

**A BIRD NEEDS  
TWO WINGS:  
WISDOM AND  
COMPASSION**

**KADAMPA  
CENTER**

**RALEIGH, NC**

**WITH VEN.**

**ROBINA**

**COURTIN JUNE**

**1-7, 2020**



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Published for the participants in the teachings with Ven. Robina Courtin, hosted by FPMT's **Kadampa Center**, Raleigh, NC, **kadampa-center.org**. With gratitude to Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive for the use of the teachings in chapters 6 and 8. **lamayeshe.com**. **Painting** of Shakyamuni Buddha by Jane Seidlitz.

## **1. THE WORKSHOP IS IN THE MIND**

### **VEN. ROBINA COURTIN**

Buddha's psychology is not made up by Buddha; he's not a creator, nor does he posit one. He's this amazing observer of the workings of the human mind, from his own direct experience. The mind, in fact, is his expertise.

He came out of the Indian tradition in which these incredible Indian philosopher meditators, more than three thousand years ago, began the investigation into the nature of self. It was they who came up with the sophisticated psychological skill known as concentration meditation that's the basis of what the world knows these days as mindfulness meditation.

With this skill, we can plumb the depths of our own mind, go beyond the conceptual and sensory levels of consciousness, our own cognitive process – not the brain; we're not discussing the brain – to degrees of subtlety that we in the West don't even posit as existing. Why? To rid the mind of the ego-based states and develop to perfection the goodness with us.

For Buddha, mind is the central player in our lives, and the source of all happiness and all suffering. Therefore, we need to learn to go deeply into the mind, to unpack and unravel its contents, deconstructing the layers of thoughts and feelings and emotions and assumptions, and reconstructing it into the mind of a buddha, our natural potential.

### **BUDDHA'S OWN EXPERIENTIAL FINDINGS**

From his own direct experiential findings he's found that the negative states of mind, these neuroses, the voices of ego that we consider utterly normal – so normal that we think we'd be abnormal if we

didn't have them – are not at the core of our being, are adventitious. We can get rid of them.

It's shocking to hear this. If I go to my therapist and ask them to please give me methods to get rid of all ego, all fear, all jealousy, all anger, all attachment and develop infinite love and infinite compassion for all beings, I think they'd be seriously worried about me. But this is the view of Buddhist psychology.

Clearly, then, we need learn to know the contents of this mind of ours and, crucially, be able to distinguish between the neuroses and the positive states of mind. Normally they're mixed together like a big soup, and we can't tell one bit from another.

In our contemporary models of the mind, we don't pay such clear attention to the workings of our own cognitive process; or, it's only when someone's about to kill me, or I'm about to kill him that I think I'd better go do something about it – and it's a little bit late. Vesuvius has already exploded! Way before then we need to pay attention to the internal workings of our mind to begin to distinguish between neurotic attachment and the virtuous love, for example;

## **BE OUR OWN THERAPIST**

We really begin to practice when we learn to be our own therapist, as Lama Yeshe puts it: seeing our mind, noticing the anger, the attachment, the fears, and learning to work with them and change them. That's the real immediate practice to do. And this is what's so difficult. Of the two causes of suffering this is the main one; these delusions impel us to create negative karma, the second one (see chapter 1).

So, to even see what's in our mind is already difficult for us, because in our culture we're not used to looking at our mind. We don't learn techniques where we can look into the mind and understand it, be our own therapist.

The way we think of psychology in the West, is we're all born this way, you do your best, you struggle along, and if things get so bad then you have to go find a therapist. It's sort of like we're just brought up to just hop into a car and get onto the freeway. No one teaches you to drive; it's just the way life is, you don't drive. And then if you have a crash you have to go find someone to help you. Well, it's a bit backward isn't it? If you learn how to drive, you can avoid the crashes.

That's all Buddha is saying. From day one, start to know your mind. It's your mind, it's your anger, it's your jealousy, darling, it's your love, it's your compassion. We need to learn to see our mind deeply, to distinguish between the various conceptual stories, and thus have the ability to sort it out as it happens – well before the crash. By the time we're 20, we're going to be an amazing human being, aren't we? Can you imagine? Not to mention 60 and 70 and 80.

## **SENSORY CONSCIOUSNESS**

But let's step back a little. We have thoughts and feelings and emotions, intellect. And then we have the sensory consciousness, which is the experiences of the mind through the medium of the body. This is the way to say it. So technically, in Buddhist terms, eyeball is not what sees things. The eyeball is just the physical medium through which that part of our mind functions in order to perceive shape and color. It's not just splitting hairs; it's a very major point. Ear consciousness is that part of our consciousness, mind, that functions through the medium of our ear, through the drum and all that business, in order to perceive sound.

So the sensory consciousness is really very limited. It's got a very limited capacity for cognition. But we make the body the boss as Lama Yeshe says. Big mistake. For example, we will say, "Oh wow,

look at that delicious chocolate cake”. We think we *see* a delicious chocolate cake. Technically not true, according to Buddha.

Eye consciousness perceives only shape and color. It has no more capacity. Ear consciousness, it can’t hear divine Miles Davis. I’d say, “Oh wow, that’s Miles, I can hear Miles there” because I’m a big fan of Miles Davis. But ear consciousness doesn’t know that. It only knows or perceives or cognizes sound.

So they’re a very limited level of awareness. But we give them so much more power than they actually have. They’re the interface between me and the world, aren’t they? Without the senses we have no way of experiencing anything because this is the level we function at. We’re living in a sensory universe now. Buddha calls it the desire realm.

## **THE WORKSHOP IS IN THE MIND**

Then we have mental consciousness. That’s where the workshop is, as Rinpoche says. That’s what we have to become familiar with, that’s what we have to get to know deeply, and that’s where we have to be our own therapist. And that’s what we have to change, because that’s where the potential for enlightenment is. And that’s where all the potential for suffering is. This is the point. So even beginning to recognize that our sensory experiences and our mental consciousness are fundamentally different is crucial, because then we don’t get fooled by what the senses tell us. It’s an extremely important point to in order to become a good practitioner.

## **NEGATIVE, POSITIVE, AND NEUTRAL STATES OF MIND**

According to the Buddhist model of the mind, we divide the contents of our mental consciousness into three categories; there’s no fourth. There are the so-called positive states the negative ones, and neutral. Examples of neutral – which doesn’t mean they’re not important; it means they’re neither negative nor positive in their character – are

concentration, mindfulness (which really means not-forgetfulness), discrimination, alertness, attention, intention, and so on. These are vital states of mind that enable anyone to function properly – whether you’re a murderer or a meditator. I like to call them the mechanics of the mind. Remember, we’re not discussing the brain here. Buddha doesn’t talk about the brain, he’s talking about the cognitive process itself: thoughts and feelings and emotions.

The virtuous ones like love and compassion are altruistic, are the source of our own happiness, and cause us to want to help others. The negative ones are necessarily I-based, totally self-centred and in their raw form really neurotic, really delusional, and really disturbing; and they’re the source of my suffering and, of course, the source of why I harm others.

In the long-term we need to use the single-pointed concentration technique that hones concentration, mindfulness, alertness and the rest to an incredible degree of brilliance and clarity, and with these we learn to unpack and unravel our delusions and eventually rid our minds of them.

## **NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND HAVE TWO MAIN FUNCTIONS**

There are two main characteristics that the negative states of mind have. One is indicated by the term disturbing emotion. So even if we became familiar with just this, it would give us great courage to want to go beyond it because this is what suffering is. Just the suffering of being angry, just the suffering for yourself of being jealous, being depressed. It’s so obvious, isn’t it, it’s so clear that it’s so painful for us.

Another characteristic, and this is the really tasty bit, another characteristic that these negative states of mind have is that they are delusions. What Buddha’s saying is that the extent to which we’re

caught up in depression or anger or attachment is the extent to which we're out of touch with reality.

If someone accused us of being delusional, we'd be very hurt. But Buddha is saying exactly that.

### **WE'RE ALL MENTALLY ILL: IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF DEGREE**

So in our culture, we just take as a given that everyone has a bit of anger, a bit of this, a bit of that, and we call that normal. We bring delusions into our normality. Buddha has a more radical view of what is mentally ill, what is delusional. Are you seeing my point? He says we're all delusional, it's just a question of degree. And that really is the best way to say it.

Which is quite shocking. What it also implies is the level to which we can be the opposite. If we just take as normal a bit of anger, a bit of jealousy, a bit of this, a bit of that and that's a rounded normal person, then you can't really move very far from this, you're stuck with that. But by saying that all attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, are delusions and are not at the core of our being – that's Buddha's fundamental finding – we're saying that we can get rid of them.

He is more subtle in his assessment of how we are crazy and he is more subtle in his assessment of how we can develop. You see my point? That's the flip side.

### **KNOW OUR OWN MIND**

The Buddhist model of the mind is very clear in distinguishing between these positive states of mind and the neurotic ones, the negative ones. Buddha's main finding, as I mentioned, is that these negative states, these neuroses – he would have liked that term, I think – are adventitious; they do not belong in the mind and thus we can get rid of them.

The positive ones, we all know: love, compassion, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, self-confidence. As soon as we hear those words we go, “yeah, that’s great”, whether we’re on the receiving end of them or whether they’re inside us. We know they’re the good stuff. Then you’ve got the stuff that’s miserable: we know depression, jealousy, low self-esteem, self-hate, anger, arrogance. These we know immediately aren’t cool.

Therefore, we need to know our mind because what goes on in our mind is the main source – *the main source* – of our happiness and suffering; and because we need to rid the mind of these causes of suffering. That’s what Buddha means by “nirvana”.

Now, we’re not used to thinking that, not at all. We don’t believe that for one second. I believe that Mary is the cause of my happiness and she’s *out there*, and I believe that Fred is the cause of my suffering. To think that what goes on in *my* mind is the main cause, that’s a bit shocking. But that’s Buddha’s thing. Once we take this on board, then obviously what it means is, given that I don’t want suffering and do want happiness, please, I had better start knowing my mind and working on it – being my own therapist, as Lama Yeshe puts it.

## **WHAT ARE DELUSIONS?**

There are three main delusions, Buddha says. The root of them all is known as ignorance, ego-grasping, the mother of them all, a primordial grasping at a concrete sense of self

Its main voice is attachment. So let’s look at attachment because effectively, in the four noble truths, attachment is the main cause of all our suffering.

As I said, the two main characteristics of all the delusions is, one, they’re disturbing and, two, they’re delusional, they’re liars. When we’re caught up in our depression, for example, things appear in a way that isn’t accurate. It’s like we have put on our really dark, ugly

glasses. Everything looks horrible. Same with anger, same with pride, same with jealousy, same with all of them. They've all got their own flavor. They're all liars, they're all voices of the primordial ignorance, they're all voices of ego-grasping. And then we believe in the lie and we follow it. That's samsara.

## **2. ATTACHMENT IS THE MAIN SOURCE OF OUR SUFFERING**

**VEN. ROBINA COURTIN**

The Buddha's view is that actually the basis, the source, of our day to day suffering is attachment. If that's true, then clearly we'd better know what he means by it. Otherwise, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, when you hear that Buddha says you've got to give it up, you'll go, "Oh, I've got to give up my happiness? I've got to give up my heart?"

This is really difficult because when we use even this word in our culture we use it interchangeably with the words love, happiness, joy, pleasure. So please, throw out all your definitions, all your assumptions now and listen to this view, because Buddha uses this word in a very specific way.

I remember Lama Yeshe saying one time, "I could tell you about attachment for one whole year, but you'll never begin to really understand it until you start to look deeply inside". This is interesting. "Attachment": it's such a cute word, a simple word. We use it in our culture, but in a very different way. So it's really important when we hear Buddha's views about attachment we understand clearly what he means by it.

For us it's virtually synonymous with closeness, love. But for the Buddha it is very, very different. If you want to understand what Buddha's saying, you've got to know what his definition is. And we're not used to thinking this way, you know? If think about it, even just the word "love" – if everybody in this room gave their definition, we'd have as many meanings as people, and we tend to think that's okay. No wonder we don't communicate!

I mean, if everybody had their own view about what one plus one was, we'd all be in serious trouble, wouldn't we? "I'm allowed to think

it's seven!" We wouldn't say that. We communicate nicely when it comes to numbers; you can't get it wrong. But if I say "I love you" and you say "I love you" – wow, we think we're communicating! But we're not, because we have different definitions, different assumptions. When it comes to emotional stuff we're very wishy-washy in terms of what we mean by words.

Attachment is one of the deepest neuroses, for the Buddha. But why and how? When you say, "My god, she's so *needy*", straightaway we know that's not pleasant. "What a control freak he is". "Oh, she's so possessive". Well, these are some of the characteristics of what Buddha refers to as attachment. It's multi-faceted.

### **THE MORE WE GET, THE MORE WE WANT**

But you know what? That's the junkie mode. We truly believe that when I get it then the satisfaction will come. It's like an ache, a pain and I've got to get that thing to assuage the pain. That's the junkie mode. So we're all junkies, it's a question of degree. We're all deluded; it's a question of degree. We're all insane; it's a question of degree.

Attachment is the source of most of the other unhappy emotions we experience in daily life – like anger and jealousy and all the rest. It's deep in our bones. At the most primordial level it's the deep feeling of dissatisfaction. We're never satisfied: no matter what I get, not enough; no matter what I do, not enough; no matter what I achieve, not enough; no matter what I eat, not enough. As my mother used to say, "The more you get, the more you want". That's profound. That's the very energy of attachment, actually. It's a driving force within us. It's at the deepest level, it's so instinctive. That's the Buddha's point. That's the tragedy of attachment.

So, just naturally, on the basis of this deep feeling of dissatisfaction comes the next level of attachment, which is the obvious one, the hankering after something – because if you feel

dissatisfied, something's missing, isn't it? So, if something's missing, you've got to look for something to fill up the gaping hole – pretty obvious. At this level of attachment, attachment goes out the objects of the senses: the food, the bodies, the handbags, the houses, the things, the sounds, the smells. It's obvious. And that's the very world we occupy: it's nothing other than all the objects of the senses.

Some people are more into getting a beautiful body; other people want the delicious food. Well, actually we crave both, don't we? As Lama Yeshe says, "you people are ridiculous! You can never work out whether it's the food you're more attached to or your body!"

It's pretty obvious that the motor that drives us is this craving, this hankering, this yearning for the things out there, assuming totally that when we get them, we'll get happy, get satisfied. That's the philosophy of attachment.

## **ADDICTS**

In our contemporary models of the mind, when this attachment is severe we call it addiction. Well, Buddha says, I'm sorry, guys, you're all addicts – it's a question of the object and the degree of it. The low levels of the dissatisfaction, the everyday yearning, the craving, the neediness – for us it's just normal and we don't even call it a problem until it's overwhelming.

And that's Buddha's point. If we start to know our minds well and look more deeply before something dramatic happens, then we can really do the work that he would suggest we *can* do, which is to fundamentally change our minds. This is what he's saying.

It seems a bit depressing and a bit shocking to talk about our pleasures like this, but we need to look into these experiences, trying to understand how attachment lies to us, cheats us, fools us.

## **WE THINK HAPPINESS IS WHAT WE GET WHEN ATTACHMENT GETS WHAT IT WANTS**

The trouble is, the only way we know how to get any good feelings at all – and that’s a bare-bones way of saying what “happiness” is – is to get an object of attachment: a nice house, nice clothing, nice body, nice husband, nice family, nice job, nice money in the bank, nice food, nice this, nice that. It’s never-ending. This is the only method we know for getting happy.

In other words, what we think happiness is is getting what attachment wants. That’s the motor that drives us. And it’s the way the world is. The mice and the dogs are the same – check their behavior. Because it’s universal, it seems so normal, so it seems a bit mean and cruel of Buddha to point it out, isn’t it? Is he trying to make us suffer or what?

## **BUDDHA SAYS HAPPINESS IS WHAT WE GET WHEN WE GIVE UP ATTACHMENT**

Not at all. He’s actually trying to show us how to get happy. It’s just that he has different methods. What he has found from his own inner work, in the depths of his own mind, is this: happiness is what you get when you give up attachment. This is shocking!

If this is so, we had better be clear about how to identify it. We don’t want to chuck the baby with the bath water. Attachment, then, is far more nuanced than it appears on the surface.

## **DELUSIONS EXAGGERATE**

In general, all the delusions exaggerate, distort certain aspects of their object. Anger, when it’s strong in the mind – the state of mind that informs the anger is aversion – when aversion is there, the thing, the person, the situation that you’re averse to appears uglier than it really is. We know this.

Equally when attachment is in the mind, the function of attachment is to exaggerate the delicious qualities of something. When attachment is in the mind, the thing or the person or the situation that you're attached to, that you're hankering after, appears more delicious than it really is.

So let's use the chocolate cake as an example. What's extremely hard here now: because we're so on autopilot with this process, it's so ancient within us, we're so brainwashed with these delusions, they all happen spontaneously. We have practiced them literally to perfection from life after life after life. So to deconstruct this is extremely difficult. You need to really put the microscope of your mind on to it.

First there's this feeling of not having. What's missing? Then the thought comes – chocolate cake! Now there's the next level of attachment, the manipulating to get it, the anticipating, the expectation. And now what happens is – and this is the killer – we get the cake and how does it appear to us? Totally divine! It looks unbelievably delicious. In fact, it looks *way more* delicious than it really is. The attachment tricks us. It makes the cake look so divine we can't believe it, isn't it? That's attachment's job: to grossly exaggerate the deliciousness of the object.

Next, of course, we *totally* believe that when I get the cake, I'll get happy. It'll fill up the gaping hole. It'll make me satisfied. Well, we all know it's not true. Actually, we're still dissatisfied. So then we try again, we keep going, each time hoping satisfaction will come. And not only that. From experience we know that not only does it not satisfy us, it actually causes us to crave even more next time. In other words, the more we get, the more we want.

Attachment, then, is a honey-covered razor blade. We *know* it's true that the more we get the more we want. Just test the last time you kept trying to get happy from eating cake. Temporarily, it tasted pretty good. But if you keep eating it – and you do, because you're not satisfied yet – it becomes revolting. But we forget that. We go to

the toilet, we go to sleep, and then the next day, having forgotten the belly ache, the acid reflux, the indigestion, again we hunger for the cake even more, again trying to get happy. Of course, eating the cake did bring some pleasure, but it's probably just the first mouthful – it's downhill from there!

The word attachment sounds so simple. “Oh I love chocolate cake!” That's just the tip of the iceberg. It's coming from this aching sense of missing, of lacking, of not having. And so it manifests as incredible neediness, yearning, neediness in a neurotic sense. And it's just there all the time. So depending upon the kind of karmic imprints you have, the kind of habits you have with certain kinds of phenomena and things from past lives, that will then attach itself to that type of thing.

### **ATTACHMENT SELECTS ITS OBJECTS**

I saw a movie recently called “De-Lovely”, about Cole Porter. There he was, in a rarified world, in a worldly sense, very rich, very elegant, always surrounded by beauty. He seemed a very lovely man, very kind, very patient, very sweet, he didn't get angry. But he had this massive attachment, this aching, yearning neediness, and for him it was people: he was always falling in love with people.

A junkie has dumped their attachment onto heroin. Another person is constantly needy for people to love them. “Oh, she's so needy”, we'll say, this little emotional needy person who needs other people to approve of them. Frankly, that's the one we've all got deeply. They say the need to be approved of is the deepest attachment of all. They talk about the yogis in the mountains, who've given up sex, drugs, and rock and roll, they're still thinking about what the people down in the village are thinking about them.

So then you make it far more than it is, that's how attachment works. So of course, because we are born with it and it's “instinctive” as we would say – and all instinct is, in Buddha's terms, is the habit

of thinking and doing something so often that now it happens spontaneously. That's all instinct is. And then we take it as true, we see it as true.

So, the function of attachment is that it's a liar, it is strongly imprinted in us, it's habitual. It's a liar in the sense that it makes the things seem more delicious than they really are. It's a liar in the sense that it make us believe that if I get it or do it, I'll get happy. The energy of attachment is this ache, this pain – you look at even when it's just the cake, you've got to put it in, it's so painful, you feel so distressed.

But we all know that it's not happiness, because the more we do it the more miserable we get – not to mention fat and everything else. So that's the junkie mind. This is the attached mind.

### **CONFUSING ATTACHMENT AND LOVE**

Right now, for example, if I say, "I love Andy", and you'll know by the way I say it that I mean "in love" not just "like". There is indeed the altruistic state of mind called love – the wish that Andy be happy – but it's polluted by attachment.

There I was, hankering after someone, *a boyfriend*. I'm looking and looking and eventually – boom! – this fellow comes into my sight. I grab hold, we talk, and it's not long before I've got my entire next eighty years planned. "Finally I've found happiness!" As we discussed, the attachment absurdly exaggerates his deliciousness, doesn't it? Certainly in the beginning, when we're completely blissed out, you can't believe how divine this person is. You can't stop thinking about him *all the time*. You just hear his name, you practically want to faint. We *know* this experience.

It seems cruel of Buddha to say that attachment causes suffering; because everything in your being at this moment, when it's all fresh and new, is telling you that it's the exact opposite: it's the cause of unbelievable happiness.

As we discussed, the way it causes suffering is that it *exaggerates*. And we all know that. And then comes this *massive* expectation, anticipation that he will do *everything* that that my attachment wants.

Of course, there is plenty of love there too: that means I want him to be happy. But if the attachment is fierce, it pollutes the love, and it won't last.

So what happens to my expectations? Now that we're in close proximity, I'll start to see that he's a regular human being. He might snore at night. Maybe his armpits stink, you know? He'll leave the toilet seat up. He mightn't do the dishes. The smallest things. The more I have attachment, the more I'm a control freak, the more I'm anticipating, the more I'm needy, then the more poor Andy will disappoint me; he can't blink without doing the wrong thing. That's because of my attachment. With this, love has got no chance!

And then gradually what comes is aversion, irritation, annoyance, frustration, upset – all these polite words for anger. Because anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants, when it's thwarted. Then, a month later you look at this man in your bed and you wonder, "Who the hell's this revolting bloke?"

Attachment over-exaggerates his deliciousness, but it has the bonus of triggering pleasant feelings, and that's what throws us. And it's almost impossible to distinguish between genuine love and this attachment and neediness and expectation and possessiveness and all the rest,

Love, then, is under the positive heading. It's altruistic in its nature. Defined simply, the bare-bones level of love is: "May Andy be happy". It's the delight in Andy's happiness. The trouble is, we simply can't tell the difference between love and attachment. Ironically, it's the presence of our good qualities that make it difficult. If I had just raw attachment for Andy, and virtually no love, I'd be a vampire and I'd eat him up for breakfast. Then it's easy to identify attachment.

The trouble is, attachment is a honey-covered razor blade because it *looks* like I'm being kind, it seems like love. We know when we're on the receiving end of that kind of attachment, it's a terrible letdown when you realize a person's just been using you. I'm not being mean about us; we all do this; this is what attachment *is*. It's like this monster, you know. So, interestingly, our love and our compassion temper our attachment but at the same make it hard to see it; we fool ourselves.

So, at the moment, because I'm in love with Andy, of course I *love* Andy. Absolutely, I want him to be happy. I will love him to death, you know – but as long as he does what my attachment wants. When he starts coming home late and being mean and not looking at me any longer and not being so kind, my love will turn off like a tap, I'm sorry; and then only anger will be there and then if I'm not careful I'll kill him. Do you understand?

But we think, “Oh, this is normal; this is relationships”. Well, Buddha says, sure, it's normal but it's mental illness. Our heart should break for ourselves when we realize the pain that we're experiencing because of attachment.

But we can get rid of it, that's the point.

### **3. HOW THE NATURAL LAW OF KARMA PLAYS OUT IN OUR MINDS AND LIVES**

**VEN. ROBINA COURTIN**

#### **KARMA: FUNDAMENTAL TO BUDDHISM**

If we're saying we're a Buddhist and we're attempting to practice Buddhism, if we're not applying the laws of karma, if we're not taking that as our hypothesis, if we're not applying that in our daily life, we're not really being a Buddhist. This is fundamental to Buddhist teachings – his view about the world, how it comes into being, what our mind is, what causes happiness, what causes suffering, etc..

So, this law applies – runs – in the mind. So the mind, for the Buddha, is where things happen. The mind is where the workshop is. The mind is where everything happens. The mind is where the source of suffering is. The mind is where the source of happiness is. The mind is the point.

#### **WHERE DO I COME FROM?**

The question of course, is demanded, “If I’m not created by somebody else, where do I come from?” Well, in a simple sense, you could say you come from previous moments of yourself. Think of your mind as a river of mental moments – your thoughts and feelings of *now*, in the simplest linear sense of cause and effect, your thoughts and feelings of *now* come from the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. And your thoughts and feelings of the previous moment come from – guess what? – the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. You track it back to ten years ago, twenty years ago, in your mothers’ womb. “Well, maybe I began a month before conception.” Well, no. If my mind existed then, it must have come from a previous moment of my mind. Then clearly you get back to the

first moment of conception, when we all assume we began. If you're Christian, God put a soul there, in the egg and sperm; and if you're a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm.

Well, the Buddha has this third option. Your egg and sperm are there. Yep, the parents worked hard to get them to stay together, and not go down the toilet with the rest. But what *causes* them to stay together is the entry of consciousness, your consciousness. So you can track your consciousness right in this continuity of mental moments going right back to that first moment of conception. "Well, I must have begun then." Well, yes, relatively speaking, this package called "Robina" began then, but where did the body come from? Mummy and Daddy. Where did your mind come from? Previous moment of itself. So your mind is its own continuity of mental moments.

It's a very simple concept, actually. Not difficult for us to intellectualize, to theorize about. Your mind is its own continuity. And obviously, to assume this, you have to assume it's not physical. Because, clearly, if you think your mind is your brain, then you did come from your parents, which is the materialist view, that they "made" you, you know?

## **YOUR MIND IS YOURS**

And so the experiential implication of this is that your mind is *yours*. And that means the contents of it are yours. And so what are the contents of your mind? All the love and the kindness and compassion and wisdom and contentment and anger and jealousy and fear and paranoia and rage – all of this. This is the contents of your mind. So all of these, being contents of your mind, they too come from previous moments of that particular quality in your mind.

So this is a simple idea that implies reincarnation, isn't it? It's a simple concept. Not a difficult concept intellectually. But we're so familiar with the view that I come from mother and father and my

anger comes from mother and father and my jealousy and my depression and my all the rest come from the DNA and the egg and the sperm and all the rest, you know. They play a role, no argument. But they're not the main thing. For the Buddha, the main things are your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your unconscious. Your tendencies, your feelings. All of this. This is yours. This is *yours*.

We come into this life fully programmed with all of our tendencies, with all of our characteristics. It's a big surprise to us. I mean, we accept we come fully programmed, but we think the programming comes from mother and father. It doesn't, Buddha says. Tendencies in the mind are mental and mind is not physical and it comes from previous moments of itself, not from the external condition, which is called the brain.

One can see indicators in the brain of certain things, no argument with this. So this fundamental point of Buddhism is that your mind is yours. And whatever's in it is simply from you having put it there in the past. Hardly surprising concept – cause and effect.

### **KARMA MEANS INTENTION**

This is the essential idea of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, that is translated as “action”, really simply. Which implies reaction. Action-reaction, in this meaning: cause and effect. Seed-fruit, you know.

It's also, more fundamentally, translated as intention, will, volition. Every microsecond of everything we say, everything we think and feel, and indeed do and say, with our body and speech on the basis of what's in the mind, is a karma. An intentional action that necessarily will leave an imprint, or a tendency or a seed in your consciousness and will ripen in the future in that consciousness as your experiences.

What goes on in our mind, in other words, is the main cause of our future experiences. This is what Buddha says.

This is a simple concept. Not a difficult idea. It's just a question of being able to say it and get our heads around it. It isn't complicated. We think it's complicated, but it's just because we haven't got the right words, you know. It's not a complicated concept at all.

Of course, it's not evident to us. So we take it as our working hypothesis. Buddha's saying basically: we are the creators of ourselves. It's a very simple point. Whatever's in your mind is there because you put it there, not because Mummy and Daddy did something to you. This flies in the face of the assumption that we all have that's the basis of our lives, and is, as Buddha would say, a misconception. That, you know, I am angry because my father was angry. I am jealous because my mother was jealous. I am depressed because I have certain hormones. We always put an external reason to it, you know. Which sort of, for us, is a way of saying, "It's not my fault".

We've got this dualistic view. We assume we're made by mother and father. We assume the anger and the jealousy and the depression are either there because of the genes or the DNA or they're there because I've got a mean boyfriend, or because I had a lousy mother or a horrible husband or a bad kid or a horrible boss. This is the typical way we talk. And this is, in fact, the view of the materialist world. This is the philosophy of the materialist world that is backed up by the view that your mother and father made you, that you're only physical.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

One has to know one's mind, because that's the one we can change. Yes, certain people's external conditions make it quite tough – if you're in a prison and you can't open that door; you can say "Well, I can't help being angry, I'm surrounded by mean people". You might say that. But the ones who are really practicing don't say that. They know that this is their physical condition, and this is indeed the result

of their karma (and we'll talk more about that in a minute), and so they will adapt themselves to that condition and still work on their minds.

The person who's got the chemicals that aren't working, that seem to be the trigger for depression, yes, you recognize that you've got those particular chemicals, but the depression is your mind, it's your viewpoint. You might be around people who are mean and ugly who hit you all the time, and if you've got an angry tendency it'll make it easy for you to get angry, it's true. But if you're really being accountable, you'll recognize the anger's yours. This is what we have to do. This is the toughest part. This is the part that's massive for us. So difficult because we're so used to this dualistic way of talking. It's always like, "It's not my fault. It's not my fault".

And that's the view of the materialist world, you look. It's an assumption of ego. "I didn't ask to get born, did I? It's not my fault. My mother made me. My father made me." We don't want to blame God – well, if you're an Italian, you will. They blame God in the most rude way. They say, "God is a pig!" when things go wrong. They say even worse things about Our Lady. We don't mind blaming our parents – a bit nervous about blaming God, maybe.

So, the whole way ego works, Buddha says, is in its nature dualistic. It's always, "Poor me, the victim". Lama Yeshe would call ego the "self-pity me". You look at how we are every time – instantly trying to cover ourselves, defend ourselves, "It's not fair", "It's not my fault", "I didn't mean to". Everything to try to deny accountability. It's so painful for us to be accountable. You look at it. It's typical. This is how ego is, this is its nature. This is the way it is.

So, to go against this and slowly become accountable, you listen to the Buddha's views of karma – that your consciousness comes from you in the past, not your parents – it reinforces this ability to be accountable. Because my mind is mine, I came fully programmed with my tendencies. Don't blame anybody else. But this includes our

good ones as well, and we forget about those. We agonize, “Why do bad things happen to me?” We never agonize, “Why do good things happen to me?” We don’t care why, just give me more, you know. But we have all the good things for the same reason: I created the cause to have them.

## **FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS**

There are four ways in which our actions from the past lives – you know, before we even entered into this present womb of our mother – there are four ways those past actions ripen in the present. Or indeed, there are four ways in which our present actions leave seeds in the mind that will ripen in the future as one’s experiences. It’s a constant process, ongoing. Every microsecond of everything that goes on in our mind, and the things we do on the basis of those thoughts with our body and speech, this is the karmic process. This is constantly occurring. This is the natural process of cause and effect, constantly in play.

### **1. FULLY RIPENED RESULT: A REBIRTH**

The first, main one – they call it the Fully Ripened Result – is the type of rebirth we get born into. So, you know, if we’re materialists or if we’re Christians, for example, we both agree on one thing at least – that someone else made us. I was made by God. I was made by Mummy and Daddy. They’re the same principle, aren’t they? That you’re made by someone else. Which means it’s got nothing to do with you.

Whereas the Buddha says everything is to do with me. We are accountable. Our past actions are the main cause of why my mind found its way to my present mother’s human womb. Why blame your parents? They’re just lying there having fun and you come along. Which is kind of an interesting concept – who thought that you were the main cause of who you are? Big surprise!

Not more than a few weeks before conception in your present mother's womb, your consciousness was in another form, another life. And at the time – very simply speaking – at the time of the death of that life – and it doesn't always follow that it was a human life, there's a whole bunch of options of types of rebirth as far as the Buddha's concerned – at the time of the past death, then a very strong tendency of morality must have ripened at that time due to many, many, many complicated causes and conditions all coming together. So this is a very simplistic explanation of it.

We've programmed ourselves, basically, in a very major way with past practice of morality, of goodness, in the context, no doubt, of a spiritual path, which then ripened at the past death when the consciousness got to the subtle level and eventually left the body, which is when you're dead. Then after having been in the intermediate state, as they call it, like a dream state but out of the old body, our consciousness found its way very precisely into our present mother's Fallopian tube and joined the egg and sperm there.

The main cause of this is our past morality. Your father and mother having sex is just a co-operative cause. They did not make you, they did not create you. They merely had sex. Your consciousness had very strong karmic connection with them from past history with those particular parents. I mean, it's a highly complex scenario, you know, but simply speaking that karma ripened at the time of your death and then caused your mind to go on autopilot to find its way into our particular mother's human womb.

One lama said that at the time of a male and female human having sex, billions of consciousnesses that have recently passed away – and that's obviously not just from the human realm, Buddha would assert a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of consciousnesses existing in different realms – that at the time of the male and female having sex, billions of consciousnesses are all hovering around trying to get in. Well, we got in! From Buddha's point of view, we should be

weeping in delight every day at how fortunate we are, getting such an extraordinarily fortunate life. Human life – so few of those, obviously – we have more mosquitoes in one summer in the backyard than you have humans at any one time.

So, clearly it's easier to get a mosquito birth, dog birth, giraffe birth – maybe less giraffes, not so many of them – fish, who knows how many fish, plenty of fish – the vast majority – anyway, billions and trillions of other consciousnesses, we can see this. So, we got the human one. Amazing – already amazing. That's the first way our karma ripened – we got this human birth. But, you know, Mother Teresa and Hitler both got one of those, so where are the differences?

## **2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: OUR TENDENCIES**

That gets us to the second way in which our past actions ripened in the present. And this is our tendencies, our characteristics, our personality; our depression, our kindness, our wish to kill, our wish to lie, our being good at piano, our being good at maths; whatever it might be. And that's an interesting point, psychologically speaking. In Buddhist terms, whether you're good at love, good at anger or good at music: they're all simply tendencies. We make this big dramatic difference.

We are delighted to own responsibility for our being good at music, for example.

“Why are you good at piano, Robina?”

“Well, I've practiced for years and years.”

“Why are you good at anger, Robina?”

“Oh, that's not my fault. That's my father's fault!” No accountability whatsoever! We love being accountable for our being good at music, or maths or being a gymnast, you know, but not emotional stuff. We have this different set of laws when it comes to emotional stuff, which I find most fascinating – no logic at all.

The Buddha says, those tendencies – whether you're angry, jealous or just being good at music – are just tendencies. Why do we have a tendency? From having done it before. Quite simple. Mozart clearly had musical tendencies. Hitler clearly had other tendencies, and he expressed them, didn't he, in his actions.

Our mothers and fathers – this is a big shock to us – they're not the main cause of this. The absolute default explanation in the materialist world is it's all in the DNA and the genes. That's why we always go back to the parents to check why I am what I am. No, we don't need to. Yes, my mother was good at music. Everyone says, "Yeah, Robina's good at music because her mother was good at music". No – Robina's good at music because she practiced it before. So is my mother, and we happen to come together. And then she encouraged my music by teaching me. It doesn't come from your parents, Buddha said – it's a very simple point. A simple point, but shocking to us.

So, your tendencies – they call this Actions Similar to the Cause. They're yours. You're fully programmed with every one of these from the first second of conception. Millions of these different imprints, millions of these different tendencies.

### **3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE**

The third way that your karma ripens, your actions from the past ripen in the present, is called Experiences Similar to the Cause, and that's all the stuff that happens to you. The people you meet, the parents you get, the teachers, the abusers, the ones who are loving to you, the ones who rape you, the ones who give you a million dollars, the ones who are kind to you, the ones who steal from you, whatever it might be. The way you're treated and seen in the world. The main cause? Your past actions.

So Buddha puts us in the centre, in the absolute centre – each one of us – in the centre of responsibility for all our experiences. He says

our actions are the main cause of why we are who we are and why what happens to us happens to us. All the good and all the bad. This applies to giraffes, dogs, ants, fish, humans – all *sem-chens*. The term in Tibetan for “sentient being” is “*sem-chen*”, “mind-possessor”. Buddha says that there’s not an atom of space where you won’t find mind-possessors. Trillions of them. Buddhist psychology, interestingly, refers to all sentient beings, not just humans.

#### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA**

And fourth, they call it Environmental Karma, which is the very way the physical world impacts upon us. So here we are, sitting in this room. It’s quite pleasant, isn’t it? It’s quite peaceful, pleasant view out there, it’s quiet, you know – the walls aren’t dripping with mould. It’s pleasantly painted. It smells nice.

Don’t take this for granted – this experience of a pleasant environmental experience is the result of our collective virtue. If suddenly the building explodes, or a gunman comes in, this is due to our collective non-virtuous karma.

Basically, Buddha’s point about karma is that suffering, when everything goes wrong – could be externally, could be the people, could be the environment, could be in your own mind – when everything’s out of whack, out of balance, disharmonious, when the elements are all crazy, when people are all fighting, when people are mean to you, when your own mind’s berserk, this is the result of negativity. It’s not blame, it’s not punishment. There’s no concept of punishment in Buddhism. It’s a natural law. And positive karma is the cause of things working harmoniously and nicely.

So the four ways your karma ripens: the very fact that you’re this human being, with this very particular family and friends and people who harm you and people who help you – whatever those experiences are. All your tendencies and even the way the physical world impacts upon you – where you were born, the way the physical

world is, all of this – our actions in the past are the main cause of this. Buddha puts us absolutely in charge. “We are the boss”, Buddha says.

### **I’M THE BOSS**

So if I am the boss of my own present experiences, if I am the cause of it, then indeed I can be the cause of my future experiences – which is why you should then check up, do I like this life, do I like people punching me in the nose? Do I like having people being angry at me? Do I like being depressed and angry and jealous and poor and living in an ugly environment and all polluted or horrible? No, I don’t. Then, okay, there must be causes of this; what were they? You check up; well, do I like this? No. Well, guess what, what’s the solution? Don’t do it again, baby! It’s pretty simple.

This is Buddhist practice. Not complicated. It’s just that we fight mightily against this because it sounds like blame, “Oh you mean it’s my fault? I must go and kill myself”. because we’re used to this dualistic view of “poor me” “victim me” “not fair” “life is done to me, I didn’t ask to get born, it’s not my fault”. That is the default mode of ego.

### **FOUR WAYS THAT KILLING, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD RIPEN**

Let me give one example of one action and the four different ways it ripens; let’s say “killing”. So, one of the main – we can see, generally, if we look at the world, one of the most harmful things we do with our bodies is to kill other beings, wouldn’t you agree? It’s quite an intense way to harm. And that, in Buddha’s view, would be any sentient being.

So, as a result of killing in the past – those four ways I described – if it ripens at the time of your death, and it becomes the main karma, it would program your consciousness to cause you to get born in a

very suffering type of life like an animal realm or a spirit or something like that. Okay. So we can deduce in our case, it was morality that ripened because we got a human life. And the Buddha would say that in general, getting a human life is the result of morality ripening.

But then we look at the next way karma ripens is as a tendency, so the second way killing ripens is as a tendency to kill. Now look at humans – we might be born humans, our main karma that caused the life itself is morality, but lots of humans kill, don't they? Can you see that? So, lots of humans, due to past killing, are born with the tendency to keep killing.

The third way killing ripens is called as an experience – which is you get killed or you die young, or you get sick. So anything that's an experience of where – the opposite to health, or the opposite to the length of life, or the opposite to that, that's the result of harming or killing. Do you understand? So, generally speaking, sickness – the elements not working properly, food not being digestible, things harming us instead of nourishing us, this is the result of past killing, in general.

So, for example, the fourth way, environmental karma, would be the very environment itself, which is meant to nurture us, nourish us, right? – it harms us. Look at people who eat peanuts – that's a particular environmental karmic result for a person from past killing, where just peanuts will kill them. We've got the collective karma now to have poisoned water, haven't we? More and more – who drinks water out of rivers anymore? So there's pollution – polluted water, polluted air...where the elements themselves are harmful to us. That's the result of killing. Do you understand? Make sense?

## **IDENTIFY THE CAUSES OF A PROBLEM, THEN WE KNOW HOW TO FIX IT**

In the Second Noble Truth, the Buddha states the causes of suffering, and he narrows it down to two main causes: karma and delusions. And they subsume down to the one: delusions. Delusions are the main cause of suffering: because of these we do negative actions, we harm others.

So, in relation to the two causes of suffering, karma and delusions, there are two levels of practice. The most immediate, the most urgent, as Rinpoche puts it, is in relation to the delusions: at the very least refrain from creating more negative karma in day-to-day life. So, if someone punches your nose, you at least protect your mind to not create more negative karma. And that's our ongoing, everyday practice, watching our body, speech and mind like a hawk every minute.

But the second one is in relation to karma, for all the countless past seeds we've already got, all sitting in our mind right now, trillions of lives-worth of seeds, latent, waiting for the appropriate conditions to ripen as one's suffering. Obviously we need to get ahead of the game and purify them before they ripen.

## **THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN REBIRTH**

Q: Earlier you were talking about...coming as a human...the seeds have ripened, you've got high morality...

A: As a result of the practice of morality and goodness and keeping vows we get this particular life; yes, in general, even an ordinary human life is the result of a lot of morality karma ripening at the time of the previous death.

Q: If we come back as a dog, does that mean that we...I mean, in my mind I don't see that necessarily as a lower form...?

A: I understand. I understand. Okay. Where that fits is this. Would you agree – as nice as dogs are – would you agree they're not

very bright? I mean, you talk to them about developing compassion, they don't really get it. You try to explain emptiness to them, they're a bit thick. You try to teach them piano, I mean they're just like a bit limited. I'm not being rude about dogs. They don't have many options in their minds.

Let me put it this way. If you want a really long neck, best to be a giraffe. Guaranteed. If you want to fly, be a bird. But, honey, if you want to work with your mind, and have a few more options, probably best to be a human.

So, it's a contextual thing. It's not high or low or some kind of hierarchy – it's a question of what you want to achieve. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said one time, if just for a couple of minutes you could have a direct experience of the mind of your little cute doggy-woggy, the mental suffering of the most profound ignorance of that mind would be so intense, you'd never want to waste another second of your precious human life. That's the ordinary ignorance of an animal's mind.

Now, we don't think this way in our culture, I agree. But just think about it – it's a different way to look at what ignorance is. We all have ignorance. Ignorance is the term for this ego-grasping that's this panic state that rises as soon as we're attacked or insulted or hurt or don't get what we want. Well, animals live in that one. Your dog has been living in your house for years, and it barks every time it hears the gate squeak. By now you'd think he would have learned it's the gate squeaking. But he doesn't, the poor thing, because he's paranoid. His big eyes are round, he's barking like crazy; his unhappy mind: it's called fear, and fear is a function of ego-grasping, ignorance. So if you think of it this way, without being mean to dogs. Buddhist psychology refers to all living beings, remember, not just humans.

## **KARMA IS RIPENING AND WE'RE CREATING IT EVERY MICRO-SECOND**

Q: Does the consciousness that moves from lifetime to lifetime – is that a ...collection of seeds or is it –

A: It's a collection of seeds or a bunch of programming.

Q: So, what happens, say for example in this life, like if a karmic seed has ripened, or a number of karmic seeds have ripened over a lifetime, that consciousness that moves on, it is based on those seeds that are left in the consciousness....

A: Every microsecond that you're existing – so, what's your name?

Q: Helen.

A: Okay. So here we have Helen. So your consciousness, every microsecond right now it's working. Every second, you're doing something, thinking something, feeling something, assuming something. Each second, you're programming your mind, aren't you? Every second, you're sowing a karmic seed. Whatever we do, say and think leaves imprints in the mind. So this is your consciousness.

If you tracked it back, just logically going back, each second, each second, you get back to the first moment of conception, wouldn't you? Then you have to go back to a moment before that. And it's the same continuity of mind. And then a previous life, and a previous life and you go back a million lives.

So we can deduce that there's this particular tracking of consciousness that at this moment in time is labeled "Helen" on the basis of this particular human form. So that consciousness, that river of mental moments, will continue to be programmed by whatever goes on in it and it leaves this body, and program, program, and takes another body, program, program – so it just keeps going.

The Buddha says we're usually not in charge of this process, because we think everybody else does it to us, it's not my fault, and how dare? and all this business. But if you're really in charge of this process, you're cleaning up your act. You're stopping programming

your mind – as best you can – with more negativity. You're trying to program your mind with positivity, and you're purifying the seeds you've already grown – hopefully this is your spiritual procedure – until eventually you've cleaned up your mind completely and now you're an enlightened being. Do you see what I'm saying?

Q: So, it is a collection that keeps on going from lifetime to lifetime until you...

A: ...cleaned up all the rubbish and grown up all the good. That's it. Precisely. That's it. That's what the process of becoming enlightened is all about. That's the Buddhist way of putting it. You understand. We're communicating, right?

Q: And every microsecond, we're experiencing the ripening of karma, and creating more.

A: Precisely. That's right. That's exactly the point. Every microsecond is the fruit of a past one, and on the basis of this we do more. So that's why we've got to get ahead of the game. Stop creating the negative ones, clean up our act, control body and speech, clean up the mind, rip out the negative ones from the mind, and then grow the positive ones, and eventually it will be a mind that's called enlightened – fully developed in goodness and completely rid of badness. That's what it is and that's where we're heading. So it's not a random thing... if one is in charge of the process, it's not a random thing at all. You're really on track with it and you know what you're doing. You know what to do, what to say, what to think, what not to do, what not to say, what not to think, what seeds to sow, and you just keep on bopping.

## **4. THERE'S NO KARMA THAT CAN'T BE PURIFIED**

**VEN. ROBINA COURTIN**

As Lama Yeshe says, “We create negativity with our mind, so we can purify it by creating positivity with our mind.” This is the process of purification.

If we are the creators of our own reality, our experiences, then we change things. Of course, easy to say, but very hard to see this, mainly because we're addicted to the samsaric way of interpreting life: that we didn't ask to get born, that it's not my fault: so deeply ingrained in us!

### **THERE IS SUFFERING: FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

So, if we're sick of suffering, we'd better know how to accurately identify it. This is the First Noble Truth. There are three levels of suffering.

#### **1. The Suffering of Suffering**

This is in-your-face suffering; all the bad things that happen.

#### **2. The Suffering of Change**

Now this is a bit depressing, because it's what we actually call happiness. Buddha calls it suffering. It's a sneaky, honey-covered razor blade; it's basically when attachment gets what it wants. It looks to us like happiness, but it's just the junkie getting the fix. It's actually fraught with suffering.

#### **3. All Pervasive Suffering**

The third kind of suffering, even more subtle – we don't even give it a name in our culture, or even in our religions – is being born in the first place with this body, which is the body of a junkie in a world constructed of junk, and to survive you need to ingest it. There's no

choice: it's all in the very nature of suffering. That's the third level of suffering.

## **THERE ARE CAUSES OF SUFFERING: THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH**

So, we're locked in suffering – the world is in the nature of suffering, the Buddha says. And why all this? Well, it's got causes – that's the Second Noble Truth. And guess what? There are two main causes, and we created both of them. It's scary – we think it all comes from everybody else.

One is the **1. past karma**, the past action, that left the seed in your mind when you did the negative action that is now ripening as your suffering. And the second cause, and actually they both subsume down to this one, is the **2. delusions** in the mind that cause you to do the negative action in the first place, which then again manifests when you punch me in the nose and I say, "How dare you," and I punch you right back, and the ball keeps rolling.

## **TWO LEVELS OF PRACTICE**

### **1. WATCH OUR BODY, SPEECH AND MIND LIKE A HAWK AND REFRAIN FROM DOING HARM NOW**

So, in relation to these two causes of suffering, there are two main kinds of practice. And as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, the first one, the most immediate, the most urgent, is in relation to the second cause of suffering, the delusions: do not respond in a deluded way to the good and bad things that happen every day, which are the fruit of our past action.

You own these karmic appearances as yours, so you do everything in your power to not respond with negative mind, body, or speech. You do everything in your power to avoid harming the person back or grasping at the good things; you watch your mind like a hawk and try

not to sow more negative seeds. That's your first immediate practice. Every minute, watch your mind like a hawk, watch your body and speech like a hawk. You avoid at least creating more negative karma in relation to the situations of daily life.

The second one is where you now have to take care of the karma you've already created in all the countless past lives, the seeds that are lying in your mind, latent, waiting for the conditions to ripen as your suffering. They haven't ripened yet; so you've got to get ahead of the game, you've got to pull them out, or at the very least weaken them. And that's what purification is.

### **THE FORCE OF OUR PAST HABITS**

But before we get into purification, first let's look at why it's so hard to do the most immediate level of practice, the most urgent: to watch our body, speech and mind and not create negative karma now.

So it's a tough one, because the tragedy of karma is, we're brainwashed, we're completely conditioned, we're completely habituated, we're completely brainwashed – not by others but by our own past actions, habits. We are propelled by the force of our past habits.

Now, when it comes to good things, aren't we fortunate? For example, a friend of mine taking the lice out of her three-year-old son's head, and the little boy cries, "Mummy, Mummy, leave them alone, don't hurt them. It's their home." The little boy is full of compassion. He's three. She hasn't taught him this. So *he* is propelled by the force of *his* past karma, which is his compassion. We can deduce logically that he has practiced compassion in the past so that now it arises just naturally. How fortunate that spontaneous compassion arises in his three-year-old mind and he cries with compassion for the lice in his own head! How marvelous! Programming is good when it's virtuous karma.

Look at Mozart: his mother gives him a piano at the age of six, off he goes writing, his sonatas. We can deduce that he's programmed with music. When I popped out of my mother's womb, shouting and kicking, we can deduce that I was programmed with anger. So, it's a tough one when the programming is negative, because whatever's happening to you appears bad, not fair; it feels so spontaneous that you believe that anger is totally right.

Another example I use, a friend of mine, another mother of a child – she said when her little boy first saw the fishing, he ran like a magnet. She hated fishing. She never taught him this. He saw fishing and he ran like a magnet. Why? Because he had the karma to kill. We can deduce he's been in the lower realms in the past, he's finished that karma, but the tragedy is, he didn't purify all aspects of it. He's still got the residual result, which in this life is the habit to keep killing. The habit is very strong. The three-year-old boy with compassion, he didn't have to think about it; it just spontaneously came because he'd practiced compassion in the past. So this little boy, he must have practiced killing in the past. He saw the river, the fishing, attachment is instantly activated. He was magnetized by the fishing, it looked so delicious to him. And the thing you run like a magnet to is a thing you've done before, then you put your attachment glasses on instantaneously so it will look good to you, it will therefore trigger a good feeling, therefore logically you assume, "Oh, this must be good because it gives me a good feeling." So then he pursued it. He followed the fishing. He became a professional fisherman.

She said she went fishing with him one time, to please her boy. And she found it unbearable. All she could see was suffering fish. All she could see was the fish, who by their body language were clearly showing that – poor things – they would rather be in the water, please! The poor things can't shout; they haven't got a voice. Their poor little eyes can't show much; the best they can do is wriggle their

body, isn't it? I mean, if he had the addiction, the attachment to killing pigs, you'd *know* the pigs were unhappy – they'd squeal and kick and try to run away on their little legs. Who'd want to go pig killing? Nobody. We go fishing because they die seemingly peacefully, poor things – they don't make a noise.

So he can't see suffering. All his life he's killed fish; he's attached to it. He's addicted to it. Every single day going out – and the feeling of feeling good. This wonderful feeling comes from attachment to something. So, because the world accepts fishing, no-one's going to argue with him. If he was attached to killing poodles, he would've been in trouble – keep it secret, snuck out at night. No. Fishing, everyone does it so no-one tells him it's not good. So he never questioned it.

But his mother, having no attachment to fishing, all she can see, nakedly, is the suffering of the fish. He literally couldn't see it, and this is the proof that we make up our own stories based upon what's in our minds.

So, because he had a habit to kill and attachment to it, then his rose-colored spectacles caused it to look good. He couldn't see the suffering. Literally. He was a lovely human being, she said, a kind, lovely, generous man. But he was blinded; and that's what attachment causes – so sneaky. It blinds us from seeing the truth. She saw suffering; he couldn't see it. He'd been doing it for years, killed hundreds of thousands of little fishies. He felt blissful. This is the tragedy of habit.

## **JUNKIES FOR PLEASURE**

So we are propelled by the force of our past habit. And that, conjoined with the attachment – you're lost. Completely lost. That's why it is so hard to change – because we are junkies for pleasure. We are junkies for pleasure. That's this human realm. Buddha calls it a desire realm. So that means we are junkies for pleasure; we are born

with these senses that crave their objects. The moment we get the object, that's what we mean by happiness. If we feel happy, then we logically deduce the action we did must be good.

The same with the torturer – I remember reading about one of those guys years ago, a multi-murderer and a torturer. He said, from the time he could remember, he was compelled to kill, to torture and kill creatures, little ants and animals, because it gave him pleasure. And then of course as he got older, he graduated to humans.

He intellectually knew it was wrong; because he could see the world didn't approve, but you know, he had to keep it secret, of course. But he was totally addicted to the pleasure that it gave him. Why? Habit from the past, programming from karma.

We think in the West, Oh, he's just this devil, he's an evil person. But the logical reason he did it is because of his past killing, no doubt as an animal, torturing – look at animals, they torture each other all the time. Constant. They're just addicted to torture. Being tortured and torturing – that's what animals do. Worst, most intense suffering. This guy – karmic imprint, you know, of torture. And what happened? He got pleasure from it: habit meets attachment equals pleasure. And the logic is, "It must be good, because it gives me a good feeling." Of course, the world doesn't agree, so he's going to keep it quiet. There's always this conflict in his mind. But he is addicted to the pleasure.

Look at our pathetic little habits, you know. Overeating, smoking, junkies for sex, maybe... look how hard it is to get past our old habits, and we've got pathetic little habits, you know. Imagine if you got born with the habit to torture! What a terrible suffering – can you imagine? Or just to even kill fish and not realize it's suffering, not realize it's negative, all because it feels good. This is why attachment is so tricky.

This is why we have to have really logical, intelligent minds to have a sound basis for what is good and what is not, and then judge

our experiences according to it. And then struggle to change our old habits. It's a tough job, because we are propelled by our habits. We're on autopilot, you know. We think we make choices. We think we're intelligent. We're not. We're just junkies for habits, you know, craving to get good feelings. Stuff the food in, whatever we do. So we have to look into our minds carefully, and then struggle to change the habits. And it is a struggle, we all know that.

So that's the immediate level of practice, the most urgent, as Rinpoche says, the here and now, dealing with what arises every second.

## **2. PURIFY THE KARMIC SEEDS THAT HAVE NOT YET RIPENED**

This other one – the purification – is to deal with the seeds that haven't even manifested yet, that one can see no evidence of. This is called purification. And as Lama Zopa says, we are insane not to do this practice every day.

### **PURIFICATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS**

So, like all this work in Buddhism, this process of purification is practical, it's psychological. A really easy way to remember is – and I like this one – is to call the steps the Four Rs. There are different orders of these, according to the practice, but I like this particular order.

The first one is Regret, the second one is Reliance, the third, the Remedy, the fourth one, Resolve, the determination to make changes.

#### **1. FIRST OPPONENT POWER: REGRET**

So the first one is you've got to acknowledge what you've done wrong. If you've taken poison, let's say, the very first step is to recognize that you've done it. You've got to first acknowledge there's a problem. It's

pretty reasonable. You've first got to acknowledge you've eaten poison. "Oh, what a fool! Quick, what can I do about it?" Then you find yourself a decent doctor; then you do something to purify it, you apply the antidotes. Then you determine never to do it again. This is reasonable; it's practical, it's common sense.

Trouble is, when it comes to morality, we seem to have this other set of rules and we get all guilty and ashamed and neurotic, or we blame; we're ridiculous. We do everything to avoid responsibility.

### **BLAME, GUILT, DENIAL**

When it comes to doing things like killing and lying and stealing, instead of simply acknowledging it, we want to find someone else who's fault it is. That's as ridiculous as trying to find someone to blame for the poison in my dinner. You're dying, but all your thoughts are for blaming. Blame is pretty useless, which is our typical mode.

Another typical mode is guilt – "Oh, I ate poison. Oh, I'm such a bad person. I ate poison." Every day, you're getting sicker and sicker..."Oh, I'm such a bad person, I ate poison." We love to live in this one. Completely useless. Complete waste of time. Totally impotent. It's the same as blame, but you're the person you're blaming. One is anger, one is self-blame. They're the same problem.

The third one, even more ridiculous – and we love this one – "Robina! There's poison in your dinner!" "There is not!" We call it living in denial.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

So we've got to be accountable. This entire process of purification is based upon the understanding of karma and on the recognition that you don't want suffering. Regret, the first step, is all about yourself.

So, we have guilt, now, which beats ourselves up. "I'm just a bad person." Blame or guilt, we run to these spontaneously because they

are a natural response to having ego-grasping, of having this ignorance that clings to the self-existent me. It's this dualistic state of mind that naturally blames others, or naturally blames yourself. And we have to conquer that. We have to argue with that wrong view.

One time His Holiness was asked the difference between guilt and regret. It was such a sweet answer, but quite profound. He said: "With guilt, you look into the past and you go, "I did this and I did that and I did this," and then you go, "and I'm a bad person." We just assume naturally that if I've done bad things, I must be a bad person. That's how we think. That second thought is the view of ego, the view of ego-grasping, that over-exaggerates the badness, and paints the entirety of myself with that brush.

The same with blame. "You are a bad person. You did this and you did this and you did this and you're a bad person." This is what all delusions do; they exaggerate. And it's just not accurate. Forget being not morally right – it's just not accurate. It's an exaggeration. It isn't accurate to conclude because you've killed and lied and stolen, that you're a bad person. You're not. That's mistaken. Your *actions* are bad, no problem with that. That's clear. That's more precise.

But the point here is, then His Holiness said, "With regret, you also look into the past and think, "I did this in the past, and I did this, and I did this..." but then you think, "What can I do about it?" Now, we have to cultivate this consciously, it doesn't come naturally. Instead of saying, "...and I'm a bad person," you then say, "What can I do about it?" You change the thought. We have to cultivate that view. That's what regret is. It's wholesome, courageous, and optimistic.

You could say that regret is like compassion for yourself. Like the poison, the reason you say, "Oh my God, what an idiot! Quick, where's the doctor?" – it's obvious why you say this. You don't have to state it: you know that poison will cause you suffering, and you know you don't want suffering. Well, same here. You're sick of

suffering, and you understand that having harmed others will cause you suffering.

### **WE HAVE TO SAY THE WORDS**

So, when we do this practice at the end of the day, you speak out to yourself what you have done to harm others. You bad-mouthed your husband, you talked about your girlfriend behind her back, you took the pencil at work and you never returned it. I mean, maybe you're not going around torturing and killing too many people, but whatever it is, you've got to acknowledge it. "I did do this and this..." And then you check the main things throughout this life – maybe you had an abortion, maybe you went fishing, maybe you're a hunter: you acknowledge it, and you regret it.

And, of course, this step is most important if you have taken vows: lay or monastic vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. It's vital to regret having broken them, and not just this life but in the past as well.

And this is regret. You acknowledge what you have done to harm others and, because you don't want suffering yourself – this is the motivation behind regret (compassion for others comes in the second step), you regret having done it. "I regret this. Why? Because I'm sick of suffering. I don't want the suffering that will come from this if I leave that seed in my mind. Because if I do leave that seed in my mind – that poison – it will ripen as my suffering and – hey! – I do not want suffering."

This attitude does not come naturally to us. Guilt comes naturally! Even if we say the word regret, it still feels like guilt. So, we have to spell it out to make it a new thought. It's a really crucial point, I tell you. It's not enough just to say, "Oh, I regret killing and lying and stealing." It feels like guilt, so you've got to change the words.

The simple, most fundamental thing about karma is that everything you do and say and think leaves a seed in your mind that

can ripen as that experience for yourself in the future. You just have to think: do I like being stolen from? Nope. What causes people to steal from me? I must have stolen from them. So if I've just stolen a pencil, then I'll get stolen from in the future. I don't want that. It's just logic; you've got to think it through, if you apply the law of karma, you know.

So you've got to be logical. Think it through. Make it real for you, not just some religious feeling. Not some weird, guilty feeling. That's useless. It's practical – I regret having done this because I don't want to be stolen from, I don't want suffering, I'm sick of it. Yet again I've shot my mouth off – shouted at people. I'm sick of this habit. First of all, too, you can even right now see the suffering and the hurt it causes you, the pain of that anger, you're feeling all caught up in it and fed up with it and you're so sick of it. You've got to feel that pain and be fed up with it. "I'm sick of this suffering, I'm sick of this boring habit."

And, of course, the main suffering we do not want is to be born in the lower realms, which is the main result of negative actions. We really have to think these things through.

And we're just talking here of the habits that we do that harm others; we're not looking at just our own emotional problems yet. We're looking at the actions of our body and speech first – what we do to harm others first – killing, lying, stealing, bad-mouthing; there's only so many names for them. You regret them. Remember the things, your old habits in this life – you know, maybe you're addicted to sex and you harm people with your sexual attachment; but you look at the suffering you're causing yourself.

## **THE BUDDHA'S VIEW OF MORALITY**

You see, this is a very interesting point, let's look at this a bit more – Buddha's view of what morality is. It's a really important point to think about. The usual view we have about morality, which is why

we're like children and resisting it mightily, is because we think it comes from somebody on high forcing it upon us: either God or our mother or the judge or the police, you know. We think it's done to us.

It isn't like that, not for Buddha. I asked a Catholic priest, a friend of mine, "What defines something as a sin?" He said, "It's going against the will of God." That is what defines a sin: something you do that is against the will of God. Now, that's reasonable if God is the creator, and that's reasonable if you are a Christian. That's appropriate. That's correct.

But that's not the Buddhist definition of a negative action. Going against Buddha's views is not what defines something as negative. It's got nothing to do with Buddha! That's like saying, "Why is smoking bad? Oh, because my doctor told me not to." Your doctor's merely a messenger. The reason smoking's bad is because it'll hurt you, dear.

For Buddha, what defines killing as bad is really simple; it's because it harms another. Buddha says this is a conventional truth that you can prove quite quickly. You just do your market research in this world, in this room and you ask around, "Do you like getting killed, stolen from, lied to, kicked in the teeth?" Everybody will say no.

So we can deduce logically that a negative action is one that harms another, because you've just proven it by agreeing we don't like it. That's what makes it negative. It does not come from somebody on high, it's not set in stone; it is not, in other words, self-existent. It is a dependent arising. That's Buddha's view; it's a natural law. So, what a negative action is is one that harms another.

But in this very first stage of practice where you regret doing actions that harm others, the reason first – you have to hear this point – the reason you regret having done it is not for the sake of others yet; it's for *your* sake, remember? So, a negative action is defined as an action that harms another; but at this first step, you

regret it because your doing it programs your mind to keep doing it and to have it done to you, not to mention being born in the lower realms.

So, you regret it because *you* don't want the suffering. This is a crucial point. We've got to understand this, not just be vague about it. "Oh I do my Vajrasattva practice, oh I regret lying, killing..." We don't even give it thought, you know, we just wishy-washy gloss over it.

So a negative action is defined as one that harms another, but at this first stage – and this is the very meaning of the first level of practice in Buddhism – in the first scope of practice, junior school, I like to call it – His Holiness uses this analogy as well: the way the teachings in the lam-rim are structured, it's like the education system. In Tibetan medieval language they call it the Lower Scope of practice. So junior school level of practice is to control your body and your speech.

The reason you will regret killing and lying and stealing and bad-mouthing – and there's not that many actions you do with your body and speech that harm others, sexual misconduct, lying, killing, stealing, you know, shouting at people, harsh speech, talking behind backs; there's only so many. "You know what, I'm sick of this suffering, I'm sick of the pain it causes me right now and I do not want the karmic fruits of this in the future. No way! So I regret having killed, lied, stolen, etc. etc."

Then it makes it very real for you, because it's about yourself. Don't feel bad about this. Don't feel guilty, like I should just be having compassion for others. Compassion's the Great Scope – that's university, people! You've got to recognize your own suffering before you recognize the suffering of others. You've got to be sick of your own suffering – this is what renunciation *is* – you're sick of your own suffering. That's why you've got to contemplate what these ridiculous things that we do, do to *ourselves*. Don't gloss over this step, it's extremely important.

So, you regret the things you did today, yesterday, this life, in beginningless past lives – the things you’ve done with your body and speech to harm others. “I regret anything I have ever done, since beginningless time to any sentient being.”

And of course, for those of us with vows, deeply regret our broken vows: pratimoksha vows – vows of individual liberation, the vows you take for junior school and high school – if you’ve broken those, then you deeply regret having broken those. If you’ve taken bodhisattva vows, then you deeply regret having broken your bodhisattva vows. If you’ve taken tantric vows, you deeply regret having broken your tantric vows, because these are lifelong vows. So you regret these, hugely, because you don’t want the suffering that this can cause in the future: being separate from our lamas, the Dharma, the Buddha’s teachings, not to mention other suffering.

And if Buddha is right in asserting, as he does, that we’ve had beginningless lives, that we’ve had countless lives as animals, and that mightn’t be the most suffering life, but that’s where we do the most harm; animals just in their nature harm and get harmed. Look at one whale: it opens its mouth for one mouthful of one breakfast on one day and forty million creatures go in. And you get guilty because you killed one person. Get some perspective, please! That’s a lot of sentient beings. So they live in a killing environment; they live on killing, animals do. So, the harm we’ve done to sentient beings as animals is inconceivable in comparison to what we’ve done as humans.

So if our minds are beginningless and we’ve had these lives, we’ve done countless things and that means those karmic seeds are on our minds now. So, you better regret them, because you know you don’t want that suffering again! “I regret anything I’ve ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time.” Regret the lot! Because I do not want suffering – we’ve got to add that thought. “Because I am sick of suffering. Because I do not want suffering.” You’ve got to say

that. That's what makes it real, and not just some nice religious feeling. Not just guilt.

That's regret, the first of the four opponent powers.

## **1. SECOND OPPONENT POWER: RELIANCE.**

### **a. REFUGE**

Now you think, "Well, good! Whom can I turn to? Where's the doctor, please?" So you turn to Mr. Buddha. He's our doctor. Second step: Reliance.

There are two parts in Reliance: the first is reliance upon the Buddha; that's called Refuge. So what does that mean? Let's look at this again, carefully. If I'm a Christian, I would rely upon God, because he's my creator. So how I get purified is by requesting him to forgive me. Well, Buddha will forgive you; he's a nice guy, I promise. But it's got nothing to do with purification. Nothing. It's nice to be forgiven, but it's not the point. It is not the discussion. Quite different.

So we rely on Buddha because he's our doctor – he's got the methods; he's got the medicine. So, "Thank goodness I've got a decent doctor," you think. And you do a little prayer, you visualize Vajrasattva, the particular manifestation of Buddha that all the lamas praise as the best one for this practice.

In the bodhisattva path, the Buddha manifests as like, gorgeous, you know, jewelry on his arms and ears and throat, and silken clothing; they call it the royal aspect. This is coming from tantra, where that's a whole different discussion and it has to do with enhancing the senses and energizing them. It's quite different, another level. So, Buddha in that aspect is called Vajradhara, or in Tibetan, Dorje Chang.

When I first became a Buddhist, I really like this name "Dorje Chang" and I asked Lama Yeshe, "Who's Dorje Chang, Lama?" and he said, very simply, "He's the biggest Buddha, dear." I was very

proud to know I liked the biggest Buddha! So basically, that's the tantric aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha.

For this purification practice, we use another aspect of Vajradhara, who looks the same, but he's white: Vajrasattva. He's particularly to do with emptiness, because realizing emptiness is when you've finally cut the root of the delusions, and that's when we actually purify our minds. Until then, by doing this purification practice we are simply stalling the ripening, we're weakening the seeds, we're like burning them, we're not pulling them out completely. Until you've realized emptiness, you will never cut the delusions, you'll always have more suffering. We need to stop their ripening, though, and that's what the purification process does. So, one relies upon Vajrasattva.

So, we visualize him above our head, and then we take refuge, say a prayer remembering the Buddha, grateful to have a Buddha, and we imagine him as our own lama, who manifests as the Buddha for our benefit, to show us the way. That's what refuge means. You rely upon the doctor.

Now, you've got to look at what it means, "rely upon the doctor." Why would you rely upon a doctor? Two reasons: one, because you do not want more sickness and you need their medicine; and two, because you are confident they're a good doctor. It seems kind of obvious; you don't go to a doctor because they've got a cute nose. So you rely upon their advice. It's perfectly reasonable.

Here, of course, this implies having thought about the Buddha, seeing that he's valid, and wanting to rely upon the Buddha because you want his medicine so that you can heal yourself.

In other words, if you've never thought about suffering, and you haven't regretted anything you've done wrong because you haven't thought about suffering and its consequences, then the Buddha will be pretty meaningless to you. If you haven't taken poison, or you don't realize you've taken poison, you might have heard about some

amazing doctor who's got every antidote to every poison on earth, and you go, "Oh, how interesting. But how boring. Who needs him?" You don't care. But check how you feel when you've discovered you know you've taken poison; you're going to hang on every word that doctor says and take his advice perfectly.

## **b. COMPASSION**

The second part of Reliance is where you have compassion for those you have harmed. It's a bit curious that it's called reliance. The lamas put it like this: here we are, now wanting to cultivate compassion for the suffering of others. Whom do we rely up, or need, in order to accomplish compassion? Suffering sentient beings, of course. If we never meet a suffering sentient being, how could we ever cultivate compassion. It's in this sense that they say we "rely upon" sentient beings.

In the first step, Regret, it's like having compassion for yourself. You're regretting the harm you've done for your sake. Now here, what you need to cultivate is compassion for those you've harmed, and you regret for their sake and want to purify yourself for *their* sake. But you can't have that until you've got the first one. Compassion is based upon this first one, on Regret. You can't have compassion for the suffering of others until you've got this real sense of renunciation for your own suffering. It's impossible, you can't. You've got to have this one first.

Why? Very simple. Renunciation has two parts: The first part is: you are sick of suffering. Now, we all know that – we're all sick of suffering. But the second part's crucial: you now know *why* you're suffering – your past negative actions and your delusions. When you've got these two, that's renunciation.

Compassion is these two as well, but instead of yourself, it's applied to others. One: you see people suffering, and you find it unbearable. But, two: you now know why they are suffering, and

that's the big shift here. You now know why they are suffering: because of their karma and their delusions: They, like you, are the source of their own suffering. You don't have compassion because they're poor innocent victims, which is the only people we usually have compassion for now; we love to have compassion for innocent victims, usually animals and children.

Now you see others suffering and you know why they're suffering. It's a crucial difference and one has to cultivate it carefully. Again, it's completely based on the teachings of karma, so one has to think of this so carefully, analyze it so carefully. Because the feeling we have now is guilt and shame and hate and blame, you know.

Our compassion now on based upon there being no karma. We only have compassion for innocent victims, because we assume the cause of suffering is the horrible oppressor. Buddha says, "Wrong view." Actually, when you've got this view of compassion, you'll have even more compassion for the oppressor. That's a fact. Why? Very logical. It's like a mother for her junkie kid. Everybody else hates him – he lies, he steals, he's a pain to be around; but the mother, her heart breaks for him. Why? Because he is causing himself suffering. That's the basis of compassion.

You see people who are the victims of harm, you realize it's the result of their own past actions and your heart breaks for them, but you have even more compassion for the people who caused it, because the people who are the victims are just finishing their suffering and the ones who caused it are just beginning theirs.

Once you've got this first for yourself, which is renunciation: I'm sick of suffering, I know why I'm suffering: karma; then it's easy then to have compassion for others. You can't get it properly until you've got it for yourself. This is a reasonable psychological kind of progression, and all of it's based on karma.

Now, in this second part of the second step, Reliance, you think about compassion now. You think of those you've harmed, and you

know what it's like to suffer so you know what it's like for their suffering. You regret for their sake, now. Compassion for others.

And if you're brave enough, you can have compassion for those who have harmed you, because they're going to suffer in the future. And of course, the dynamic of all this is you know you caused them suffering in the past, that's how come they're causing you suffering now. When you've got karma down, you can own it so strongly.

### **WITH THE VIEW OF KARMA, NO BLAME, THEREFORE NO ANGER**

In 2003 I remember, in New York, I was there for a conference that Richard Gere had organized: a bunch of ex-prisoners, when His Holiness was there. Twenty ex-prisoners who had been meditating in prison: black and white, male and female, Puerto Rican, Mexican: a cross-section of American society. So people like me who had worked with people in prison were invited as well. We had this very nice talk all day, just a lovely conference, you know? And they all met His Holiness.

Richard also invited two young Tibetan nuns who'd been tortured and sexually abused in prison for a couple of years, basically for just being nuns. So they were telling their experience.

First of all, if you could quantify suffering, then it was obvious to all the Americans that the suffering of the nuns was more than all of theirs put together. But second, it was really clear they weren't angry, which is a big surprise to us. Because we have a victim mentality, and because we think we're innocent victims, and we think suffering is caused by others, we assume anger is normal; because anger is blame, isn't it? Anger is the response of the innocent victim.

But if you have the view of karma, you don't have blame. The nuns were sad, there were tears, but they weren't angry. And that's a big shock to us: we assume anger is normal; in fact, we'd think you're not normal if you don't have anger.

But these nuns, at the end of their talk, they said very quietly, “And of course, we had compassion for our torturers, because we knew we had harmed them in the past.”

This is a huge point. This is why we can't just gloss over karma, we've got to really give it thought. And this is the basis of all of Buddha's teachings. It is a way of spelling out the law of cause and effect. Really think it through – it's the basis of all practice. And it's the basis of compassion.

### **3. THIRD OPPONENT POWER: THE REMEDY**

So now, the third step. Now you take the medicine. You apply the antidote. You can say in Buddhism there's a whole medicine cabinet of remedies, but all the lamas in the Tibetan traditions praise this particular meditation, this particular visualization, this particular mantra as a really potent medicine. Often this step is simply called “applying the antidote.”

So, you know, anything here would apply. If you've got a habit to kill, you make a point of saving lives. You go get a bunch of worms and instead of having them killed as bait, you release the worms. It's a powerful thing to do. Or one of your practices could be, one of your antidotes could be to help sick people: anything you do that's opposite to the thing you're regretting. If you're regretting lying, you make a special point of telling the truth. You must do this anyway in your life. They are necessary.

But here, in this step, the very powerful practice, very powerful antidote, remedy – and one has to think about why it's powerful, not just because it's religion, you know – this very potent medicine of visualizing Vajrasattva and saying his mantra. This is said to be a very powerful medicine that works at a very deep level of your mind. So, one does this visualization of Vajrasattva purifying the various actions of your body, speech and mind and reciting the mantra.

All the lamas say that any practice that involves saying the Buddha's name, visualizing, reciting their mantras, is hugely powerful, far more powerful than practices that don't involve the Buddha. They talk about the "power of the object," the object of one's thoughts, actions, etc. So doing this practice of visualizing nectar coming from the Buddha and purifying your negative actions of body, speech and mind while you recite the mantra, is like an atomic bomb on the negative karmic imprints.

That's the third step.

#### **4. FOURTH OPPONENT POWER: RESOLVE**

And the fourth one, as Pabongka Rinpoche says, is the most important: Resolve, or the determination to change. If you can't own responsibility for what you've done wrong, you can never make the decision to change, can you, because you don't want to own it. First with regret and then the determination to change, you're really becoming accountable. You're really growing up. You're becoming mature. And you're becoming your own friend. That's why this practice is so crucial to do. Not just to gloss it over, say, "Oh I've done my Vajrasattva mantras..." That's not enough, I tell you. That's just not enough. You've got to think through these four steps. It's psychologically really profound. It's being your own therapist, as Lama Yeshe puts it, I'm not kidding.

Things really shift if we can do this properly, because this is where we get the courage to know we are in charge of our life and we *can* change. Because it's the power of our own will, our own determination to change.

So this fourth step, again, is so practical: you make determination not to do again. So, if you have taken vows – I will never kill, I will never lie, I will never steal – you've taken those five lay vows, and they're lifetime vows, so obviously you need to reiterate that vow.

Every time you say “I will never kill,” it’s like digging that groove deeper in your mind. It’s not enough to say, “Oh, yeah, I took vows twenty years ago. Twenty years ago I vowed I wouldn’t kill,” but you’ve never thought of it since. It’s like saying, “Oh, I’m a pianist, I played piano twenty years ago.” You’re not, unless you do it every day. We see these things as so self-existent. It’s not enough. It’s an ongoing, dynamic daily thing.

If every day you say, “I will never kill,” I mean, excuse me, guess what the result will be? It’s hardly rocket science. If every day you say it, that protects you every day from ever killing. It’s obvious. It’s so embarrassingly obvious. But we forget these things. So you need to reiterate your vows. I will never kill. I will never steal. I will never lie. I will never whatever they are. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows. You need to say this every day. Reiterate your commitments.

And it’s not just because you’re hoping God will make you good or Buddha will bless you; it’s you training your mind. Like if you do pushups every day, guess what? You keep getting better at it. We understand it when it comes to creativity and art and learning things, but we think this is “religion” so we don’t understand why I should say every day I’ll never kill. Because you’re training your mind in that direction. Because everything comes down to the thought. All you’re doing by becoming a Buddha is programming your mind with positive thoughts. It’s nothing more secret than that.

Then, of course, you don’t lie to yourself, as Rinpoche says. If you’re not ready to say I’ll never do it again, if you haven’t taken the vow, and you’re still going fishing every day or going hunting, then don’t lie to yourself and say “I’ll never kill again”; you’re not ready. Be realistic.

Look at our old habits, like getting angry. So maybe you’ll say, “Okay. I see the reasonableness of not getting angry. I’m going to give it a go. I won’t get angry for five hours.” Or you might say, “I won’t lie

for ten hours,” – and because you’ve got to go to bed soon, when you’re asleep, you won’t lie, believe me; you’ll keep your vow!

Be realistic; it’s an incremental thing, and you’ve got to take this seriously on board. That’s why you can’t just do your mantras and think, “I’ve done my practice.” It’s not enough. It’s a serious psychological procedure that you’re involved in. Practice is real; it’s you dealing with your own mind.

So, give yourself a timeline. And when it comes of course to your delusions, your neurotic thoughts, the things that harm you only – and I didn’t mention this in Regret – but of course you can think of your own rubbish: your own angry thoughts, your depression, your jealousy, which are destroying you. You can deeply regret these because it’s obvious the suffering it causes you; because you’re sick of the suffering.

Now here in this fourth step, you maybe can’t say, “I’ll never be depressed again”; it’s not possible, if you’re caught up in the middle of it. But you make some decisions for yourself; realistic, humble decisions. “Okay. I’m going to watch my mind like a hawk. I’m going to do my best tomorrow.”

Any vows you’ve taken, you must reiterate them at this step: I will never break my lay vows, I will never break my bodhisattva vows, I will never break my tantric vows, etc.

If you haven’t taken vows, and if you can start to say I will never kill, lie steal, etc., then great.

Take it at your own pace. Make decisions every night with this practice, and you will change. “We can mold our minds into any shape we like,” as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. We’re the boss, remember.

## **5. PURIFICATION: THE PRACTICE OF VAJRASATTVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS**

There is no negativity that cannot be purified. The purification process is basically a psychological one. As Lama Yeshe says, it is our mind (and on the basis of that our actions) that create the negativity and it is our mind that transforms it by creating positive energy. Although we rely on Buddha's methods for the purification, it is not as if it is Buddha purifying us or forgiving us; we ourselves do the purifying.

We purify by applying, the Four Opponent Powers.

### **THE PRACTICE**

Prostrate three times then sit. Bring your mind to a quiet state.

#### **1. THE POWER OF REGRET**

Sincerely regret, from the depths of your heart, anything you have done to harm any living being, on this day, in this life, in all past lives.

The reason to regret is based on the logic of karma: We experience everything due to our past karma, our past actions; so having harmed others we ourselves will necessarily experience suffering in the future. Thus we cannot bear the thought of the future suffering that we ourselves will experience. And who wants that? We know from the present suffering that we do not want it, so the logic is, therefore, to remove the karmic seeds before they ripen as future suffering.

Go through the three non-virtuous action of the body and four of the speech, regretting those we remember and those we don't, in

other words all the harm we have ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time.

If we have taken vows, then we must regret having broken them specifically: pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

For all of these, think like this: “I regret from the depths of my heart having harmed others, broken my vows, etc., because I do not want the future suffering. I am sick of suffering.”

Then think, “What can I do about it? Whom can I turn to?”

## **2. THE POWER OF RELIANCE**

### **Refuge**

We rely upon, turn to, the Buddha, the doctor, who has the methods that we can use to purify. It’s not that we need Buddha to forgive us; we purify ourselves by relying upon his methods..

Visualize Vajrasattva above the crown of your head. He is your guru manifesting in this aspect for your benefit.

He is in the bodhisattva aspect, radiant, blissful white light. He is adorned with jewels and silken clothes. He’s sitting cross-legged on a white lotus, which although born out of mud is untainted by mud, just like our enlightened potential, which is born out of our delusions but is untainted by them. His face is radiant and beautiful. His eyes are long (horizontally) and peaceful and full of love and compassion for you. His mouth is red and very sweet. His hair is black and held up in a top knot.

Guru Vajrasattva’s right hand, holding a vajra, which represents compassion and bliss, is at his heart; his left, holding a bell, which represents the wisdom realizing emptiness, is resting in his lap.

Now, say a prayer of refuge:

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha

I go for refuge until I am enlightened.

By this practice of meditating on Guru Vajrasattva

May I reach Buddhahood so as to benefit all sentient beings!

**b. Compassion** In order to develop compassion, we need to rely upon other beings, the very beings we have harmed and who have harmed us, by developing compassion for them.

Think in particular of people you have harmed recently; and in the past; and then, in general, all beings we have ever harmed since beginningless time.

Then remember those who have harmed you: have compassion for them because they will suffer as a result of the harm they have done to you.

Make the strong aspiration to do this practice of purification for the sake of all these sentient beings. “I must purify for their sake.”

### **3. THE POWER OF THE REMEDY**

This is the actual medicine, the doing of the actual practice of purification. There are three stages to the meditation, and it consists of visualization and recitation of mantra.

#### ***a. Purification of body***

Guru Vajrasattva very compassionately sends powerful white nectar, like coming out of a hose very forcefully, from his heart. It arcs around and enters your crown and pours into your entire body, filling you completely. It keeps coming and it forces out of your lower orifices all the harm you have ever done to any living being with your body in the form of inky liquid, which pours out of you and disappears into space, not one atom left. Feel completely purified.

Recite the mantra as you visualize (3 or 7 or as many as you wish):

#### **Short mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM

### **Long mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA  
/ DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO SHAYO MAY  
BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA  
HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA /  
VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Then be delighted that all the harm you have ever done to any sentient being with your body is completely purified. And think that there is no way you could do anything but benefit others now with your body.

### ***b. Purification of speech***

Again, Guru Vajrasattva very happily sends powerful nectar from his heart chakra. It arcs around and forcefully enters your crown, filling your entire body, this time forcing up to the top of your body all the negativity of your speech, which overflows and disappears into space, not one atom left – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on the tap in the sink and fill the dirty glass, all the junk in glass comes to the top and overflows.

So imagine that all the gossip and harsh speech and useless speech and lying and talking badly about others behind their backs – all this is purified by the powerful nectar filling you.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

### **Short mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM

### **Long mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA  
/ DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO SHAYO MAY

BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA  
HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA /  
VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Again, feel so happy that your speech is now completely purified. And imagine that it's not possible that you could do anything but benefit others with your speech.

### ***c. Purification of mind***

Third, Guru Vajrasattva now very compassionately sends powerful beams of laser light from his heart chakra, which arcs around and enters your crown chakra and fills your entire being – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on a light in a room the darkness is instantly dispelled. So, just as the light hits your heart chakra, the darkness of the negativity of your mind – all the attachment and neediness, the anger and violence, the depression and resentment and jealousy and bitterness, etc. – all instantly dispelled, not one atom left.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

### **Short mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM

### **Long mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA  
/ DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO SHAYO MAY  
BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA  
HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA /  
VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Again, be delighted that all your delusions, which are the source of our own suffering and the cause for why we harm others with our body and speech, are totally purified, gone, finished.

Think: there is no space in your heart now for anything but love and kindness and forgiveness and wisdom and bliss and compassion.

#### ***d. Purification of even the imprints of negativity of body, speech and mind***

This time imagine that Guru Vajrasattva sends light again and it fills you completely and eradicates even the subtlest imprint of negative energy from your mind. (It's like once you removed the garlic from a jar, you still need to remove the smell.) Again recite the mantra.

##### **Short mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM

##### **Long mantra**

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA  
/ DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO SHAYO MAY  
BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA  
HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA /  
VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Now feel you are completely purified, not one atom of negativity left in your mindstream; even the subtlest obscurations to omniscience have been removed.

#### **4. THE POWER OF RESOLVE**

The fourth step in the purification process, and such a crucial one, is the determination to change, to not to harm with our body, speech

and mind again. Without this, we keep doing the same old things. The determination, the aspiration, to not harm again is like a beacon that guides our body, speech and mind in new directions. Remember, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “Everything exists on the tip of the wish, the aspiration.”

If you have taken vows, then think, “I will never break my pratimoksha vows. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows and commitments.”

As for our other old habits, if we can’t commit to never do them again, then don’t lie to ourselves, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. So think carefully and then decide to refrain from them for a year, a month, a day, even a minute – whatever is realistic. Then in general vow to make the effort to avoid the others.

This determination not to do again is what gives us the strength to change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Guru Vajrasattva is delighted with us. Wanting to merge with your mind, he melts into white light and absorbs into you through your crown. Think: “My guru’s body, speech and mind, Vajrasattva’s body, speech and mind, my own body, speech and mind: same thing.” “Union-oneness,” as Lama Yeshe would say. Meditate on this.

Next, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends, meditate on the emptiness of the three circles: “In emptiness, there is no I, creator of negative karma; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created.” Place your mind in that emptiness for a little while. In this way, look at all phenomena as empty – they do not exist from their own side.

## DEDICATION

Finally, dedicate all the merit, the positive energy, you have created by doing this purification to all living beings: see chapter 10.

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## THE FOUR TYPES OF KARMIC RESULTS THAT THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS PURIFY

**1. The power of regret** purifies the *experience similar to the cause*, which, let's say for killing, is to get killed, to die young or to get sick.

**2. The power of reliance**, *Refuge and bodhichitta* purify the *environment result*, which for killing is living in a place where the food and medicine are not conducive to good health.

**3. The power of the remedy**, in this case the *visualization and recitation of mantras* – or whatever action one does as the actual antidote – purifies the *throwing karma* that causes birth in the lower realms.

**4. The power of the resolve or determination not to do again** purifies the *action similar to the cause*, which in a sense is the worst result: it's the habit to keep killing, which propels one back into the lower realms.

## THE MEANING OF THE MANTRA

**OM** the qualities of Buddha's holy body, speech, and mind; all that is auspicious and of great value

**VAJRASATTVA** the being who has the wisdom of inseparable bliss and

emptiness

**SAMAYA** a pledge that must not be transgressed

**MANU PALAYA** lead me along the path you took to enlightenment

**VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA** make me abide closer Vajrasattva's vajra  
holy mind

**DIDO MAY BHAWA** please grant me a firm and stable realization of  
the ultimate nature of phenomena

**SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA** please grant me the blessing of being  
extremely pleased with me

**SUPO SHAYO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of well developed  
great bliss

**ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of the love that  
leads me to your state

**SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA** please grant all powerful attainments

**SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY** please grant all virtuous actions

**TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU** please grant your glorious qualities

**HUM** the vajra holy mind

**A HA HA HA HO** the five transcendental wisdoms

**BHAGAWAN** one who has destroyed every obscuration, attained all realizations, and passed beyond suffering

**SARVA TATHAGATA** all those who have realized emptiness, knowing things just as they are

**VAJRA MA MAY MUTSA** do not abandon me

**VAJRA BHAWA** the nature of indestructible inseparability

**MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA** the great pledge being; the great being who has the pledge, the vajra holy mind

**AH** the vajra holy speech

**HUM** the transcendental wisdom of great bliss

**PHAT!** clarifying the transcendental wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness and destroying the dualistic mind that obstructs it

## **COLOPHON**

By Ven. Robina Courtin, based on the teachings of her lamas, Lama Thubt

## **6. OUR LIFE BELONGS TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

### **SO MANY SENTIENT BEINGS SUFFER FOR US**

When we realize that being caught up in samsara is the most frightening thing, we won't be able to stand it for even one second.

But not only that: so many sentient beings have to suffer for us, for our comfort, so that we can survive. So many beings had to die so that we can enjoy shelter. So many beings were killed so that we could have clothes. So many sentient beings had to die so that we could eat and drink. Think of just the chickens: billions of chickens are killed in the world every day just for food. And then so many sentient beings had to create negative karma by killing the chickens and all the other beings for our food and our clothes. So many beings get crushed and die when we drive a car. So many sentient beings suffer many hardships for us.

### **WANTING HAPPINESS FOR OTHERS BRINGS HAPPINESS FOR YOURSELF**

Devoting your life to achieving happiness for others is the best way to achieve your own happiness. You become like the rising sun, illuminating all. In this way, you achieve happiness now, every day, every hour, and every minute. By continuing to live your life like this, you go from happiness to happiness and at the end of your life, when you pass away, you have so much happiness and no regrets, not the slightest fear of or worry about dying, only incredible enjoyment.

You can even die for others: to give happiness to all living beings, temporarily and ultimately, and to free all living beings from suffering and its causes.

And you can help others around you. If you have the opportunity, talk to them. Think that you're there to liberate them. Talk to them about the good heart, teach them compassion, and how to look at everything as positive. It will give peace and happiness to them.

### **WITHOUT COMPASSION LIFE IS USELESS**

Even if a person can live for many eons, if there is no compassion, if life does not become useful for other sentient beings, it is empty and meaningless. Even if a person has a lot of power, if there is no compassion, power is dangerous. Without compassion, power is used by the ego, by self-cherishing, and it becomes dangerous for the world, for oneself and for others.

If there is no good heart, no compassion, no thought to benefit others, it doesn't matter how much education we have, life is empty and meaningless. All the education is used just to develop selfish ego and delusions. There is no meaning in having an education without a good heart, the thought of benefiting others.

It doesn't matter how much wealth a person has, life is empty if there is no compassion. Being rich is not the purpose of life. Being healthy is not the purpose of life. Having a long life is not the purpose of life. These things are not the meaning of life. The purpose of life is to be beneficial for others, useful for other sentient beings.

If you are able to make your life beneficial for other sentient beings, to bring them happiness, then your purpose in life is achieved.

### **EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH COMPASSION**

When you have problems, you can experience them for others, use them to develop compassion for others. Thus you use your problems to achieve enlightenment, your problems become the path to enlightenment.

If you have cancer or AIDS, for example, you can experience your illness with compassion, for the sake of other sentient beings, to bring them all happiness up to and including enlightenment. Thus your sickness becomes the path to enlightenment.

Even if you have a bad reputation, you can experience it for sentient beings. Therefore, all problems – being in prison, failed relationships, illness, business failure, unemployment, bad reputation – become a special, heroic practice. Before, such experiences were something that you disliked and only wanted to get rid of. But now, with your practice of compassion, they become highly desirable, so powerful and special, even necessary, for the development of your mind in the path.

## **GREAT COMPASSION IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF BODHICITTA**

The determination that drives bodhisattvas to bear hardships and work continuously for sentient beings comes from bodhicitta, which itself comes from great compassion. This root, compassion, fuels the skies of benefit that derive from bodhicitta, like rocket fuel powers a spaceship or electricity generated by a power station lights up an entire city.

It is great compassion that has already brought numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in the past, brings numberless sentient beings to enlightenment at present, and will bring numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in the future. It is great compassion that makes numberless buddhas do perfect, unmistakable work for numberless sentient beings until they achieve enlightenment. And it is great compassion that causes all buddhas to have omniscient mind and the perfect power to benefit all sentient beings.

Your own great compassion will become the source of peace and temporary and ultimate happiness of numberless sentient beings,

including all the beings in this world, in your country, your own parents, companion, children and, lastly, yourself.

Without compassion in your heart all you have is ego, which both directly and indirectly harms all sentient beings, including those in this world, in your country, your own parents, companion, children, and yourself. Your compassion is the source of happiness of even the people and animals you encounter in everyday life.

Without compassion there are only personality ego-clashes and many other problems – anger, jealousy and the like. Without compassion your life is overwhelmed by problems, like a mouse trapped in a cage and killed, an elephant stuck in the mud and suffocated, a fly caught in a spider’s web and eaten, or a moth attracted by a flame and drowned in hot candle wax. Without compassion, your life is enmeshed in problems that continue until you die.

You need to practice compassion. Compassion is the most important Dharma practice you can do, the most important meditation you can practice. The more you practice compassion, the greater the peace and happiness in your heart. Living and working with compassion is the best thing you can do.

## **COMPASSION CAN HEAL ILLNESS**

In recent times, in Seattle, one student had cancer that had spread all over her body. The doctors were afraid to do an operation; they felt that it was very risky and dangerous. So she did the bodhichitta practice called *tong-len* (see chapter xx), exchanging oneself for others: taking upon oneself s entient beings’ sufferings and the causes of suffering, and giving one’s own merits and happiness to others.

Eventually, when she went to the hospital for a check-up, they did not find any cancer. The doctors were completely amazed. She

explained what she had practiced, but they could not understand how this meditation could cure her cancer totally. This is one subject that they cannot explain.

This is one of the benefits of bodhichitta, letting go of the “I,” and cherishing others. Well, you can use the difficult situations in your life as a means to develop bodhichitta, exchanging oneself for others. Instead of cherishing the “I,” cherish others; instead of giving to oneself, give to others.

This is said in the teachings of Buddha, but also this is the reality that you can see in your own life, from your own experiences. Global problems, problems in a country, family problems, individual problems – all these problems come from cherishing the self. By cherishing the self one opens the door to all sufferings. By cherishing others one opens the door to all happiness, inner peace, joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment right now in your heart. You are able to overcome all the problems in your life and your mind; you will have a very happy death, a self-supporting death, as well as happy future lives, and, especially, ultimate happiness, total liberation from all suffering and its causes, and enlightenment.

Cherishing others is the cause of temporal and ultimate happiness for all sentient beings up to enlightenment.

### **THE UNBELIEVABLE BENEFIT OF BODHISATTVAS**

All this compassion leads to bodhichitta. You need so much merit, unbelievable, unbelievable merit to actualize bodhichitta. When someone achieves bodhichitta, they become a bodhisattva. In that second they become the spiritual heir of all the buddhas, they receive the name. They become the supreme object of offerings of all sentient beings. You collect inconceivable merits when you make offerings to them, or when you see them, hear their voice, or even if they give something to them, or they touch you. Even if you harm them,

because of their realization of bodhichitta they only benefit you in return. They pray for good things to happen to you.

There is a saying in relation to bodhisattvas: “If you can’t make a connection with them by doing good things, then make a connection by doing harm.” This is not saying you must harm a bodhisattva, but in the case that it happens, it is worthwhile. In return you are guided by that bodhisattva from life to life; they only benefit you, only pray for you.

For example, when the Buddha was a bodhisattva, he sacrificed his blood for the five yakshas; they drank his blood. Then, due to that karmic connection, in the next life they became his disciples as human beings – at Deer Park in Sarnath when he gave his first teaching, on the Four Noble Truth, the first turning of the Dharma Wheel. They drank his blood, but in return the bodhisattva prayed that in a future life they would be his direct disciples and be able to receive teachings from him, and, of course, that they go forth to liberation and enlightenment.

There is unbelievable benefit for sentient beings when you are a bodhisattva. Only with bodhichitta can you complete the two types of merits – wisdom and compassion – and become a buddha. Without bodhichitta, even if you have wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, the highest you can achieve is arhatship, liberation from samsara, the cessation of all the delusions and karma.

By practicing bodhichitta, you can achieve the holy body of a buddha, the totally pure vajra holy body. Not only can you be free from suffering, but you can be totally free from the disturbing thoughts, the delusions, the gross and subtle obscurations. You can attain an immortal body that pervades all of existence – a holy body that pervades the whole world and is itself pervaded by the whole world. This is what the buddha’s holy body can do. There is no limit to your ability to benefit all sentient beings. Transformation such as this happens; it comes from bodhichitta.

## **WITH BODHICHITTA YOU CAN BENEFIT COUNTLESS BEINGS**

Whatever unceasing heavy negative karma you have created, with bodhichitta you can purify it. With bodhichitta, you achieve all the happiness of this life and, the happiness of all the future lives, and the happiness of liberation from samsara, and finally and most importantly, you attain full enlightenment.

You achieve everything from bodhichitta. From you, from this bodhichitta, the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, sura, and asura beings can receive all this happiness up to enlightenment. Isn't that incredible? Even just considering the human beings in one country, the many millions – you are able to cause all of this happiness up to enlightenment for them. Then you are able to cause all this happiness for all the human beings in this world, then all the human beings in other universes. For numberless human beings you are able to cause all this happiness.

You can achieve this for all sentient beings. Just ants, for example. In one spot, under one stone, one ants' nest, there are so many ants, thousands of ants. You are able to cause all this happiness up to enlightenment for them. Then in one field, or on one mountain, in one country, in all the countries of this world – there are so many, we can't imagine how many. Imagine all the numberless sentient beings you can see only through a microscope. Your bodhichitta is able to cause all this happiness up to enlightenment for all these sentient beings. If you imagine all the various types of animals there are: they are numberless. Then there are numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, human beings, sura and asura beings.

You can't imagine what your bodhichitta can do! What else is there in life to enjoy? Wherever you are, if you can practice bodhichitta, that is the best life, the happiest life, the most

meaningful life. It doesn't matter where you are, your mind can practice this.

## **BODHICITTA FULFILLS OUR OWN WISHES AND THE WISHES OF OTHERS**

What is the best practice? What all the numberless buddhas found when they checked for sentient beings was that bodhicitta is the best practice for sentient beings. The answer to your question is the same. I cannot answer differently from what all the buddhas have said in the past when they checked for what was most beneficial for others.

The practice and realization of bodhicitta is the most important thing in life because it fulfils not only your own wishes for happiness but also those of all other sentient beings – each and every one.

With bodhicitta you can completely dry up the ocean of samsaric suffering and its causes and achieve liberation and enlightenment because it helps you gain the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, which eradicates both gross and subtle defilements.

Bodhicitta is what allows *arya* bodhisattva to abandon the sufferings of samsara, including rebirth, old age, sickness and death, just by achieving the right-seeing path. Even though arhats of the lesser vehicle path have the wisdom directly realizing emptiness and many other inconceivable qualities, they still have the remainder of the suffering aggregates.

Bodhicitta is the door to the Mahayana path to enlightenment and the root of the limitless qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind. The courageous bodhisattvas are able to bear all the hardships of working for sentient beings, no matter how great they are, even if it costs them their life. Since bodhisattvas see how beneficial it is to bear hardship in order to work for others, they are not only able to bear it but they experience limitless joy as well. For bodhisattvas, even dying as a result of working for others is like

drinking nectar. They experience the delight of a swan plunging into a cool pond on a hot day.

Bodhisattvas abandon the thought of achieving their own liberation from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its causes – delusions and karma – as one discards used toilet paper, having not an atom of interest in it. They have only aversion to gaining the ultimate happiness of nirvana for themselves alone.

Bodhicitta allows bodhisattvas to complete the accumulation of the two types of merit – transcendent wisdom and virtue – and is the cause of their achieving the two holy bodies, the ultimate goal: the holy body of form, *rupakaya*, and the holy body of mind, *dharmakaya*. The sole purpose of achieving these two holy bodies is to be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings. Even though there are numberless sentient beings and it can take three countless great eons to complete the accumulations that enable them to bring every single one to enlightenment, what gives bodhisattvas the determination to do so is bodhicitta.

No matter how many eons it takes to have one sentient being generate a single virtuous thought, the bodhisattva will try to make it happen without being discouraged. In the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*, Maitreya said,

In order to ripen even one virtuous thought, the bodhisattva, the heir of the Victorious Ones, whose mind is stabilized in supreme perseverance for highly ripening sentient beings, does not get discouraged, even if it takes thousands of ten million eons.

## **OUR LIFE BELONGS TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

Our life belongs to other sentient beings. Therefore I advise you to live your life with bodhichitta motivation, so that everything you do,

as much as possible, is to free sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and to achieve enlightenment.

To accomplish this you need to achieve full enlightenment, therefore do everything – study, practice, meditate, eat, walk, sleep, sit, do a job – with this motivation.

Every day, practice having a good heart as much as possible. When one sincerely practices kindness to others and one wants to give every single cause of happiness to others, then even if you don't expect it, naturally the result is that everybody becomes kind to you and is happy with you, listens to you, etc. In this way, you can help others, you can talk to them about the path, how to achieve everlasting happiness and total liberation.

*Advice to people in prison by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.*

## **7. EQUANIMITY, THE BASIS OF LOVE AND COMPASSION**

**VEN. ROBINA COURTIN**

### **EQUANIMITY**

In this context, as a basis for developing stable love and compassion, equanimity is the heartfelt recognition that enemies, friends, and strangers – and let's face it, there's no fourth category – enemies, friends and strangers are equal, are equal.

Now, from what point of view? We're not all equal in terms of being fat or thin or long-necked; we're not all equal in terms of intelligence. All sentient beings all equal in their wish to be happy and their wish not to suffer. Check this out. Even thinking about this statement we can begin to see how it makes sense.

### **ENEMIES, FRIENDS, AND STRANGERS**

But right now of course, we don't see this emotionally, because our world is made up of enemies, friends and strangers. And who are they? They are the objects of our three main delusions, the three root delusions.

Ignorance, and the object of this ignorance – and the way it functions here is just this deep indifference – is what we call strangers.

The object of our aversion are called enemies.

The object of our attachment, they're called friends.

Friends, enemies and strangers, isn't it? And you won't find a fourth category. You think about it.

## **ATTACHMENT FOR FRIENDS**

There are those you like, whom you are attached to. And who are they? Simply, they're the ones that do what you want. Not being mean or anything, that's just it. They do what you want, they suit you, they agree with you, they like what you like, they appear pleasing to you therefore, and so they're the ones you can afford to love. They're the ones you can say "Okay, I want you to be happy."

You do love them, it's true, we do have some love, but as Lama Zopa says our love right now is unstable or, as we would say, it's got strings attached. Very nice statement. Because why? Because it's only for those we're attached to.

Look at animals for us, look at how we relate to animals. It's very obvious. You can have incredible compassion for that little cute poodle. Remember a few years ago – was it San Jose somewhere? – some road rage bloke got out of his car and went over and stuck his hand in and grabbed his little poodle off the front seat and chucked it into the traffic, and it died. Now he was practically hanged.

Now, if that had been a rat, people would have called him a hero. You see my point? Look at the difference. The Buddha would say, "Excuse me, rat or poodle, they're both sentient beings, they both want to be happy, they both deserve being loved," but because we're attached to poodles, we call the man a naughty man. Because we hate rats we call him a nice man. I mean, how arbitrary can you get? Isn't this very bizarre? Isn't it?

We say we are attached to certain types of people, we're attached to what we call our husband – or maybe not, who knows! We're attached to our children, or we're attached to whoever the person is, generally speaking because they suit my needs. A thing called a poodle, if I like poodles, they suit my needs so I become so attached to it. Then what do I do? I impute all sorts of qualities onto that poodle, which, excuse me, it just doesn't have. Like with the

chocolate cake. You make the poodle far more gorgeous than it really is. Look at it. Our pets, it's embarrassing what we do. We call it love, we call it compassion, we call it helping animals.

Even PETA, who love animals and don't want them to be harmed, I bet they don't care about the insects. I don't think they care about the insects. I don't think so. There are many people who are very pure vegetarians, who don't care about the insects: they will use them to kill each other so they can have nice healthy veggies. You see my point? Not to mention the millions of creatures who die when we plant and grow veggies, etc., etc.

We always limit whom we love and whom we don't. The Buddha's deal is, there's not a single sentient being on this earth whom we shouldn't have compassion for and love for, and not just humans, it's not just a few animals, it's every single sentient being. It's a very big basis: all the mind-possessors, because they're all in the same boat. They're all being born human one life, animal the next, spirit the next, hell being the next, they're enemy the next, they're friend the next, but fundamentally there's some things that we all share: the wish to be happy, the wish not to suffer. Have to establish this, think about it, see how it's logical, first.

### **HOW TO MEDITATE ON EQUANIMITY**

Then practice. You visualize in front of you, imagine in front of you, right in front, eyeball to eyeball, your enemy, the person at the moment you don't like – and usually, it can easily be our Mum or our Dad or ex-husband; it's often a person who's been our friend; now it's our worst enemy; the person whom just when we look at their face appears so uncomfortable to us, makes us feel miserable, makes us feel all distressed, or guilty, or angry, or hurt. So, fantastic: the more you dislike this person the better for this meditation!

These types, all of these meditations we're taking about, by the way. . . it's very surprising, because we think of meditation as some trippy thing where you close your eyes and you visualize something like a buddha, or you watch your mind or something. But – and we're going to talk about this in a minute – you do concentration meditation, and then you go to the second mode of meditation and you do analysis. This is all you're doing. You're taking these things you've heard and you think them through in a very careful, clear way in order to trigger a feeling for them. That's meditation. We'll talk about this in a minute, it's coming.

Equanimity, essentially as I said, it's the attitude that, when you've really got it, heartfelt, a genuine, easy recognition that in fact enemy, friends and strangers are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. The method you use to come to this conclusion, you use all sorts of arguments just to argue with ego's view, ego's entrenched view: real enemy out there, real friend, real stranger.

### **USE LOGIC TO ARGUE WITH EGO'S MISCONCEPTIONS**

There's all sorts of things you can do. You can look at the enemy and you can think okay, you look at your catalog of reasons why now you call them enemy, why now you have anger towards them: because they did this, this, this and this; we use all this logic. Well, like we've been talking already, Buddha's really basically saying, "Excuse me, Robina, just because someone is mean to you is no logical reason to hate them. It's completely unnecessary." Which is so shocking to us, because we absolutely believe that's logical. The world lives this way.

In other words, in this equanimity meditation what we're trying to do is get a bit of space between ourselves and these three people. See them separately from me. Right now we see them as extensions of myself: the friend is an extension of me, so my friend, whom I want to be happy, whom I totally adore, we can't even separate them from

ourself. Aversion the same. We see people only in terms of what they do or don't do to me. A friend is a person who helps me, an enemy is a person who harms me, and a stranger is a person who does neither. You think, very simple.

How do we feel about each? We have attachment for the one who suits my needs. We have aversion for the one who harms me. And we have a profound uncaring and indifference towards 99.9999% of all the rest of them who are the strangers. Why? Because they don't affect my life. Who could care? Can't even look at them, they're so boring. Isn't it?

### **ENEMIES, FRIENDS, AND STRANGERS KEEP CHANGING**

This is how it is, this is how we are. And these groups keep changing. The delusions stay the same. The stranger of yesterday is now the friend of today. The stranger of yesterday is now the enemy of today. The friend of yesterday is now the enemy of today. The enemy of yesterday is now the friend of today. We can see, we constantly go back and forth, because things change.

And then we believe in that latest label. The one we were totally adoring six months ago, made us faint with pleasure, now he leaves us cold as ice; hate him. Look at him, "If only I'd known what he was like six months ago." Isn't it? Just because our eyes are now seeing something different. We're so silly aren't we, it's embarrassing.

Basically to get this equanimity, you put in front of you these three people, and they can be different people at different times, and you just go through, enemy first and you go through different things. "It's not permanent, Robina, six months ago he was my friend. How could he inherently be an enemy? It can't be like this." You try to argue with yourself to sort of shake your very entrenched view. "Yes, he did do this to me, he did do that to me, but what's that got to do with it? That doesn't mean he doesn't want to be happy." When you loved

him, you knew he wanted to be happy and you tried to make him happy. He has not changed. You just use logic to argue with yourself to see how this entrenched position is mistaken in its assessment. This is what you're trying to do, get away a bit, get some space.

## **FRIEND**

You look at the friend; the same type of logic applies. You look at this person, you think she's a lovely person because she does this, this, this and this for me. "Of course she's a lovely person. She is a lovely person, that's why I like her, because she's lovely." I mean, excuse me, you just have to find a few things about her that you know that she does, that is mean to other people. We don't care about this because she's not mean to me. We even would defend her and what she does.

You look at every group of people who support each other, who are friends. They all agree on the same group of enemies and they all support each other in that view. But it should be enough to blow your mind, to prove that there can't be an inherent friend. If some people dislike this person then there can't be an inherent friend there. Like there can't be the cake, delicious and ugly simultaneously. They're both projections of the mind. Enemy and friend are projections of the mind.

Use simple arguments to break down ego's entrenched view. You think for example this person whom you totally adore, whom you're in love with, and he smiles and he's so happy and you know he's happy because you make him happy. Wow, amazing isn't it? Incredible feeling. All you've got to do is practice, just think: he's happy tomorrow and you look at him being happy, and then you notice that he's happy now because she makes him happy, not me. He's still happy. You should be so happy for him. But instead you want to kill him, because suddenly someone else is making him

happy. He's smiling now. . . the same smiling as yesterday or the week ago, or the month ago, or the six years ago when he smiled at you and was blissful. Now he's smiling, still blissfully, but it's no longer you who's causing it. But he's still happy. If you really want to have love, may you be happy. Of course it's so painful: oh my God.

### **ENEMY**

Look at the enemy. You just have to argue to see how he's not inherently an enemy; you just have to remember that he's got a nice girl friend who thinks he's gorgeous. He's got some kids who love him. His boss thinks he's great. You know this, but you don't want to think this. It's not comfortable; because they're stupid too: they can't see the real person like you can. We don't like to think of that, but it's very profound logic.

### **STRANGER**

We can see our mind is so limited by attachment, aversion and, of course, indifference. You hear about a stranger, a person who you don't know, means who neither harms nor helps you: you just don't care. Totally can't even look at them, can't even spend long enough to read the story in *The New York Times* about this particular country whose name you can't even say, about the particular suffering; you go to the page and look at the football scores or something, because they are strangers to you. They've neither harmed nor helped. But many Americans will look avidly at all the Iraqi news because the Americans are in there, you see. It's attachment and aversion, friends and enemies.

### **WE ALL THINK WE'RE SPECIAL**

Look at the Israelis and Palestinians, it's amazing. Israel is so tiny you could jog across it without getting too puffed out. Look at the

energy there of the people who occupy that piece of Earth, all believing it's their land, fighting over it, hating each other, and then putting all their philosophies onto it. Frankly – I'm not being rude about anybody – but I think if you think you're the chosen people, already you're in big trouble. I mean really, I think you've got to be in big trouble if you start to think this. I don't care whether you call yourself Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, or Buddhist for that matter. That's really a very difficult statement: the chosen people. Oh my God. But everybody thinks this, they all think they're special. Mormons think they're unique and special, the Seventh Day Adventists completely convinced that they're right. The Catholics totally believe they're right. No doubt fundamentalist Buddhists are completely believing they're right. Everybody has this concrete, fixed view we're right and these poor people down there who aren't. I mean, it's crazy.

Equanimity is this attitude that moves yourself away from these three a little bit, using a logical arguments to break down ego's illogic. There's no inherent enemy, friend or stranger, there are just projections of your delusions. That objectively, these people are the same.

If I put up here in front of you my enemy, my friend, and my stranger, you won't notice any difference, you can't tell. There's no big "E" engraved on the forehead of the enemy. There's no wings on the friend. You'll put your own projections onto them. They have noses and arms and legs and toes and fingers, they all want to be happy, they all go to the toilet, they all get depressed, they all get constipation. There's equality there, it's very easy to see it, but we're so tunnel vision in our views, believing in our own karmic appearances.

With equanimity we can begin to be more objective and therefore more stable and effective in our capacity to help others. It's a powerful starting point.

## **8. HOW WE GRASP AT A SEPARATE SELF**

**LAMA YESHE**

### **THE MOUNTAIN OF SELF**

Our conception of ego instinctively feels that I'm somewhere around here; Thubten Yeshe is somewhere here. Where is Thubten Yeshe? My ego's instinctive interpretation is that I'm here, somewhere in my body. Check for yourself. See what comes up in your mind when you think of your name. The huge mountain of your self will arise. Then check exactly where that mountain of "me" can be found. Where are you? Somewhere around your body. Are you in your chest, in your head?

You feel this instinctively. You don't have to study philosophy to learn it; you don't have to go to school; your parents didn't teach you. You've known this since before you were born.

Buddhism describes two kinds of ego identity: *kun-tag* and *lhen-kye*.

### **LEARNED GRASPING AT SELF**

*Kun-tag* means the sense of self that's philosophically acquired. It's something that you learn through outside influence from teachers, friends, books and so forth. This is the intellectually derived ego. Can you imagine? You can even acquire an ego through reading. This one is easier to remove, of course, because it's more superficial. It's a gross conception. The simultaneously born sense of self is much, much harder to get rid of.

## **INNATE GRASPING AT SELF**

The one I'm talking about is *lhen-kye*, the simultaneously-born one; the one that exists simply because you exist. It was born with you; it needs no outside influence for its existence. Like the smell that comes with a pine tree, they're one. The pine tree doesn't grow first and then the smell comes later. They come together. It's the same with the innate sense of ego;

This instinctive conception of ego is really convinced that around my body is where you'll find Thubten Yeshe. Someone looks at me and asks, "Are you Thubten Yeshe?" "Yes", I reply, "I'm Thubten Yeshe". Where is Thubten Yeshe? Around here. Instinctively, I feel I'm right here. But I'm not the only one who feels like this. Check up for yourself. It's very interesting.

## **MY NAME IS NOT ME**

Until I was six years old, I was not Thubten Yeshe. That name was given to me when I became a monk at Sera Monastery. Before that time, nobody knew me as Thubten Yeshe. They thought I was Döndrub Dorje. The names Thubten Yeshe and Döndrub Dorje are different; different superstitions give different kinds of name. I feel my name is me, but actually, it isn't. Neither the names Thubten Yeshe nor Döndrub Dorje are me. But the moment I was given the name Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Yeshe came into existence. Before I was given the name, he didn't exist; nobody looked at me and thought, "There's Thubten Yeshe". I didn't even think it myself. Thubten Yeshe did not exist.

But when one superstitious conception named this bubble, my body – "Your name is Thubten Yeshe" – my superstition took it: "Yes, Thubten Yeshe is me". It's an interdependent relationship. One superstition gives the name Thubten Yeshe to this bubble of relativity

and my ego starts to feel that Thubten Yeshe really does exist somewhere in the area of my body.

### **THUBTEN YESHE IS MERELY A NAME**

The reality, however, is that Thubten Yeshe is merely the dry words applied to the bubble-like phenomenon of these five aggregates. These things come together and that's it: Thubten Yeshe, the name on the bubble. It's a very superficial view. The ego's instinctive feeling that Thubten Yeshe exists somewhere around here is very superficial.

You can see that the relative reality of Thubten Yeshe is simply the name that's been given to this bubble of energy. That's all Thubten Yeshe is. That's why the great philosopher and yogi Nagarjuna and the great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa both said that all phenomena exist merely in name. As a result, some early Western Buddhist scholars decided that Nagarjuna was a nihilist. That's a conclusion that could be reached only by someone who doesn't practice and spends all his time dealing in concepts and words.

If I were to show up somewhere and suddenly announce, "You're all merely names", people would think I was crazy. But if you investigate in detail the manner in which we're all merely names, it becomes extremely clear. Nihilists reject the very existence of interdependent phenomena but that's not what Nagarjuna did. He simply explained that relative phenomena exist but that we should view them in a reasonable way. They come, they go; they grow; they die. They receive various names and in that way gain a degree of reality for the relative mind. But that mind does not see the deeper nature of phenomena; it does not perceive the totality of universal existence.

## **RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE EXIST SIMULTANEOUSLY**

Phenomena have two natures: the conventional, or relative, and the absolute, or ultimate. Both qualities exist simultaneously in each and every phenomenon. What I've been talking about is the way that bubbles of relativity exist conventionally. A relative phenomenon comes into existence when, at any given time, the association of superstition and the conception of ego flavors an object in a particular way by giving it a name. That combination – the object, the superstition giving it a name and the name itself – is all that's needed for a relative phenomenon to exist. When those things come together, there's your Thubten Yeshe. He's coming; he's going; he's talking. It's all a bubble of relativity.

## **THUBTEN YESHE IS A BUBBLE**

If right now you can see that Thubten Yeshe's a bubble, that's excellent. It helps a lot. And if you can relate your experience of seeing me as a bubble to other concrete objects you perceive, it will help even more. If you can see the heavy objects that shake your heart and make you crazy as relative bubbles, their vibration will not overwhelm you. Your heart will stop shaking and you'll cool down and relax.

If I were to show you a scarecrow and ask if it was Thubten Yeshe, you'd probably say it wasn't. Why not? "Because it's made of wood". You'd have a ready answer. You can apply exactly the same logic to the argument that this bubble of a body is not Thubten Yeshe either.

I believe very strongly that this is me because of the countless times from the time I was born up to now that my ego has imprinted the idea "this is me" on my consciousness. "Me. This is me. This bubble is me, me, me". But this bubble itself is not Thubten Yeshe.

## **THUBTEN YESHE IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND**

We know it's composed of the four elements. However, the earth element is not Thubten Yeshe; the water is not Thubten Yeshe; the fire is not Thubten Yeshe; the air is not Thubten Yeshe. The parts of the body are not Thubten Yeshe either. The skin is not Thubten Yeshe; the blood is not Thubten Yeshe; they bone is not Thubten Yeshe; the brain is not Thubten Yeshe.

The ego is not Thubten Yeshe. Superstition is not Thubten Yeshe. The combination of all this is not Thubten Yeshe either – if it were, Thubten Yeshe would have existed before the name had been given. But before this combination was named Thubten Yeshe, nobody recognized it as Thubten Yeshe and I didn't recognize it as Thubten Yeshe myself. Therefore, the combination of all these parts is not Thubten Yeshe.

If we call the scarecrow Thubten Yeshe and then analyze it to see exactly where Thubten Yeshe can be found, we can't find Thubten Yeshe in any of the parts or on all the parts together. This is easy to understand. It's exactly the same thing with the bubble of my aggregates. Neither any single constituent part nor the whole combination is Thubten Yeshe. We also know that the name alone is not Thubten Yeshe. So what and where is Thubten Yeshe? Thubten Yeshe is simply the combination of superstition flavoring an object with the words, "Thubten Yeshe". That's all that Thubten Yeshe is.

## **BEYOND THE NAME, THERE IS NO THUBTEN YESHE**

Beyond the name, there is no real Thubten Yeshe existing somewhere. But the simultaneously-born ego doesn't understand that Thubten Yeshe exists merely as an interdependent combination of parts. It believes that without question, around here, somewhere, there exists a real, independent, concrete Thubten Yeshe. This is the nature of the simultaneously-born ego. Therefore, if we do not

remove conceptions like, “Somewhere in this bubble, I’m Thubten Yeshe”, we cannot release the ego.

The conception of ego is an extreme mind. It holds very concretely the idea that somewhere within this bubble of the four-element combination body there exists a self-existent I. That is the misconception that we must release. If the ego mind assessed the situation reasonably and was comfortable and satisfied perceiving that superstition giving the name Thubten Yeshe to this interdependent, four-element bubble was enough for Thubten Yeshe to exist, that would be a different story. But it’s not satisfied with that. It cannot leave that alone. It wants to be special. It wants Thubten Yeshe to be concrete. It’s not satisfied with Thubten Yeshe being a mere name on a collection of parts. Therefore, it conceives an imaginary, unrealistic, exaggerated, concrete self-entity.

*Edited from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive by Nicholas Ribush.  
Published in the June 2001 issue of Mandala.*