loved ones, precious possessions, every single aspect of a Bodhisattva's life is about non-attachment. Non-attachment does not mean abandon! It simply means not having a grasping nor clinging attitude towards anything or anyone. It means living with contentment, benefitting all beings equally.

The moment you grasp, anxiety, attachment, dissatisfaction, fear, unhappiness pop up. We can observe this for ourselves.

Let's take our body: We are naturally getting older. But we grasp at youth and try to deny natural aging. So we spend tons of money on make-up. Both women and men do this. Even pet dogs and cats get made up at animal salons, right? Just to create something that is totally different from what is natural.

Who you are, is your karma and it can be the most beautiful thing about you.

Let me relate a few stories to show how attachment is a real trouble-maker. A long time ago, I visited Hong Kong where a few Dharma friends commented that I looked sunburnt and that I had a pimple forming (which I felt was not the case). They preferred me having fair and clear skin. So they advised me to wash my face frequently and got me a tub of face cream. After following their advice, I BEGAN to get a pimple !! (Laughter).

On another occasion, I was told that I have a lot of wrinkles and was given a bottle of gel. I tried it occasionally but it seemed to me that I was getting even more wrinkles, so I threw away the bottle.

I used to be very lazy about showering and am not shy to say so. My body never itched but being in India meant much dust on one's body and during one's shower, black stuff would come out. Then I was told that it's not healthy not to shower often and that it was good to shower twice a day. So I did but the more I showered, the more sensitive my skin became resulting in itchiness, rashes and pimples too!! (Laughter). In the Himalayas, it gets very cold but one still perspires and the black-stuff gets quite thick, though not bad-smelling. (Laughter) When I first went overseas, I think it was to Singapore, in the car, I almost vomitted from the perfume the lady in the car was wearing. I guess I was

missing the smell of the Himalayan dark-stuff. (Laughter).

You can see from these accounts that when one is not attached to one's body, there is no problem with it but once one begins to worry over it and take all sorts of actions based on attachment, endless trouble comes. (Laughter).

Normally, when I go back to Nepal, I drink from almost any water source e.g. tap water and have no stomach problems. However during one trip by members to Kopan, I kept worrying about the water for the members' sake. I kept telling them to only drink mineral water and I too began to only drink mineral water but ended up with stomach ache. (Laughter) I later thought how the power of the mind changes even the physical system of one's body. That is why meditation is very important, we have to create the positive mind through meditation. In the same way, with possessions, appreciate what we have but not grasp at them. Otherwise there will be so much mental suffering.

At the time of death, we have to leave everything behind. That is the moment of separation. The only thing you can carry with you, is your Dharma practice. Therefore, whatever loss we suffer today, why agonise over losing it? If death happens tomorrow morning, one loses much more. When death happens, two types imprints will follow you - positive and negative imprints. The weight to these two will determine one's next rebirth. If one does not wish lower rebirths, use every opportunity up to the last minute to set up a positive mind, which will influence the

throwing karma and the realm of rebirth. To achieve, this, one needs to habituate one's mind with virtue. A virtuous mind will not just arise at the time of death. Familiarity is crucial.

If we can make strong prayers in this very life, it will create imprints to meet the Dharma again and to be able to cultivate again in future lives. That is how you upgrade your spiritual development life after life. The richest person is one who possesses the satisfied mind. There was a Kadampa master who wrote how a beggar may crave for today's meal and when the beggar eats that meal, his hunger is satiated; whereas a billionaire who craves to make two billion in the coming days grasps much more than the beggar and in that way, is much poorer than the beggar due to not having satisfaction. Further, if one does not get the opportunity to do a single virtuous action with one's wealth, then at the time of one's death, one would leave totally empty-handed and unprepared for death's journey. By knowing Dharma, we are in a position to utilize our material possessions in the most meaningful way and at the same time, create the most powerful imprints in one's mind which will be of great help now and in the next life.

 Verse 34

*Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And the cause deterioration in a
Bodhisattva's conduct
Therefore give up harsh words
Which are unpleasant to others
This is the practice of the bodhisattvas*

Practice 34 is never express harsh words. Even though one's mind at the start of the conversation was based on bodhicitta and wisdom, the moment harsh words come from your mouth, it marks the collapse of bodhicitta.

During Dr Jimpa's recent session, he expressed the view that as long as harsh words are used, no matter if used with compassionate motivation, it is still negative. Hence we should guard our speech carefully. However, it is not just a simple matter of not using scolding words. Sarcastic words or sweet words designed to cause hurt, come under the category of harsh words as well.

In Western cultures, teachers are not allowed to beat nor scold the children and need to apply the softest method to deal with them or else face police action, right? The Bodhisattva practice seems to be more inclined towards Western culture! But of course, one needs to apply wisdom too e.g if the child is

frequently doing wrong and harming others, the child has to be firmly taught not to do that. For a start, we should avoid any use of harsh words and instead, find alternative ways to deal with a difficult child.

I am certain that Kuan Yin Pusa never expressed harsh words but yet was able to liberate numberless beings under critical and wild conditions. However, no wonder Kuan Yin's head cracked into 11 parts before being re-assembled by Guru Amitabha.

In the process of our practice, we definitely will cry many times, sometimes with good reason as we feel we have failed but remember always that we cannot give up. This is where having Dharma friends helps. If one is surrounded by those who discourage you from practice and encourage distraction, it will be very difficult to sustain your journey on the Path. Your basic Buddha nature like a like a clear sunny sky. Sometimes, there are storm clouds – it does not mean that the sun is no longer there; it is just that the clarity has been temporarily overcast by clouds. Likewise, our fundamental nature is clarity but delusions are like the clouds which interrupt the clarity. Hence we need practice and virtuous friends help us to keep up the practice to clear off the clouds and restore a clear, happy, sunny mind. We need to be cautious about negative friends and foster virtuous friends.

I have observed on several occasions during puja that some attendees seemed lost as to which page of the puja text is being

performed and when someone shows that person the correct page, that person gets upset! Perhaps that person's ego was hurt by the thought, "I know how to turn the page". In any case, when we offer help, wisdom is required. If your help is rejected, there is no need to get angry. If someone gets upset with you, back off and go enjoy pizza! (Laughter). Although offering help is virtuous, wisdom requires us to be mindful about whether the person is ready to receive your help. Otherwise, it might be better to leave them alone for the time being.

For example, you may want a visitor to be comfortable and thus offer him a cushion. But he insists on sitting on the hard floor. You cannot insist that he sits on the cushion. There is the danger that he would regard you as a pushy person and be discouraged to return to a centre of pushy people. Be skilful and observant. That is a bodhisattva practice.

Harsh words include unskillful speech. Let us say you have a friend whom you always joke with. A family member of this friend then passes away and when he calls you, you continue to talk in a joking way about the death or say something casual like "Don't worry, be happy". This will not do. Although the phrase itself is not unpleasant but under the circumstances, it comes under the category of harsh speech. We need to be very careful with this.

Question: *What about Dharma debates in the monastery? They seem quite aggressive!*

Ans: Monastic debate is purely for monks to help each other gain a deeper understanding of the teachings. By being provocative and tricky with words and logic during debate, it enables the debators to sharpen their comprehension of philosophy. Therefore, there are no harsh words being exchanged there. Even though sometimes, both debators' faces get all red, inside the heart there is joy and respect. I always felt grateful to my debating partner because he helps me gain a fresh perspective of understanding on the topic. That is the essence of debate. The "aggression" that one sees during debate is actually a sense of firmness of one's understanding of a philosophical point. For example, let us say the statement from one debator is "Medicine Buddha can cure all illnesses whereas ordinary doctors cannot". True or not? If the answering-debator agrees with this statement, reasons must be given; the challenging debator will then refute the statement with reasons. And this debate goes on until the conclusion is arrived at that there are more reasons to support the truth of the statement that Medicine Buddha can cure all illnesses than not. If a definitive conclusion cannot be arrived at, that calls for another debate session.

Over and above avoiding harsh words, one should be polite and use honorific terms to address people. For instance, it would be improper to address Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche as "Hey, Zopa". Likewise with ordinary people, it is good to use polite ways to address them.

When Bodhisattvas communicate with others, they regard everyone

with a mind of respect, speaking to them using kind words and even their bodily gestures illustrate the appreciation and high regard for the other person. This is how Bodhisattvas are.

 Verse 35

*Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop
through counter actions
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness
and mental alertness
Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment at
once, as soon as they arise
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas*

Practice 35 advises applying antidotes to disturbing emotions.

Disturbing emotions arise due to delusions being active. Cultivating the 6 Perfections is one of the most effective methods to overcome disturbing emotions. There are four headings when studying the 6 Perfections: The first one is engaging into the practice of 6 Perfections itself; the second one is engaging into the practice of the skilful means of nurturing disciples; the third one is engaging in the practice of eradicating delusions; the fourth one is the practice of accumulating merits.

The application of antidotes should be done in a precise manner. If attachment is the problem, one should apply the antidote to attachment (namely seeing the unattractive aspects of the object of attachment) rather than apply the antidote of patience (which is targeted at a different delusion, namely anger). Or if jealousy arises, one should apply the antidote of rejoicing, rather than practice generosity which is the antidote to the delusion of miserliness.

Bodhisattvas are quick to recognize the arising of delusions and move to apply the appropriate antidote at the very moment the delusion arises. This is to prevent the mind from being habituated with a delusion. The longer we allow a delusion to take root, the deeper and longer it stays there.

Therefore, how should one go about training one's mind in applying antidotes? Firstly, one needs to develop mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is awareness and introspection checks the quality of mindfulness, like a guard at the door of mental awareness. When a delusion comes to the door of the mind, mindfulness might detect it but it is introspection which alerts mindfulness to close the door tighter. Mindfulness alone sometimes does not succeed in keeping delusions out because delusions like attachment are very slippery. Anger may be more obvious but ignorance is also very tricky to catch. Delusions are sometimes subtle and manifest as a happy experience e.g. enjoying praise, which gives room for attachment, pride and ignorance to flourish. Introspection is a stronger warrior through its ability to see through subtle delusions and raise the red flag of caution – so in the case of oneself receiving pride, introspection will have a dialogue with mindfulness, saying “This praise is feeding pride and attachment. It will hurt you in the end. Mindfulness, make sure you do not let pride and attachment come in. Kick them out”. That is how one should guard against delusions gaining a foothold in our mind.

Introspection acts like a CCTV security camera - even there is no one around, it “sees” what is happening. The computer which houses introspection is mindfulness, so when introspection sees something is approaching, it will report to mindfulness. In this way, both mindfulness and introspection are necessary in detecting and acting against any approaching delusion.

The entire purpose of the 37 practices of bodhisattva, as is the entire purpose of the Lojong (mind-training) teachings is to guard our mind against delusions, the source of all suffering.

We therefore, need to encourage ourselves in the cultivation of mindfulness and introspection. We do this through understanding and logic and habituating our minds through meditation. If we allow delusion to enter our mental continuum, it will pollute the clarity of our mind resulting in an experience of distortion and suffering. And this in turn causes us to repeatedly get reborn into samsara to experience suffering again and again. For this reason, we have no choice but to guard our mind in order to be free from delusion, the disturbed mind and achieve the state of peerless happiness. This is a very practical approach to life.

I used to dread watching the TV news because there is always bad news, hurtful, painful accounts of sufferings everywhere. However, through the kindness of these teachings on mindfulness and introspection, I now watch the news. I allow myself to see all that the news presents and instead of feeling sad, I feel inspired to do more for others. One should not allow oneself

to become sad due to others situation or hurt due to others' actions because if you become a victim of theirs, it intensifies their negative karma.

The main purpose of Dharma is to challenge and overcome delusions. The best time to train in the antidotes is when our minds are not disturbed nor overwhelmed by delusions. It would be difficult to start practicing when one mind is in a very agitated state. When our minds are relatively "quiet" or in a neutral state, we can start habituating our mind the faults of delusions and the advantages of applying the antidotes. This way when the delusion arises, we have had some practice and experience in utilising the antidotes to subdue the delusions. Reading Dharma books is also helpful in the battle against delusions. Reading is like an analytical meditation. It will plant imprints of whatever we read. And if whilst reading, one is able to draw the meaning into one's heart, it is much more effective. In this way, when delusion strikes, it will be easier to awaken one's recollection and application of the antidote.

Dromtoenpa advised that if any teaching does not strike at delusions to bring them down, it is not Dharma. Thus, when we are setting up a beautiful altar, we need to be very mindful. If we perform the altar arrangement as a decoration, it is already influenced by the delusion of attachment to beauty, hence that action of arranging the altar is not Dharma. Or if whilst practicing great compassion, one feels superior in being able to deliver help, that is not Dharma. The sign of having practiced Dharma is

a subdued mind, a humble mind.

You can look at HH Dalai Lama or Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, if you bow this much to them, they bow much lower than you. If you express one word of praise to them they will express two words of praise to you. If you say they are Buddha, they would say that you are the earlier Buddha. For us ordinary people, if someone paid homage to us as a Bodhisattva, we would probably say, “Yes, so what do you want from me?” (Laughter).

One should observe oneself and check whether our delusions are operating or not. When anger or any delusion becomes dominant and more aggressive, likewise, mindfulness and introspection must be more robust. Therefore, we first need to recognize the object to be negated e.g. for attachment, we need to understand what is meant by attachment – how it arises, its faults, its antidotes and the benefits of eliminating attachment. Likewise, we need to know all the various types of delusions and their corresponding antidotes in order to start training in them to conquer delusions to the root.

 Verse 36

*In brief, whatever you are doing
Ask yourself, “What is the state of my mind?”
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish other’s good
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas*

Practice 36 is harnessing mindfulness and introspection for the welfare of all living beings.

This verse speaks of the urgency to attain stable mindfulness and introspection. Without these two, all other practices of the Bodhisattva cannot be actualized. Everything we do – from the simple act of walking to the act of meditation, all require mindfulness and introspection. Otherwise, we could hurt ourselves! Similarly, to be able to effectively help living beings, one requires this potent partnership.

In the practice of the 3 high trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom, success in these is dependent on mindfulness and introspection. Without them, ego constantly threatens to undo the rope that binds the delusion-mind to Dharma.

Some people are fond of collecting chakras and hanging them up everywhere for protection. If we do not guard our mind by mindfulness and introspection, one will never be protected.

The danger of over-reliance on chakras is that one starts to get mentally lazy; one believes that the charkas will do all the work for us. They do not. If we do not abide by the law of karma through our being mindful of all our actions, despite all the chakras that one might have, one will still be faced with disappointment and problems.

One might assert that some Sutras state that if one recites a particular sutra, one need not do any other practice. Such verses are premised on the assumption that one understands that guarding one's mind is the basic building block. Reading a sutra, whilst simultaneously letting one's mind go wild is not going to bring any benefit to oneself nor others. This is obvious. Therefore, of course, if one has mindfulness and then recites the sutra, it will indeed be pure Dharma practice. The moment you tame your delusions, negative karma will no longer arise. The moment you do not have negative karma, who is going to harm you? Who will be able to harm you? No one. On the other hand, even if one's entire house is surrounded by chakras, if one keeps on committing negative karma, one will continue experiencing the suffering results. If you can guard your mind, you can purify you karma.

The introspection is the mind which is able to differentiate between virtue and non virtuous conduct. For example, if one performs Tara Puja solely for the purposes of this life, introspection will point out that "Doing this puja is a virtue but as you are doing it for this-life's purposes only, it is not Dharma.

Since it is virtue, there will be some happy results but it will not be ultimate lasting happiness". Or if you are doing a Tara Puja just because of you want to win the court case (one where you are in the wrong), introspection will tell mindfulness, "This is totally the 8 worldly concerns and thus absolutely wrong. Make sure you close the door to delusions". The mental conversations between mindfulness and introspection are always interesting.

Mindfulness and introspection should be conjoined with the bodhicitta to benefit others. What an extraordinary and meaningful life one will have then.

 Verse 37


*To remove the sufferings of limitless beings
Understanding the purity of the three spheres
Dedicate the virtue from making such effort
to enlightenment*

This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

Practice 37 is about dedicating all merits towards the enlightenment of all living beings.


Whatever form of bodhisattva conduct we engage in, we must dedicate for it to be the complete cause to eradicate all sufferings of numberless beings and to liberate them and bring them to the state of full enlightenment.

When raising dedications, one should take care to dedicate with the mind of bodhicitta (taking on the responsibility to bring all beings to enlightenment by oneself alone) and a mind of wisdom meditating on emptiness i.e. thinking that the words of dedication, the person making the dedication and the recipient of the dedication are all empty of inherent existence. In so doing, even if a moment of anger arises subsequently, it will not destroy the merits derived from the virtuous conduct. Otherwise, even we gather a store of merits, if we allow anger to arise, that anger can eradicate all past virtues that were not “sealed” with the emptiness-dedication. Such is the potency and destructive nature of anger.


 *Concluding Verses*

*For those who want to train on the
Bodhisattva path
I have written “The 37 Practices of the
Bodhisattvas”.
Following what has been said by excellent ones
On the meaning of sutras, tantras and treatises.*


The purpose of composing the 37 practices was to inspire one to pursue the practices of the bodhisattva path by drawing from the teachings and advice of the Buddha’s own words, as well as the commentaries and instructions of the great realized masters and mahasiddhas.

 *Though not poetically pleasing to scholars
Owing to my poor intelligence and
lack of learning
I have relied on the Sutras and words
of the excellent
So I think these Bodhisattva practices are
without error.*

The composer Togmay Sangpo asserts himself to be lacking in learning and refined language. However, he explains the basis of his work and highlights that those who have cultivated in these ways have attained great realizations and is thus an unmistakable path.

 *However, as the great deeds of Bodhisattvas
Are hard to fathom for one of my poor intelligence
I beg the excellent to forgive all faults
Such as contradictions and non-sequiturs.*

This verse is the sign of the composer's great humility, declaring the bodhisattvas practices to be difficult to carry out for one such as he. Nevertheless, he describes these profound practices, though extremely difficult, have great benefits of purification, accumulation of merit and nourish the inspiration to serve sentient beings including leading them to enlightenment.

 *Through the virtues from this,
may all living beings
Gain the ultimate and conventional
altruistic intention
And thereby become like the Protector Chenresig
Who dwells in neither extreme –
not in the world nor in peace!*

This is the final dedication that all merits from teaching and practicing these 37 practices be the cause for the realization of conventional and ultimate bodhicitta in all living beings, as well as prevent practitioners from seeking to remain in the peace of nirvana for one's own benefit but instead, strive to liberate

all sentient beings and bring them to the state of Chenresig (or Avalokitesvara/Kuan Yin).

Concluding words from Geshe Tenzin Zopa –

“I have received the experiential teachings on this 37 Practices text from my late guru, Geshe Lama Konchog. For the oral teachings on this text, I received it from my root guru, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and also from HH Dalai lama. Even though my own knowledge, experience, practice and realizations are the zero of the zero but due to the lineage practice and blessings, you will definitely receive the blessings of the realized beings our Gurus through acquainting yourself with these discussions here.

Thank you for your patience in listening to these teachings. Even though a so-called teacher may not know how to teach but if the listener listens with the right intention and attentively, one will still be able to extract the essence meaning of the teachings. Otherwise, if the teacher does not know how to teach and the listener listens with wrong motivation, then everything will truly be upside down! But I am certain that you have paid attention, so I rejoice in your great merits. Let us generate profound gratitude to our Gurus, the Buddhas and Bodhistvas and in particular to Bodhistva Togmay Sangpo for this illuminating work and may all their holy wishes be actualised and all sentient beings gain liberation and enlightenment without a moment delay. This prayer of dedication, and being making the dedication are empty of inherent existence.”

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HOW TO TREAT DHARMA BOOKS

Dharma books contain the teachings 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 should not be 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 negative and 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 mind stream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUNG, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche has specifically advised that photos or images of holy beings, deities and other holy objects should not be burned and instead placed with respect in stupas or other high clean places so that they do not end up on the ground.



Biodata of Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Geshe Tenzin Zopa holds a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy from Sera Jey Monastic University in South India and is a master in Tibetan Buddhist rituals. He is currently the Resident Teacher at Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society, Malaysia and was for a long time, the Director of the Tsum Valley Project (in the Himalayan

region), which provides Buddhist study and practice facilities and accomodation for the community in the Valley. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the principal and focal point of the award winning film titled “Unmistaken Child” which chronicles the search for the reincarnation of his great master.

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 benefitting 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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