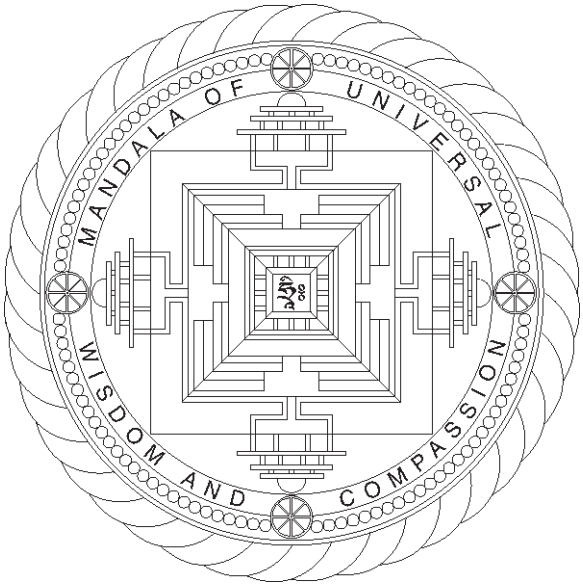
Discovering BUDDHISM

Awakening the limitless potential of your mind, achieving all peace and happiness



How to Develop Bodhichitta
Required Reading

Contents

Bodhichitta: The Perfection of Dharma, *by Lama Thubten Yeshe* 5

Generating the Bodhimind, *by His Holiness Kyabje Ling Rinpoche* 11

The Kindness of the Mother, *by Lama Zopa Rinpoche* 19

The Six Perfections, *by Geshe Rabten* 23

Practicing the Good Heart, *by Lama Zopa Rinpoche* 29

The Nature of Compassion, *by Lama Zopa Rinpoche* 43

Living with Bodhichitta, *by Lama Zopa Rinpoche* 51

Optional reading:
How to Generate Bodhichitta *by Ribur Rinpoche* 61

Further required reading includes the following texts:

The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 106–19, 143–87)

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, 1997 gold edition (pp. 547–89, 626–46) *or 2006 blue edition* (pp. 499-537 & 573-92)

A Daily Meditation on Four-Arm Chenrezig, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

© FPMT, Inc., 2001.
All rights reserved.

Bodhichitta: The Perfection of Dharma

by Lama Thubten Yeshe

I think it is absolutely essential for us to have loving kindness towards others. There is no doubt about this. Loving kindness is the essence of bodhichitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific or psychological disagreement with this. With bodhichitta, there's no East-West conflict. This path is the most comfortable, most perfect, one hundred percent uncomplicated one, free of any danger of leading people to extremes. Without bodhichitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realizations don't come.

Why is bodhichitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have a good meditation but don't have bodhichitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss: "Me, me; I want more, I want more.' Then the good experience disappears completely. Grasping is the greatest distraction to experiencing single-pointed intensive awareness in meditation. And with it, we are always dedicated to our own happiness: 'Me, me I'm miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I'll meditate.' It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results—peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss—just don't come.

Also, without bodhichitta it is very difficult to collect merits. You create them and immediately destroy them; by afternoon, the morning's merits have gone. It's like cleaning a room and an hour later making it dirty again. You make your mind clean, then right away you mess it up - not a very profitable business. If you want to succeed in the business of collecting merits, you must have bodhichitta. With bodhichitta you become so precious—like gold, like diamonds; you become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

From the Western, materialistic point of view, we'd think it was great if a rich person said, 'I want to make charity. I'm going to offer $100 to everybody in the entire world.' Even if that person gave with great sincerity, his or her merit would be nothing compared with just the thought, "I wish to actualize bodhichitta for the sake of sentient beings, and I'll practice the six perfections, paramitas as much as I can.' That's why I always say, actualization of bodhichitta is the most perfect path you can take.

The best Dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhichitta.

What we have to do is transform our attachment and self-cherishing, and if we haven't changed our mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke. Even if you try to practice tantric meditations, unless you've changed within, you won't succeed. Dharma means a complete change of attitude—that's what really brings you inner happiness, that is the true Dharma, not the words you

say. Bodhichitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation, the most comfortable path, the most substantial path—definite, not wishy-washy. Sometimes your meditation is not solid; you just space out. Bodhichitta meditation means you really want to change your mind and actions and transform your whole life.

We are all involved in human relationships with each other. Why do we sometimes say, 'I love you,' and sometimes, 'I hate you?' Where does this up-and-down mind come from? From the self-cherishing thought—a complete lack of bodhichitta. What we are saying is, 'I hate you because I'm not getting any satisfaction from you. You hurt me; you don't give me pleasure.' That's the whole thing: I—my ego, my attachment—am not getting satisfaction from you, therefore I hate you. What a joke! All the difficulties in inter-personal relationships come from not having bodhichitta, from not having changed our minds.

You can prove scientifically that bodhichitta is the best practice to do. Our self-cherishing thought is the root of all human problems. It makes our lives difficult and miserable. The solution to self-cherishing, its antidote, is the mind that is its complete opposite—bodhichitta. The self-cherishing mind is worried about only me, me—the self-existent I. Bodhichitta substitutes others for self.

It creates space in your mind. Then even if your dearest friend forgets to give you a Christmas present, you don't mind. 'Ah, well. This year she didn't give me my chocolate. It doesn't matter.' Anyway, your human relationships are not for chocolate, not for sensory pleasures. Something much deeper can come from our being together, working together.
With bodhichitta you become so precious—like gold, like diamonds. You become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

If you want to be really, really happy, it isn't enough just to space out in meditation. Many people who have spent years alone in meditation have finished up the worse for it. Coming back into society, they have freaked out. They haven't been able to take contact with other people again, because the peaceful environment they created was an artificial condition, still a relative phenomenon without solidity. With bodhichitta, no matter where you go, you will never freak out. The more you are involved with people the more pleasure you get. People become the resource of your pleasure. You are living for people. Even though some still try to take advantage of you, you understand: 'Well, in the past I took advantage of them many times too.' So it doesn't bother you.

Thus bodhichitta is the most perfect way to practice Dharma, especially in our twentieth-century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhichitta you will definitely grow.

If you take a proper look deep into your heart you will see that one of the main causes of your dissatisfaction is the fact that you are not helping others as best you can. When you realize this you'll be able to say to yourself, 'I must develop myself so that I can help others satisfactorily. By improving myself I can definitely help.' Thus you have more strength and energy to meditate, to keep pure morality and do other good things. You have energy, 'Because I want to help others.' That is why Lama Tsongkhapa said that bodhichitta is the foundation of all enlightened realizations.

Also, bodhichitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech and

mind—your entire life into positivity and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. I think this is definitely true. You can see, it's not difficult. For example look at other people's faces. Some people, no matter what problems and suffering they are enduring, when they go out they always try to appear happy and show a positive aspect to others. Have you noticed this or not? But other people always go about miserable, and angry. What do you think about that? I honestly think that it indicates a fundamental difference in the way these two kinds of people think. Human beings are actually very simple. Some are a disaster within and it shows on their faces and makes those whom they meet feel sick. Others, even though they are suffering intensely, always put on a brave face because they are considerate of the way others feel.

I believe this is very important. What's the use of putting out a miserable vibration? Just because you feel miserable, why make others unhappy too? It doesn't help. You should try to control your emotions, speak evenly and so forth. Sometimes when people are suffering they close off from others, but you can still feel their miserable vibration. This doesn't help—others with even momentary happiness forget about leading them to enlightenment.
To help the people around you, you have to maintain a happy, peaceful vibration. This is very practical, very worthwhile. Sometimes we talk too much about enlightenment and things like that. We have a long way to go to such realizations. Forget about enlightenment, I don't care about buddhahood—just be practical. If you can't help others, at least don't give them any harm, stay neutral.

Anyway, what I'm supposed to be telling you here is that bodhichitta is like atomic energy to transform your mind. This is absolutely, scientifically true, and not something that you have to believe with blind religious faith. Everybody nowadays is afraid of nuclear war, but if we all had bodhichitta, wouldn't we all be completely secure? Of course we would. With bodhichitta you control all desire to defeat or kill others. And, as Lama Je Tsongkhapa said, when you have bodhichitta all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and pour down upon you like rain. At present all we attract is misfortune because all we have is the self-cherishing thought. But with bodhichitta we'll attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said recently, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow! What did His Holiness mean? He was saying that, in a way, bodhichitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present, usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure, and what we have is easily lost. With 'great selfishness' you help others and you help yourself; with small it's always 'me, me, me' and it is easy to lose everything.

Remember, Atisha had over 150 teachers? He respected them all, but when he heard the name of one—Lama Dharmarakshita—he would come out in goose-bumps. He explained this by saying, 'I received many teachings from many, many great gurus, but for me, Lama Dharmarakshita, who gave me the bodhichitta ordination and teachings on the method and wisdom of bodhichitta and the six paramitas, was the most helpful for my life'. This is very true. Sometimes techniques of deity meditation are extremely difficult, but bodhichitta meditation is so simple, so incredibly profound and real. That's why Atisha would shake when he heard the name of his main teacher of bodhichitta.
The main point, then, is that when you contact Buddhadharma you should conquer the mad elephant of your self-cherishing mind. If the Dharma you hear helps you diminish your self-cherishing even a little, it has been worthwhile. But if the teachings you have taken have had no effect on your selfishness, then from the Mahayana point of view, even if you can talk intellectually on the entire lam-rim,

they have not been much use at all.

Do you recall the story of Shantideva and how people used to put him down? They used to call him Du-she-sum-pa, which means one who knows how to do only three things: eating, sleeping and excreting. This was a very bad thing to call someone, especially a monk. But that's all that people could see him doing. However, he had bodhichitta, so whatever he did, even ordinary things, was of greatest benefit to others. Lying down, peacefully, he would meditate with great concern for the welfare of all living beings, and many times, out of compassion, he would cry for them. Westerners need that kind of practice. Fundamentally we are lazy. Well, maybe not lazy, but when we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left. So, when you come home from work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhichitta. This is most worthwhile. Much better than rushing in speedily, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space. It is much better to have a quiet, blissful cup of coffee. And don't pressure yourself either; that too is very bad.

Don't punish yourself when you are too tired to meditate: 'I should be meditating; I am very bad.' You destroy yourself like this. Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself you will become gentle with others, so don't push. Pushing doesn't work for me, that's why I tell others not to force themselves. We are dealing with the mind, not rocks and concrete; it is something organic.

The Western environment offers lots of suffering conditions that act as causes for our actualizing bodhichitta, so life there can be very worthwhile. For example, it is much better to subdue an adversary with bodhichitta than with a knife or gun. When attacked, you can practice loving kindness. We could also do this in the monasteries of Tibet, where there were often horrible monks. Don't think that Tibet was full of only holy people—we had unbelievably wild monks there that nobody in authority could subdue! If you would try to control them wrathfully they would get only more aggressive. But arya bodhisattva monks, people who had completely given themselves up for others, would treat them with loving kindness, and the wild monks would calm down completely. They would feel, 'This man loves me; he has great compassion. He has given up everything for others and has nothing to lose.' In that way aggressive people would be subdued, without authority but with bodhichitta. There are many stories about this kind of thing, but I'm not going to tell them now. Perhaps you think they're funny, but it's true—you can conquer your enemies, both internal and external, with loving kindness and bodhichitta. It is most worthwhile and there's no contradiction. Bodhichitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment.

In his text, *Lama Choepa*, the Panchen Lama says, 'Self-cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, and holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore bless me to change self-cherishing into concern for all others.' This is not some deep philosophical theory but a very simple statement. You know from your own life's experiences without needing a Tibetan text's explanations that your self-cherishing thought is the cause of all your confusion and frustration. This evolution of suffering is found not only in Tibetan culture but in yours as well.

And the Panchen Lama goes on to say that we should look at what the Buddha did. He gave up his self-

attachment and attained all the sublime realizations. But look at us, we are obsessed with 'me, me, me' and have realized nothing but unending misery. This is very clear isn't it? Therefore you should know clean clear how this works. Get rid of the false concept of self-cherishing and you'll be free of all misery and dissatisfaction. Concern yourself for the welfare of all others and wish for them to attain the highest realizations such as bodhichitta and you'll find all happiness and satisfaction.

Bodhichitta

It is very difficult to change holding yourself dear into holding others dear instead—the most difficult task you can undertake. But it is the most worthwhile and brings the greatest satisfaction. After practicing some meditations, such as impermanence and death, for a month you'll say, 'I'm tired of that meditation.' But you'll never get tired of meditating on bodhichitta. It is so deep; a universal meditation. You'll never get tired of bodhichitta.

You have heard of many deities that you can meditate on, many deities to be initiated into—Chenrezig and the rest. What are they all for? I'll tell you—for gaining bodhichitta. As a matter of fact, all tantric meditations are for the development of strong bodhichitta. That is the purpose of your consciousness manifesting as a being with 1000 arms so that you can lend a hand to a thousand suffering beings. If you don't like to manifest yourself this way you can relate the meditation to your own culture and see yourself as Jesus. Avalokiteshvara and Jesus are the same: completely selfless and completely devoted to serving others.

Remember what happened the first time that Avalokiteshvara took the bodhisattva ordination? He vowed to guide all universal living beings to enlightenment from behind, like a shepherd. "I do not want to realize enlightenment until first I have led all mother sentient beings there first. That will be my satisfaction.' He worked for years and years, leading thousands of beings to enlightenment, but when he checked to see what was happening he found there were still countless more. So again he worked for years and years and again when he checked there were still so many left, and this cycle was repeated until finally he was fed up and thought to himself, 'For eons and eons I have struggled to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment but there are still so many left. I think it is impossible to fulfill my vow.' And because of the intensity of his emotion his head split into eleven pieces. Then Amitabha Buddha came and offered to help, and blessed him to be successful.

So I'm sure some of you people can be like Chenrezig. The main thing is to have strong motivation. Even if it comes strongly only once, it is extremely powerful. It is very rare to have this kind of thought. A mere flash is so worthwhile; to have it for a minute, for a day...

Colophon:
Printed with permission from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

Generating the Bodhimind

by His Holiness Kyabje Ling Rinpoche

Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, was the 97th holder of the Ganden throne and thus head of the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. He was ordained by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, to whom his predecessor had also been tutor. This teaching was given at Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre on November 14, 1979.

The enlightened attitude, the bodhimind that has love and compassion as its basis, is the essential seed producing the attainment of buddhahood. Therefore it is a subject that should be approached with the pure thought, "May I thus gain enlightenment in order to be of greatest benefit to the world."

However, there are but very small spiritual effects in hearing teachings on the bodhimind if we lack a certain spiritual foundation. Consequently, most teachers insist that disciples cultivate various preliminary practices within themselves before approaching this higher precept. If we wish to go to university, we must first learn to read and write. While merely hearing about meditation on love, compassion and the bodhimind does leave a favorable imprint on our stream of consciousness, for the teaching to produce a definite inner transformation we trainees should first meditate extensively on the preliminaries (such as the preciousness of the human opportunity, death and its significance, the nature of karma and samsara, refuge, and the higher trainings in ethics, meditation and wisdom).

If we wish to attain the state of the full enlightenment of buddhahood as opposed to the lesser enlightenment of arhatship, our innermost practice must be cultivation of the bodhimind. Were we instead to make meditation on emptiness our innermost practice, there would be the possibility of falling into the arhat's nirvana instead of gaining buddhahood. This teaching is given in the saying, "When the father is the bodhimind and the mother is wisdom, the child joins the caste of buddhas." In intercaste marriages in ancient India, children would adopt the caste of the father, regardless of whether the mother was of higher or lower caste. Therefore the bodhimind is like the father: if one cultivates the bodhimind, one enters the caste of buddhas.

Although the bodhimind is the primary force producing buddhahood, bodhimind as the father must unite with wisdom, or meditation on emptiness, as the mother, in order to produce a child able to accomplish buddhahood. One without the other will not bring full enlightenment. The bodhimind is the essential energy that produces buddhahood, yet throughout its stages of development it should be applied to meditation on emptiness. In the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, where Buddha spoke most extensively on emptiness, we are constantly reminded to place our meditations on emptiness within the context of the bodhimind.

What precisely is the bodhimind? It is the mind strongly characterized by the aspiration, "For the sake

of all sentient beings I must attain the state of full enlightenment." It is easy to repeat the words of this aspiration to ourselves but the bodhimind is something much deeper than this. It is a quality within the mind systematically cultivated by one of a number of methods, such as those called "Six Causes and One Effect," or "Exchanging Self (Awareness) for (Awareness of) Others."

Merely holding in mind the thought, "I must attain enlightenment for the sake of benefiting others" without first cultivating the prerequisite causes, stages and basic foundations of this thought will not give birth to the bodhimind. For this reason the venerable Atisha (11th century) once asked, "Do you know anyone with bodhimind not born from meditation on love and compassion?" What benefits arise through having generated the bodhimind? If we know what qualities good food has we will attempt to obtain, prepare and eat it. Similarly, when we hear of the efficacy of the bodhimind we shall seek to learn the methods and practices by which it is generated.

The immediate benefit of having given birth to the bodhimind within our mindstream is that we enter the great vehicle leading to buddhahood and gain the title of bodhisattva, a son of the buddhas. It does not matter what we look like, how we dress, how wealthy or powerful we are, whether or not we have clairvoyance or miraculous powers, or how learned we are: if we have generated the bodhimind we are bodhisattvas, and regardless of our other qualities, if we do not have the bodhimind we are not bodhisattvas. A being with the bodhimind who incarnates as an animal is respected by all the buddhas as being a bodhisattva.

The great sages of the lesser vehicle possess innumerably wondrous qualities, yet someone who has developed merely the initial stages of the bodhimind surpasses them in terms of his nature. This is likened to the baby son of a universal monarch who, although only an infant possessing no qualities of knowledge or power, is granted a higher status than any scholar or minister in the empire.

In terms of conventional benefits, all the happiness and goodness that exists is a product of bodhimind. The buddhas are born from bodhisattvas, but the bodhisattvas are born from the bodhimind. As a result of the birth of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, great waves of enlightened energy spread throughout the universe, influencing sentient beings to create positive karma. This positive karma in turn brings them much benefit and happiness. On the one hand, the mighty stream of enlightened and enlightening energy issues from the wisdom body of the buddhas, but as the buddhas are born from bodhisattvas and bodhisattvas from the bodhimind, the ultimate source of the universal reservoir of goodness and happiness is the bodhimind itself.

How can we develop the bodhimind? There are two major methods, as mentioned above. The first of these, the "Six Causes and One Effect," applies six causal meditations—recognizing that all sentient beings were once one's own mother; the kindness of a mother; the wish to repay such kindness; love; compassion; and the extraordinary thought of universal responsibility—to produce one result: the bodhimind. The second technique is a meditation whereby one directly changes self-cherishing into the cherishing of others..

In order to practice either of these methods of developing the bodhimind we must first develop a sense of equanimity toward all living beings. We must transcend seeing some beings as close, some as alien and some as merely unknown strangers. Until we have this equanimity toward all beings, meditation to develop bodhimind will not be effective. For example, if we wish to paint frescoes on a wall we

must first remove any cracks or lumps from its surface. Similarly, we cannot draw the image of the bodhimind within ourselves until the mind's view has been made clean from the distortions of seeing others in terms of friend, enemy, and stranger.

The way we impute this discrimination upon others is quite automatic, and as a result of it, when we see someone we have labeled as 'friend,' attachment arises within us and we respond with warmth. Why have we labeled him as 'friend'? Only because on some level or other he has benefited or supported us. Alternatively, whenever we encounter someone whom we have labeled as 'enemy,' aversion arises within us and we respond with coldness. The reason will be because he has once harmed or threatened us in some way. Again, when encountering a stranger we simply have no feelings toward him.

Yet if we examine this method of discrimination we quickly see that it is an unstable process. Even in this life, people once regarded as friends become enemies and enemies often become friends. And in the countless lives we have taken since beginningless time while spinning on the wheel of life there is not one sentient being who has consistently been either our friend or enemy. Our best friend of this life could easily have been our worst enemy in a previous incarnation, and vice versa. A friend who mistreats us quickly becomes an enemy, and an enemy who helps us soon becomes a new-found friend. Someone who last year was regarded as a friend because he had been kind to us, this year harms us and is seen as an enemy; last year's enemy this year helps us and becomes a friend. So which one is really the friend and which one the enemy? Instead of responding to them on the basis of the ephemeral benefit or harm they have brought us, we should meditate that all have alternately benefited and harmed us in the stream of past lives, and thus abandon superficial discriminations.

A root cause of this discriminating mind is the self-cherishing attitude, the thought that considers oneself to be more important than others. As a result of self-cherishing we develop attachment to those who help us and aversion to those who give us problems. This in turn causes us to create countless negative karmas in trying to overcome the 'harmers' and support the 'helpers.' Such actions bring great suffering upon ourselves and others, both immediately and in future lives, as these karmic seeds ripen into suffering experiences.

There is a teaching that says, "All happiness in this world arises from cherishing others; every suffering arises from self-cherishing." Why is this so? From self-cherishing comes the wish to further oneself even at others' expense. This causes all the killing, stealing, intolerance and so forth that we see around us. As well as destroying happiness in this life, these negative activities plant karmic seeds for a future rebirth in the miserable realms of existence—the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms. Self-cherishing is responsible for every conflict from a family problem to an international war, and for all the negative karma thus created.

What are the results of cherishing others? If we cherish others we shall not harm or kill them. This is conducive to our own long life. When we cherish others we are open and empathetic with them, and live in generosity. This is a karmic cause of our own future prosperity. If we cherish others, even when someone harms or makes problems for us we are able to abide in love and patience, a karmic cause of having a beautiful form in future lives. In short, every auspicious condition arises from the positive karmas generated by cherishing others. These conditions themselves bring joy and happiness, and in addition they act as the causes of and circumstances leading to nirvana and buddhahood.

How? To gain nirvana one must master the three higher trainings: moral discipline, meditation and wisdom. Of these the first is the most important because it is the basis for the development of the other two. The essence of moral discipline is abandoning any action that brings harm to others. Anyone who cherishes others more than he cherishes himself will not find this discipline difficult. His mind will be calm and peaceful, which is conducive to both meditation and wisdom.

Looking at it another way, cherishing others is the proper and noble approach to take. In this life everything that comes to us is directly or indirectly due to the kindness of others. We buy food from others in the market; the clothing we wear and the houses in which we dwell depend upon the assisting participation of others. And for attaining the ultimate goals—nirvana and buddhahood—we are completely dependent upon others: without them we would not be able to meditate upon love, compassion, trust and so forth, and thus would be unable to generate spiritual experience. Also, any meditation teaching we receive has come from the Buddha through the kindness of sentient beings. The Buddha taught only to benefit sentient beings; if there were no sentient beings he would not have taught. Therefore, in his *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*, Shantideva comments that in terms of kindness, the sentient beings are equal to the buddhas. Sometimes, mistakenly, people have respect and devotion for the buddhas but dislike sentient beings. We should appreciate sentient beings as deeply as we do the buddhas themselves.

If we look at happiness and harmony we will find its cause to be universal caring. The cause of unhappiness and disharmony is the self-cherishing attitude.

At one time the Buddha was an ordinary person like ourselves. Then he gave up self-cherishing for universal caring and entered the path to buddhahood. Because we still hold the self-cherishing mind we are left behind in samsara, having benefited neither ourselves nor others.

The *Jataka Tales* (*Previous Lives of Buddha*) relate that in one earlier incarnation, the Buddha had been a huge turtle who took pity on several shipwreck victims and carried them to shore on his back. Once ashore the exhausted turtle fell into a faint but as he slept he was attacked by thousands of ants. Soon the biting of the ants woke the turtle up, but when he saw that if he moved he would kill innumerable creatures, he remained still and offered his body to the insects as food. This is the depth to which the Buddha cherished living beings. Many of Ashvagosha's *Jataka Tales* are dedicated to relating similar accounts of the Buddha's previous lives, in which the importance of cherishing others is exemplified. The *Wish-Fulfilling Tree* has 108 such stories.

Essentially, self-cherishing is the cause of every undesirable experience, and universal caring is the cause of every happiness. The experiences of the lower realms of existence, all the suffering of mankind and every interference to spiritual practice are caused by self-cherishing, and every happiness of this and future lives comes from universal caring. The subtle limitations of lesser enlightenment are also caused by self-cherishing.

We should contemplate the benefits of cherishing others and try to develop an open, loving attitude toward all living beings. This should not be an inert emotion but should be characterized by great compassion—the wish to separate others from their suffering. When we meet with a being in sorrow our reaction should be like that of a mother witnessing her only child caught in a fire or fallen into a terrible river: our main thought should be to help others. Toward those in states of suffering we should

think, "May I help separate them from their suffering," and for those in states of happiness we should think, "May I help maintain their happiness." This attitude should be directed equally toward all beings. Some people feel great compassion for friends or relatives in trouble but none for unpleasant people or enemies. This is not spiritual compassion, it is merely a form of attachment. True compassion does not discriminate between beings; it regards all with an equal emotion.

Similarly, love is the desire to maintain the happiness of all beings impartially, regardless of whether we like them or not. Spiritual love is of two main types: that merely possessing equanimity and that possessing the active wish to maintain others' happiness. When we meditate repeatedly on how all beings have in previous lives been mother, father and friend to us, we soon come to have equanimity toward them all. Eventually this develops into an overwhelming wish to see all beings possess happiness and the causes of happiness. This is great, undiscriminating love.

By meditating properly on love and compassion we produce what are called the eight great benefits. These condense into two: producing happiness in this and future lives for both ourselves and others, and developing along the path to full and perfect buddhahood. It produces rebirth as a man or god, and fertilizes the seeds of enlightenment.

In brief, we should have the wish to help others maintain their happiness and separate from suffering regardless of whether they have acted as friend or enemy to us. Moreover, we should develop a personal sense of responsibility for their happiness. This is called "the special thought" or "the higher thought" and is marked by a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. It is like taking the responsibility of going to the market to get someone exactly what he needs, instead of just sitting reflecting on how nice it would be if he had what he wanted. We take upon ourselves the responsibility of actually fulfilling others' requirements.

Then we should ask ourselves, "Do I have the ability to benefit all others?" Obviously we do not. Who has such ability? Only an enlightened being, a buddha. Why? Because only those who have attained buddhahood are fully developed and fully separated from limitations: those still in samsara cannot place others in nirvana. Even sravaka arhats or tenth level bodhisattvas are unable to benefit others fully, for they themselves still have limitations, but a buddha spontaneously and automatically benefits all beings with every breath he takes. His state is metaphorically likened to the drum of Brahma, which automatically resounds teachings to the world. Or it is like a cloud, that spontaneously takes cooling shade and life-giving water wherever it goes. To fulfil others' needs we should seek to place them in the total peace and maturity of buddhahood, and to be able to do this we ourselves must first gain buddhahood. The state of buddhahood is an evolutionary product of the bodhimind. The bodhimind is born from the special thought of universal responsibility—the thought to benefit others by oneself. To drink water we must have both the desire to drink and a container for the water. The wish to benefit others by placing them in buddhahood is like the desire to drink, and the wish to attain enlightenment oneself in order to benefit them in this way is like the container. When both are present, we benefit ourselves and others.

If we hear of the meditations that generate the bodhimind and attempt to practice them without first refining our minds with the preliminary meditations, it is very unlikely that we shall make much inner progress. For example, meditating on compassion without first gaining some experience of the meditations on the four Noble Truths, or at least on the truth of suffering, would lead to a merely superficial

understanding. How can we experience mature compassion, the aspiration to free all beings from suffering, when we do not know the deeper meanings and levels of suffering that permeate the human psyche? How can we relate to others' suffering when we do not even know the subtle levels of frustration and tension pervading our own being? The nature of suffering must be known in order to know the workings of our own mind; only then shall we be in a position to empathize with the hearts and minds of others. We must have compassion for ourselves before we can have it for others.

Through meditation on suffering a certain amount of renunciation or spiritual stability will be generated. This stability should be guarded and cultivated by the various methods taught on the initial and intermediate stages of training, which are the two main steps in approaching the meditations on the bodhimind. As we progress in our meditations on the suffering nature of being and on the causes of this suffering, we begin to search for the path leading to transcendence of imperfection. We meditate upon the precious nature and unique opportunities of human existence, which makes us appreciate our situation. Then we meditate upon impermanence and death, which helps us transcend grasping at petty aspects of life and directs our minds to search for spiritual knowledge. Because spiritual knowledge is not gained from books or without a cause, its cause must be cultivated, which means training properly under a fully qualified spiritual master and generating the practices as instructed.

Merely hearing about the bodhimind is very beneficial because it provides a seed for the development of the enlightened spirit. However, to cultivate this seed to fruition requires careful practice. We must progress through the actual inner experiences of the above-mentioned meditations, and for this we require close contact with a meditation teacher able to supervise and guide our evolution. In order for his presence to be of maximum benefit we should learn the correct attitudes and actions for cultivating an effective guru-disciple relationship. Then step-by-step the seeds of the bodhimind he plants within us can grow to full maturity and unfold the lotus of enlightenment within us.

This is but a brief description of the bodhisattva spirit and the methods of developing it. If it inspires some interest within anyone I shall be most happy. The basis of the bodhimind—love and compassion—is a force that brings every benefit to both yourself and others, and if this can be transformed into the bodhimind itself, your every action will become a cause of omniscient buddhahood. Even if you could practice to the point of even slightly weakening the self-cherishing attitude I would be very grateful. Without first generating the bodhimind, buddhahood is completely out of the question. Once the growth of the bodhimind has started, perfect enlightenment is only a matter of time. We should try to meditate regularly on death and impermanence and thus become a spiritual practitioner of initial scope. Then we should develop the meditations on the unsatisfactory nature of samsara and the three higher trainings, which make us practitioners of medium scope. Finally, we should give birth to love, compassion, universal responsibility and the bodhimind, thus entering the path of the practitioner of great scope, the Mahayana, which has full buddhahood as its goal. Relying on the guidance of a master, we should cultivate the seeds of the bodhimind in connection with the wisdom of emptiness and for the sake of all that lives quickly actualize buddhahood. This may not be an easy task, but it has ultimate perfection as its fruit.

The most important step in spiritual growth is the first: we must begin by making a decision to avoid evil and cultivate goodness within our stream of being. On the basis of this fundamental discipline every spiritual quality becomes possible, even the eventual perfection of buddhahood. Each of us has the potential to do this, each of us can become a perfect being. All we have to do is direct our energies

at learning and then enthusiastically practicing the teachings. As the bodhimind is the very essence of all the Buddha's teachings we should make every effort to realize it.

Colophon:
Edited by Nicholas Ribush from an oral translation by Lama Gelek Rinpoche.
From *Teachings at Tushita*, edited by Nicholas Ribush with Glenn H. Mullin, Mahayana Publications, New Delhi, 1981. A new edition of this book is in preparation. Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre is the FPMT centre in New Delhi, India.
Reprinted for the Discovering BUDDHISM program with permission from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

The Kindness of the Mother

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The following is an excerpt from advice giving by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to retreatants at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Italy, in September 1983.

While practicing this retreat think as much as possible: "This is not for me. What I am doing this for is the happiness of each kind mother sentient being. I am doing this for each human being, for each of the kind mother sentient beings here in this room, at this center, for each of them, for their happiness."

Then think: "I am doing this for all the human beings in this country, in Italy, and all the rest—to free each of them from all the true suffering and all the true obscurations. I am doing this for each of them."

All the human beings on this earth are so confused, they have so many problems. The kind mother sentient beings who have been so kind to me, who have been kind from beginningless rebirths until now, extremely kind, have so much suffering, so much confusion, so many problems. They are tormented by so many problems, experiencing many sufferings of body and many sufferings of mind, day and night. So many that even though they have not been born in hell, for them it is like being in hell. They do not know how to renounce suffering and be free of it. They do not know the cause of suffering, so they do not know how to renounce it. Even though they wish to have happiness, they do not know how to achieve this. They do not know the cause of happiness.

So think: "I am doing this practice, the retreat of body, speech and mind from non-virtuous actions, for each of the narak beings, each of the preta beings and each of the animals.

Samsaric beings are constantly suffering. There is no break, not a second, not a minute when they are not experiencing suffering. Because of the suffering of compounding action they suffer continuously until they become free of samsara. There is no break, not for a minute or a second. They experience hundreds of sufferings from the three types of suffering.

Think of the kindness of others as much as you can, then by being aware of their constant suffering, think: "I am doing this for each of the sentient beings, so that they can be free from all the sufferings and achieve the ultimate happiness, the peerless happiness, the state of omniscient mind."

Each prostration that we make accumulates unbelievable merit, so while we are making prostrations we give that unimaginable merit to all the sentient beings. While we are doing prostrations we dedicate from the heart all this unimaginable merit to each sentient being.

In the breaktime and during session time, again and again, think: "I am doing this practice not for myself but only for others, for each of the sentient beings. You should think, "I have complete responsibility for freeing each of the sentient beings from suffering, all the sufferings and leading them to the state of omniscient mind. I am responsible to help each sentient being as much as possible."

Particularly you should remember the enemy, the sentient being you dislike and you should think, "I am doing this practice for him." By remembering the kindness of those people who normally hurt your ego you think, "I am doing this for them." These people are so kind, they show you how strong the selfish attitude and anger are within you—the root of your problems. And they show you how much impatience there is within you that has to be destroyed.

Also think:"It is possible to free these sentient beings. They create negative karma because of my existence. I myself am an object for them to create negative karma, so it is my job to free them from suffering and give them happiness. It is my responsibility to help them."

Remembering the kindness of the mother

I am going to give a little more explanation of how to train the mind in bodhichitta using the seven techniques of Mahayana cause and effect.

First of all you take the kindness of the mother as an example. This does not necessarily mean your present mother: maybe you did not see your present mother, she died when you were a baby so you do not remember her or you did not live with your mother. If your father or somebody else took care of you, you can think of them; think of somebody who has been very kind in this life.

First we do the meditation of the kindness of the mother on that person. Try to see the kindness more deeply, not only the kindness of this present life, make it deeper. It is easy to feel the kindness if you use the example of somebody who has been very kind to you, who has taken care of you when you were young and given you education or much material help.

Not remembering the other person as having been your mother is no reason to think that they have not been kind to you and your mother. Just that alone does not prove it. You see, we don't remember each other as having been our mother and kind. We don't remember that the dog outside has been our mother, but that is no proof. Just because we do not recognize them is no proof. Even in this lifetime there are many times when a child who has been cared for by somebody else and has not seen their parents for a long time, for many years, cannot even remember the figure of their parents. If they meet after many years they cannot recognize each other, even though that child was born from those people. That child cannot even recognize the parents of this life.

It is due to ignorance and the change of death and rebirth, the transference of consciousness through death and rebirth that sentient beings do not recognize each other as having been mother and kind.

Generally, most children feel closer to the mother—she is the closest relative. So by remembering the kindness of the mother, it is easier to deepen your understanding of the kindness of other sentient beings, the kindness that they have given you in past lives. Then, you see them in warm aspect, in beauty.

It is like when amongst many other people you see a person who is very kind to you, automatically you see them as different from the others. Even if they are physically ugly, you get a warm feeling of beauty. This is the same feeling that you get when you meditate on the kindness of all the sentient beings having been mother. First you think of the example of the mother, then you extend that feeling to all sentient beings and you see them all, even enemies, in the aspect of beauty, warm. This aspect of beauty comes with the kindness. The love of beauty is different from the great love.

There are four steps: realizing the kindness of the mother, seeing all sentient beings as mother, wishing to repay their kindness and then the great thought of loving kindness. The great thought of loving kindness and the thought of love are different. There is a difference between these two. The love of beauty comes at the same time as you think of their kindness.

Sometimes, when you are training your mind in bodhichitta the meditation technique of equalizing and exchanging oneself for others is stronger than thinking how sentient beings are precious and kind. Depending on how you think, the other way of training the mind can be much more effective, the thought of bodhichitta comes more strongly than by using the more extensive method—the seven techniques of Mahayana cause and effect on the basis of equanimity, cutting off anger and attachment and then trying to realize how sentient beings have been mother and kind. Sometimes when you meditate one is stronger, sometimes the other.

So, the mother has been extremely kind by giving us this body. If we meditate on the basis of the four outlines it is easy to understand the kindness. There are different headings containing all the ways in which the mother has been kind, if you know these headings you can meditate on these and expand the meditation on this basis.

One great bodhisattva, a great pandit, Kunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltsen gave this advice and teaching: for us to receive this body—the body of the happy transmigrator, the perfect human rebirth—depends on the parents, we receive it from them. It is dependent on them creating the karma to give you this body.

(End: Rest of the discourse not recorded).

Colophon:
Taken from *How to Develop Loving Compassion*, a Wisdom Intermediate Transcript *(out of print)*.
Reprinted here with permission from Wisdom Publications.

The Six Perfections

by Geshe Rabten

To become a buddha, a bodhisattva has to practice six perfections:

1. the perfection of giving *(dana paramita)*
2. the perfection of morality *(shila-paramita)*
3. the perfection of patience *(kshanti-paramita)*
4. the perfection of energy *(virya-paramita)*
5. the perfection of meditation *(dhyana-paramita)*
6. the perfection of wisdom *(prajna-paramita)*

Perfection of Giving

This perfection is divided into four categories: the giving of property, Dharma, refuge, and active love (maitri).

1. The giving of property. For most of us, basic material needs such as food and clothing are the types of property easiest to give. High bodhisattvas, however, are capable of giving their eyes, flesh, and even their lives. The object we give is not the actual giving—it is only the means for giving. The real activity of giving is the strong decision to give freely, without avarice. In this way, even if we possess nothing, we can practice giving, because giving depends on our state of mind, not on the object being given.

2. The giving of Dharma. The giving of Dharma means that one gives, with pure mind, the true teaching to other beings. This type of giving is more beneficial than the giving of property. Possession of property helps for only a limited time, while Dharma is lasting and more deeply helpful. A person with property may still be suffering, but Dharma can remove this suffering.

3. The giving of refuge. To give refuge means that we work to save and protect the lives of all living beings. For instance, if we put water creatures stuck in the mud back into water, we are practicing this kind of giving. If the life of any being is in danger, we have to help in any way we can. The practice of giving refuge results in very good fruit immediately and deeply.

4. The giving of active love. The practice of active love is the wish to give real happiness to all beings. By just having this wish, we cannot directly help beings straight away, but if it is cultivated it will eventually have great results.

All these kinds of giving help in two ways—they help other beings and they help ourselves. If we practice giving solely for our own benefit, it is not true giving.

Perfection of Morality

The perfection of morality has three aspects:

1. The first aspect is the protection of our body, speech and mind from performing unskillful deeds. We have the tendency to act unskillfully, and this tendency needs to be controlled. We can think of our body, speech and mind as three naughty children, and of ourselves as their parent trying to keep them occupied in a room. Immediately outside the door of the room is a dangerous precipice, which represents the harmful things to which the children are attracted. Whenever they try to run out of the room, we have to pull them back inside to safety. If we let our body, speech and mind go as they will, we shall experience much suffering in the future. This protection of body, speech and mind is the first aspect of morality.

2. The second aspect is to protect others in the same way as we protect ourselves. For instance, when someone is about to kill an animal and we demonstrate that it is wrong to do so, we are protecting that person from committing harmful actions.

3. When we perform any skillful deed, this automatically protects us from performing any unskillful ones. This substitution of skillful action in the place of unskillful is the third aspect of the perfection of morality.

Perfection of Patience

There are three types of patience:

1. Patience when we are harmed by others. When we are harmed bodily or mentally by others we should not react by getting angry or harming them in return.

2. Patience when we are suffering. When we suffer, we point to someone or something outside ourselves as the cause. The immediate reason for our suffering may be something outside, but the deep, or underlying, cause is our own karma, which is of our own doing. The fruit or our actions must come back to us. If a person stabs us with a knife, this injury had to happen to us. We cannot point to anyone outside ourselves as the cause. This way of thinking reduces the power of suffering over us. We have to start practicing patience with very small sufferings; later we shall be able to be patient with very large ones. As a result of having practiced the perfection of patience, a bodhisattva can withstand any suffering whatsoever for the sake of beings. If we walk along a very rocky path, it is impossible to remove all the stones from the way, but strong shoes protect us from all possible injuries.

3. The patience of keeping concentration. The third kind of patience is that of keeping concentration on meditation, or anything else concerned with Dharma, without allowing distracting influences to harm the practice.

Perfection of Energy

This means energy for Dharma. There are three kinds:

1. The first is the energy of the mind that stops the desire for unprofitable things. If we have a strong desire for ordinary things disconnected from Dharma, it disrupts our Dharma practice. Although we have to do everyday things, if our fondness for them is greater than our fondness for Dharma,

our attention is taken away from our main work. A person may concentrate and work very hard, but if the goal of all that effort is a worldly one, then, according to Dharma, that person is lazy. People who really want to practice Dharma are in a hurry even when eating or excreting, so as not to waste time. Energy for worldly things is weakness; energy for Dharma is real strength. This aspect of the perfection of energy speeds us quickly towards the final goal. Having energy for Dharma practice, the real purpose of life, prevents our being distracted by worldly goals. It protects us from all kinds of bad things.

2. The second kind of energy protects us against tiredness. For instance, a meditator who suffers from such tiredness that even the mere sight of the meditation place brings on sleep, overcomes this weakness by this kind of energy. One way to stop this fault is to consider the fruit of meditation or Dharma practice; if we bear this in mind, bodily tiredness does not make us lose our energy. People at work do not suffer very much from tiredness because they are thinking of the money they will get. If we consider the great fruit of practicing Dharma we will work hard at it.

3. The third kind of energy is the confidence that we are not too small, weak or stupid to obtain the fruit of Dharma practice. Weakness of this kind stands in the way of achievement of the object. It can be overcome by thinking that the highest Buddhas and bodhisattvas also once had only delusion, lived in samsara, and were worse than ourselves. By practicing Dharma, they reached the highest stages of perfection; we can do the same. No one has perfect virtue from the beginning; when children first go to school they cannot even read or write, but later they learn to do not only that but many other things as well, and some become great scholars. The Buddha said that even insects living in excrement can become Buddhas. If we bear all this in mind, we shall find no reason why we cannot practice Dharma.

The three kinds of energy overcome three weaknesses: the first is that the mind will not turn to Dharma; the second is the fatigue we experience when we practice; the third is the doubt we have in our own ability to achieve the aims of Dharma. The person who wants to get to the top of a mountain has first to turn to the path, second, to keep going and not give in to laziness, and third, not to falter and think, "This is possible for strong people, but not for me."

The scriptures teach that all virtue follows from energy. With energy, someone who is not intelligent can get the Dharma fruit. A person who is intelligent but lazy will not get the fruit, and the intelligence is useless and wasted. With both intelligence and energy, there will be the greatest success. There is a simile in the scriptures that if the dry grass on a mountain catches fire and the wind fans it, the whole mountainside will catch fire, but if there is no wind the fire will go out straight away. Intelligence is like the fire and energy like the wind. If a person has intelligence and no energy, nothing will be accomplished. Thus the perfection of energy is essential for achieving the goal.

The Perfection of Concentration

Concentration must be on an object. It is very important in both Dharma practice and ordinary life. The Tibetan word for concentration meditation is *zhi.nay*; *nay* means to "dwell" or "stay," and *zhi* means "in peace." In a practical sense, then, *zhi.nay* means to live peacefully without busy-ness, and is often translated as "calm abiding." If we do not examine it carefully, our mind seems quite peaceful; but if we really look inside, it is not peaceful at all. Our mind is not able to stay on the same object for

a second. It flutters around like a banner in the wind; as soon as we concentrate on one thing, another comes to disturb it.

Even if we are living on a high mountain or in a quiet room or cave, our mind is always moving. If we go up to the top of a high building in a busy city we can look down and see how much turmoil there is, but when we are moving around within the crowd, we are only aware of a little of the bustle. Among the various mental factors, there is constant movement between conflicting elements; these factors always lead the mind. The movement of a banner fluttering in the wind is not caused by the banner itself but by the wind. Mind is like the banner and the mental factors are like the wind. This constant movement stops the mind concentrating on an object for long. Of our mental factors, the defilements are stronger than the good qualities. We usually do not try to control them, and even when we do, it is very difficult because for a long time we have been in the habit of always following them. Concentration or calm abiding occurs when our mental factors are purified and thus our mind is able to dwell peacefully on the object.

If we practice the calm abiding type of meditation, we might use an image of Buddha as our object of concentration. The important point is to keep our attention focused on it, clear or otherwise. The clarity will eventually come naturally. At the beginning, concentration is very difficult; the mind always turns this way and that. When we persist in the practice, however, we shall find that we are able to keep our mind on the object for one or two minutes, then three or four minutes, and so on. As the meditator continues to practice, his body and mind experience a special pleasure; this feeling marks the attainment of the final goal of calm abiding. Although at the ninth stage of calm abiding we feel very happy and peaceful, this is not the real end of meditation. Firm concentration on the object is still not the complete achievement.

Now the meditator can combine concentration with an examination into the real nature of the object of meditation. After continuing the simultaneous practice of both types of meditation, a special pleasure arises from the seeing into the object. "Seeing the object" involves seeing whether an object is suffering, seeing if it is permanent or changeable, and looking for the highest truth to be found about the real nature of the object. In Tibetan, the name for this meditation with insight is lhag.thong; lhag means more, or higher, and thong to understand or realize. Through this kind of meditation the mind obtains more understanding of the object than it can through simple concentration; when this practice has been perfected, the mind can turn to anything.

The Perfection of Wisdom

The mind can be turned to deeper and higher things. It has to be used on the one hand to overcome karma and defilements, and on the other to obtain the virtues of a buddha. For this, the object can only be emptiness, or shunyata; other meditations prepare the mind for this final object. If we have a very good torch that can show up anything, we have to use its light to find what is important. The root cause of all our trouble is ignorance. We have to use our knowledge of emptiness to dispel ignorance; we must use our mind, purified by calm abiding and special insight, to cut the root of the tree of ignorance. In the drawing, at this stage, the practitioner is holding a sword, symbolizing the realization of emptiness, to cut the two black lines symbolizing the two obscurations: the defilement-obscuration and the knowledge-obscuration. The realization of emptiness is essential to remove ignorance.

Once we come close to a thorough understanding of emptiness we are on the way to the perfection of wisdom—the complete comprehension of emptiness. The path of Seeing, when emptiness is experienced directly, is the transformation of the living being's mind. We are no longer sentient beings but arhats or arya beings and we enter the bodhisattva levels (bhumis) and experience ultimate bodhichitta, which wells up naturally when we experience the true nature of reality.

Colophon:
Taken from *The Graduated Path to Liberation, A guide to developing the mind*, by Geshe Rabten. Translated by Ven. Gonsar Rinpoche. First published by Cambridge University Buddhist Society, Cambridge, England, in 1972. Edited by Nicholas Ribush and Beth Simon and republished by Mahayana Publications, Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre, New Delhi, 1983, 1984. ISBN 0 86171 018 5.
Reprinted here with permission from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive..

Practicing the Good Heart

by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

First, I would like to thank everyone who has come here. I am very happy to meet again those whom I have met before, and to meet for the first time those whom I have not met before in this life. I hope that there will be some benefit to you even from my mumbling. I thought to speak a little about Buddhist conduct and view. Buddhist conduct means not harming other living beings; Buddhist view means dependent arising.

The value of a good heart

Buddhist conduct involves great compassion for all living beings. If we have compassion in our heart and our actions arise from that compassion, it is impossible for us to harm other living beings. Since we have compassion for others, our actions benefit rather than harm them.

First, there is not one living being who wants to receive harm-——--not even one. Understanding this, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, trained his mind in compassion for all living beings and completed that training. That was the main practice accomplished by Buddha. Using himself as the example Buddha then, out of his great compassion, advised us to have compassion for all other living beings and not to harm them.

Even if we cannot benefit others, at least we should not harm them. From the idea of not harming others, we develop the capacity to benefit them. This is Buddha's essential advice to us, which he accomplished himself. From the 84,000 teachings of sutra and tantra, this is the essential practice. If we do not abandon harming others, there is no spiritual practice in our life.

No matter how much people claim to be meditating or doing profound, secret practices, if they cannot abandon giving harm to others, they are not performing the fundamental practice of Buddhism. I think the fundamental practice of all religions, not only Buddhism, is to abandon harming others and practice compassion. This is the essence of all the various religions. Whether we are Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist, the essential point is not to harm others and to generate compassion for them.

If we act in this way, our religious practice will bring happiness to others. We will give happiness to others, and we will also certainly obtain happiness for ourselves. Even if we cannot bring happiness to others, our religious practice at least will become beneficial to our own happiness and will not harm us. This is a very important point to analyze and understand. Our practice of religion should at least benefit us with happiness now and in the future.

It is very important to have a generous, compassionate mind. Without a generous mind, a compassion-

ate heart, no matter how wealthy we are, there is no mental peace in our daily life. Our problems become even greater than before, when we were not wealthy. Our mind becomes more dissatisfied, with more worry and fear. We have more enemies and harm others.

If our heart is empty of compassion, no matter how educated we are—even if we know everything taught in all the universities and have every degree—again we have the same problem: we have no peace of mind. We have more pride than when we were uneducated and many more problems. Our life passes full of problems. Our life finishes while we are experiencing big problems of disharmony, worry, and fear.

Even if we are Buddhist and know by heart all the sutra and tantra teachings of Buddha and all the commentaries written by the pandits and can explain them all well, if our heart is empty of compassion, if we do not have a generous mind towards other living beings in our daily life, there is still no peace of mind. Even an extensive, intellectual understanding of Buddhism does not guarantee peace of mind. This can apply to any religion.

Even if we own diamonds or dollars equal to the number of atoms of the earth, if our heart is empty of compassion for others, our life is empty. Even with that much wealth, our life is empty; there is no happiness. However, even if we do not own one atom of a diamond or one dollar, if we have compassion for all beings, there is great peace and happiness in our everyday life.

We can see that none of these—wealth, education, or religious knowledge—offers peace of mind. What provides peace of mind and happiness in life is having a good heart, a generous mind.

Nothing in life is more important than the good heart. Mountains of gold or diamonds cannot compare with the value of this good heart. Without compassion, there is no peace or happiness in daily life, and your wealth becomes worthless. Compared to the value of one generous mind, it is nothing. Compassion is incredibly precious and important. It is of the utmost need in each hour, each minute, each second, for the happiness of oneself, and especially for the happiness of all other living beings.

This good heart should be our prime concern in life. Among all our activities, our enjoyment of food, clothing, and places, this good heart is the first thing we have to consider. We have to take care to generate compassion in our heart. Among all our everyday activities, we can see that this is the most important to practice from morning until night.

If we have a good heart, we experience happiness and relaxation. We have no reason to feel angry or jealous, and we have a happy mind. When we speak, sweet words come out. Even our face is happy and smiling. At night we go to bed with a happy mind and sleep comfortably, without any worries.

Otherwise, if we live our life with a selfish, ungenerous mind, we think about nothing else except me, me, me: "When will I be happy? When will I be free from these problems?" If we have this kind of attitude, jealousy and anger arise easily, strongly, and repeatedly, and we experience much unhappiness in our life, many ups-and-downs. During the day we have a cold heart, and at night we go to bed with a cold heart and an unhappy mind.

No matter how hard one tries, a person with a selfish attitude has difficulty making friends. Even when

one does manage to make friends, friendships do not last. Eventually, after a few hours or a few days, a friend becomes an enemy. Anyone with a strongly selfish attitude has few friends and many enemies. Wherever they go, they always have problems. People always complain about them and warn others, "Don't let him stay at your house!" Even though this person wants only a good reputation and does not want the slightest bad reputation, his or her selfish mind naturally brings about a bad reputation. When they visit other people, people are not happy to see them.

However, people who have a good heart, who care more about others than themselves, always have a good reputation. Wherever they go, they have many friends, and they find that other people are happy to help them. When this someone with a good heart goes to visit other people, they are happy to see him and have him stay in their house. People are always very happy to meet and help such a person—crowds of people want to help him.

A selfish, impatient person, even when having a very miserable time, has difficulty finding people to help him. Nobody wants to help him. Other people may even be glad to hear that he is sick; they may even wish him to die.

It is the complete opposite for the person with a good heart. There is happiness in his life. Even if they have nothing but water to drink, they are happy and can enjoy it. If our attitude is selfish, impatient, and cruel, even if we eat food costing many thousands of dollars or drink expensive drinks, we find no enjoyment. We cannot even taste the food because our mind is filled with problems and worries. We cannot even enjoy eating expensive food in a luxurious place.

Even though physically we may be able to go to the moon or other planets, if from birth until death we do not have a good heart towards those with whom we live, there is no happiness. Our life becomes empty—an empty human life. A good heart is priceless, more precious than anything else in the world.

The happiness of others

Starting from our family, the happiness of all beings is dependent upon us. Eliminating their problems, giving them happiness, is our responsibility. This is very important to understand, and to feel, in our everyday life.

I often use the example of a couple in which the wife practices the good heart while the husband is selfish. Because the wife thinks more of cherishing her husband than herself, when he causes her some problem, she does not retaliate. By not retaliating, she not only has happiness in her own life, but creates fewer problems for him, which means more peace. If she retaliates when he gives her a hard time, his problems become greater. Because she does not retaliate, he does not have that additional problem, so there is more happiness for him.

If we have a toothache, but today the toothache is less painful than yesterday, we say, "I am better today." It does not mean there is no pain at all; it just means we are happier today. Why? Because today we do not have as much pain as we had yesterday. The pain is less today so we are happier, and label "better" on that.

It is similar to the couple: because the wife practices the good heart, the husband has fewer problems,

so he is happier. His happiness came from her, is dependent on her. In the same way her happiness is dependent on him; it has to come from him.

Like this, if there are twenty people in a family and one of them practices the good heart, nineteen people receive one less problem. That person does not retaliate and so does not harm the rest of the family; they have that much more happiness. Their happiness came from this person. We can see very clearly how this one person is responsible for the happiness of the nineteen other people; their happiness depends on him.

Now, it is the same with all the human beings and creatures on this earth, all of whom want happiness and do not want suffering. If one living being has a good heart and does not harm others, the harm received by all the rest of the living beings becomes that much less; they receive that much more happiness. We can see that this one person is responsible for the happiness of all living beings.

It is similar with each of us here. Starting with our family—the people with whom we live, eat, and work—the happiness of all living beings is dependent upon us. If we change our selfish attitude to one of loving compassion, starting with our family, no other living being receives harm from us. They also benefit by receiving happiness.

If we do not change our selfish attitude, our actions will not change, nor will the harm we give others. Starting from the small number of beings with whom we live, eat and work, who want happiness and do not want suffering, to the numberless other living beings, the harm they receive from us will not stop.

There is a big difference when we change from the selfish mind to the good heart, which cherishes others with loving compassion. Starting with the small family with whom we live, all others receive happiness, benefit from us, and receive fewer problems. If we do not change our selfish mind, all other beings receive harm from us. Whether others are happy or continue to receive harm is completely in our hands. It is up to us. It is our decision. Each of us is completely responsible for the happiness of every sentient being.

If in our daily life we show loving kindness, compassion, and respect for everyone from morning until night, they are happy. When others see that we feel loving kindness and compassion for them, our attitude towards them makes them happy. Showing respect for them with our body and speech makes them happy. Even smiling at them makes them happy. The happiness of others definitely depends on us, on how we act towards them. If we think of the experiences of our everyday life, it is very clear that we are responsible for the happiness of others.

If we behave in the opposite way, following selfish, impatient and jealous attitudes, we make the people we meet unhappy and upset. The happiness of living beings definitely depends on us. By not changing our selfish attitude, by not practicing the good heart and cherishing others, how many living beings have we harmed this year? From birth until now, how many beings have we harmed? If we do not change our attitude, even after death we will harm others.

Consciousness continues

Think deeply about this: The direct cause of this life's consciousness, which is shapeless and colorless,

is not the fertilized egg, but a consciousness of a similar type that unites with the fertilized egg. There is continuation of consciousness. This present consciousness has continued from a past-life consciousness, and that consciousness continued from the consciousness of a previous life. In the West as well as in the East, many people, both young and old, are able to remember past lives and see future lives, their own and those of others. This comes about through development of their minds, which means some achievement of the path, whether through ordinary meditation practice or karma. As the mind becomes more advanced, one can see and remember such things.

Some people can remember coming out of their mother's womb; some can even remember being in the womb. Similarly, some people can remember past lives. Those who cannot remember past lives are in the same situation as those who cannot remember what they ate yesterday or what they talked about earlier today. They also cannot remember all the games they played as children. They cannot remember coming out of their mother's womb or what they experienced in the womb. The inability to remember these is not a valid proof that we were not in our mother's womb, that we were not born from our mother's womb, or that we did not play when we were children. In the same way, our inability to remember past lives and see future lives does not mean that past and future lives do not exist. They do exist—other people with more advanced minds and greater knowledge can see them.

As our mind becomes more advanced, we can see that the selfish attitude of our present life is the continuation of the selfish attitude of our past life. The previous selfish attitude has been continued from another past life, and so on. Just as the continuation of our consciousness does not have a beginning, the continuation of our selfish attitude does not have a beginning. Therefore, we have been harming other living beings from beginningless time until now. If we do not change our attitude in this life, while we have this precious human body, we will continue to harm other beings in all our future lives. This selfish attitude is unbelievably harmful.

By thinking of history, we can also understand how in the past millions and millions of people were killed because one person did not practice the good heart. Uncountable numbers of creatures also received harm. If this one person had practiced the good heart, if he had just practiced patience, all these millions of people and uncountable numbers of creatures would not have been killed. We can see that the well-being of all those living beings depends completely on that person; the entire problem came from that one person not practicing the good heart, not cherishing other living beings.

Cherishing others

To practice the good heart in our everyday life is more important than anything else. Try to feel this responsibility. Think repeatedly: I am responsible for the happiness of all living beings. When we wake up in the morning, as we open our eyes, we should think: I am responsible for the happiness of all living beings, and for the elimination of all their problems. This is the purpose of my life. This is why I have a human body. If you have dogs, cats, or birds in the house, think also of them: The reason I have this precious human body at this time is to eliminate the problems of other living beings and obtain their happiness. This is the meaning of my life. Then think: Cherishing myself is the greatest obstacle to my happiness and the fulfillment of my wishes. Self-cherishing is my greatest enemy. There is no question that it is the greatest obstacle to fulfilling the wishes of all living beings and obtaining their happiness. There is no greater obstacle than this.

Many times we ask such questions as, "How can I make my life worthwhile? How can I benefit others?" The best way to benefit others is to reduce our own selfish mind. The more we reduce our selfish mind, the less harm others receive from us, and the more temporal and ultimate benefit we receive. This is the best solution.

Those who practice Buddhism should think: Until I achieve enlightenment, until I die this year, this month, this week, and especially today, I won't allow myself to be controlled by the selfish mind. The best way to obtain happiness for all living beings and fulfill all their wishes is for me to cherish others. Until I achieve enlightenment, until my death-time, this year, this month, this week, and especially today, I will never separate from *bodhichitta*, the thought cherishing other living beings. In the morning when we wake up, with strong determination, we should make this plan for our life.

When you go to work, do not think, I am going to work for my happiness, because I want money and comfort. Without the money, I won't have a comfortable life. Instead of this selfish attitude, remember (even if you cannot think of all living beings) the kindness of the people who employ you. Think: Because they have employed me, I can enjoy my life, and I have the opportunity to practice the good heart and benefit others and myself. They are very kind to me. Remembering their kindness, you then go to work. Even though you are paid to work, your attitude is to benefit your employers. At the beginning and from time to time while you are working, remember this motivation.

Think of all the time we spend each day eating and drinking. All of our enjoyments—food, clothing, shelter—have been acquired through the suffering of uncountable numbers of living beings. To provide for our enjoyments, other beings created much negative karma by performing actions harmful to others, many of whom were killed. Since we receive our enjoyments from the suffering of so many other beings, it is very important to use these things with the thought of benefiting others. Using these enjoyments with a selfish mind, for our own happiness, would be insensitive and cruel. It would show a poor mind.

Whenever you eat or drink, remember the purpose of life. Be aware of your responsibility, to obtain happiness for all living beings and eliminate their sufferings. The purpose of your life is to offer service to others. For this reason you need to be healthy and have a long life; therefore, you take your food as if it were medicine.
If you spend your whole day with the thought of benefiting others, all of your activities—whether working, eating, dressing, or putting on makeup—become pure Dharma, because they are unstained by a selfish mind. All of your actions become pure virtue and the cause of happiness. This is the best, most reliable business.

If you are taking care of your children or parents, or doing similar work, again remember: my responsibility is to bring happiness to all living beings and eliminate their suffering. I am supposed to do this, but for now, it is wonderful that I am of some use to some of them. At least my body is benefiting one being (your child or parent). How wonderful this is! Think like this and rejoice.

If you constantly do your work with this attitude, there is great happiness all of the time and no room for depression. No matter how many people you are working for and no matter how hard your work is, think like this, especially thinking of yourself as the servant of others. Instead of thinking that others are there for you to use for your happiness, think: I am the servant of others; I am here for their

happiness. Like one of their own limbs, I am working to eliminate their problems and obtain their happiness. If you think that you are the servant of others, your problems stop. If you think that others are your servants, problems arise in your mind.

Destroying yourself

If you have a problem with alcohol or other drugs, feel the same responsibility: I am responsible for the happiness of all living beings. Even if I enjoy the pleasure of drinking and taking drugs, even if I were to receive ultimate happiness, it would be nothing to be excited about—I am just one person. Even if every creature on this earth were angry and negative towards me, criticizing and beating me, it would be nothing to be depressed about—I am just one person. If you do not practice the good heart, there is a danger that you, just one person, will harm all others, who are uncountable in number. Like putting poison in a city water supply, you could harm everyone. It is incredibly important that you do not harm any other living beings in this way.

If you have a problem with alcohol or drugs, think: For me to offer service to others, who are countless, is unbelievably important. In my life, there is nothing more important than this. How cruel it would be if I were to give up on all the rest of the living beings, who want happiness, help, and compassion from me. I want others to help me, show compassion, and not harm me. Like me, they all want happiness and not suffering. They want nothing more than this. They are all exactly like me. What I want is what they want. So, in terms of my own life, what should I do? Should I work for myself or should I work for others?

There is nothing more important than working for others. They need your help for their temporal and ultimate benefit. They want and need this from you. As long as you ignore them and cherish only yourself, you will not obtain even your own temporal happiness.

Think like this: This is actually my wish, but in reality I am completely destroying myself. By not controlling my mind, by following my desire to keep on drinking and taking drugs, I am becoming unhealthy and shortening my precious human life. In reality, I am destroying myself. I am destroying this precious human body, which has incredible potential to benefit others or even just one other living being. There are countless living beings to whom I can bring much temporal and ultimate happiness. Other living beings are dependent on me. By destroying my precious human body, I'm actually harming all those other living beings. I'm not allowing myself to serve others and fulfill their wishes. Seeking happiness only for myself means giving up on of all these countless living beings.

Buddhist teachings explain that in reality, as long as you follow desire, there is no satisfaction at all. This is the worst suffering. You follow desire, and there is no satisfaction. You follow desire again, still there is no satisfaction. You try again and again, but each time find no satisfaction. You try until your body collapses; until your whole life collapses. You drink until you are unable to move. The end result is that you become incapable of functioning. You end up with an empty life and experience great fear and anxiety when you die. I have heard from nurses that alcoholics die with a lot of fear. The fear they experience before they die is a sign that they will have even more problems after death.

It is the same with smoking. You may find you are smoking so many cigarettes that you cannot stop, even though you know it may be causing cancer or other diseases. In Tibetan Buddhist teachings,

especially in the predictions of Padmasambhava, tobacco is regarded as a black food, grown through wrongful prayer. Evil beings prayed that tobacco would disturb and harm people trying to live a good life, interfere with the development of their minds, and not allow them to practice virtue or meditation.

Many shortcomings of smoking are explained in the teachings. Cigarettes, opium, and such things pollute the chakras. They pollute the wind, which is the vehicle of the mind, and thus cause many disturbing thoughts to arise. Smoking causes anger and attachment to arise very easily. It damages the mind, making it very dissatisfied and impatient. Smoking makes it very difficult to develop the mind, and it especially interferes with the practice of tantra.

Cigarette smoke enters the mouths and noses of surrounding people—even those who do not smoke—when they inhale and causes harm to their bodies and minds. Even though the person smoking may be some distance from me, in another room, the smoke comes through the windows and goes into my lungs. I feel a pain in my heart.

When there is a lot of smoke, the mind becomes unclear and very sleepy. This shows that cigarette smoke pollutes the mind as well as the body. This is speaking only of the problems you experience in this life—not in the life after this. As explained in the sutra teachings, what you will experience in the life after this will be much heavier.

You may spend a lot of money every day on cigarettes, alcohol or other drugs. If you are a Buddhist, in addition to the choice of giving this money to others, you could accumulate much good karma by offering it to the Triple Gem. You use all that money, which comes from your parents or other people, on alcohol—for just a few minutes of pleasure or you could give all that money to charity. There are many people dying of starvation in the world. In Africa and many other places, there are famines. There are a lot of poor people and people in homes for the aged and in hospices who need help. In India and elsewhere there are Tibetan refugee camps. With all that money you could benefit hundreds of thousands of these living beings. There is so much you could do with it. If you do not use the money in this way, but use it only for your own happiness, you are actually destroying your own life. Not only are you destroying yourself, but you are preventing yourself from benefiting all living beings. This is very important. Choose which you want to do: Do you want to benefit others or do you want to destroy yourself?

Following desire

You are all familiar with Elvis Presley, who is very famous in the West. In his last show Elvis sang: "I tried and I tried, but I can't get no satisfaction. I tried and I tried ...." The song goes on and on like this. Remember that: "I tried and I tried, but can't get no satisfaction." Visualize Elvis Presley, completely covered with sweat, with tears streaming down his face because he could see that his whole life was empty. He did not find any satisfaction. This is an incredible teaching for us, an incredible meditation on the need to control the mind, to control desire.

In reality, in the second that we stop following desire, there is satisfaction. Right in that moment. No matter where we are, on that same meditation cushion, in that same house, right in that moment, there is satisfaction. Before, we experienced incredible dissatisfaction. We tried many things, but nothing made us happy. We had many plans and kept ourselves busy acquiring sense objects, but even after

finding them we were not satisfied. We could never have enough.

Following desire brings increasing problems in this life and in many future lifetimes. Following desire brings unbearable problems, and for a long time. The cause of all these problems is stopped immediately when we stop following desire. If we recognize the shortcomings of desire and stop following it, we immediately find satisfaction, happiness, and peace of mind. As long as we are friends with the selfish mind, we continuously have problems, hundreds of problems. Everyone seems to be our enemy, and we, in particular, experience relationship problems. As long as you are one with the selfish mind, even though your spouse may not have run away with someone else and you may physically live together, there are still many problems.

Destroying the selfish mind

In the very moment that we separate from the selfish mind, all of our gigantic problems stop. Our huge depression, which was like a gloomy valley completely covered by fog, is lifted. As soon as we separate from the selfish mind, that depression is no longer a problem. All the disharmony and problems, which ressembled living in a fire, cease immediately.

When your husband, wife, or friend leaves you to live with someone else, you experience so much worry and anger that you are unable to eat, unable to sleep, and need to take a lot of pills. Again, as soon as you separate from the selfish mind, all of these problems are no longer problems. In that moment, they disappear. When you are one with the selfish mind, you have a problem; when you separate from the selfish mind, there is no longer a problem.

It is not enough simply to know that all these problems come from the selfish mind; you have to find a solution. The solution, once you have seen that the original root of the whole problem is related to your selfish mind, is to separate yourself from this root. This is the best way to stop this huge problem and find peace of mind, calmness, and satisfaction. In this way, you become your own psychologist, your own doctor.

When you separate from the selfish mind, the wind—the vehicle of the mind—is no longer disturbed and violent; consequently, the four elements within your body are no longer disturbed and you are more healthy. Otherwise, by following your selfish mind, you make yourself unhappy and disturb your own mind. When you become impatient or jealous, the wind is disturbed, which then causes the four elements within your body to become unbalanced. This can even be physically dangerous, causing sickness, heart attacks, and so forth. As you know, ulcers and many other problems can arise from worry and fear.

Identifying the problem is not enough. The only way to stop problems completely is by actually separating from the selfish mind. If you do not train your mind, even if the external conditions change and you manage to persuade your partner to come back to live with you, after a few days or months or years, you will again experience the same problem.

As long as you are completely dependent on external conditions, you are not giving yourself freedom. Conditions always change. There is nothing to trust; nothing is definite. Again and again you will become depressed and even suicidal. When you cannot think of any solution, any way to change the

conditions so that your partner comes back to you, the thought to commit suicide comes. Once this thought comes, it takes only a minute to kill yourself. It only takes a minute to stop this precious human life.

This is how the selfish mind treats you. If such a situation occurs, remember Shantideva's advice in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life:* "If you are able to manage it, manage it. There is no point in worrying. Some things you cannot manage at all and again, there is no point in worrying because you cannot manage them." Worrying about something about which you can do nothing is useless; for example, worrying because you cannot make the sky become the earth.

In situations where there is nothing you can do, it is good to practice rejoicing. Think: I have enjoyed living with my friend for this much time. It is the same for this other person. As I wanted happiness through living with her, she wants the same happiness. She is as important as I am; her happiness is important. There is no reason why she shouldn't have the same opportunity to enjoy happiness as I have. Rejoice, thinking how wonderful it is that this other person has found the happiness that she wanted. In this way the situation becomes a cause for you to create good karma.

In your everyday life, rejoicing when others find success, in things big or small, becomes the cause of your own success. Becoming jealous of others' success interferes with your own. To create the cause for your own success, it is very important to practice rejoicing.

If your friend leaves you, think: This is exactly what my selfish mind needed. These problems have been given to me by my present selfish mind. Out of my selfishness I have done things that she doesn't like. In past lives, in past times, out of selfishness, I created the cause to experience this disharmony and separation. This relationship problem has been given to me by my selfish mind. So, now, instead of suffering by taking all these problems upon myself, I want to give all these problems back to my enemy, the selfish mind, and destroy it.

Practice mentally giving all your problems to your selfish mind. Instead of thinking: This is my problem, give it to the selfish mind. If you use all your problems as weapons to destroy your selfish mind, you will have no anger or jealousy left at all, and no opportunity to create negative karma.

Then think: These people are unbelievably kind to me. I follow my selfish mind, but these people are helping me to destroy this enemy, which is the source of all my problems. Because I cannot destroy my selfish mind by myself, they're helping me. Rather than allowing anger or jealousy to arise, think in this way. Feel their kindness from the very depth of your heart. Their kindness is greater than if they had given you a million dollars.

Think: They are giving me this gift so that I can destroy this selfish mind, which interferes with my obtaining every happiness, especially happiness for all other beings and the peerless happiness of enlightenment. Destroying this selfish mind is an incredibly valuable gift! You can derive unbelievable happiness from this thought. By practicing in this way, you become your own guide, instead of your own enemy.

No matter what problem you experience, whether in your relationships or with a disease such as cancer or AIDS, from time to time think like this: This problem is unbearable for me, but this is not only my

problem. Numberless other beings have similar problems, and some even have greater problems. How wonderful it would be if all those beings were freed from all their problems, all their sufferings and their causes, and I could take all of their problems upon myself. Pray for this to happen: May I experience all of their sufferings and causes myself, and may they have all happiness.

Day and night, while you are working or talking, continuously think: I prayed for this to happen and now I have received all of their problems upon myself. Whether experiencing a disease such as AIDS or cancer, a relationship problem, a business failure, or a lost job, think: I have prayed to receive all of the problems of other beings. I am now experiencing this problem on their behalf. Again and again think that you are experiencing your problem on behalf of others.

Instead of thinking: I have this problem, I have that problem; when can I be free?, think again and again that you are experiencing the problem for the sake of all living beings. In this way, there will be no depression; only happiness. All of the problems you experience will become worthwhile and virtuous. Even if the problem continues, it will become of unbelievable benefit in developing your mind, your good heart and bodhichitta. This is the most beneficial thing. By developing your mind and good heart, you can fulfill the wishes of all living beings, obtaining happiness for all of them. Having problems becomes more beneficial than not having them. This is Mahayana thought transformation.

Buddhist view

As I said in the very beginning, Buddhist conduct is not harming other sentient beings, and Buddhist view is dependent arising. Happiness and suffering arise by depending on causes and conditions. We label "happiness" as the calm feeling that has a sinking, satisfied aspect; we label "suffering" as the rough feeling that is dissatisfied in character. Happiness and suffering are dependent on the thought that labels, and on the base, which is the different characteristics of those feelings. Happiness exists in mere name, by depending on the thought and the base. It is the same with suffering. In dependence on the particular base—that rough feeling that is the opposite of satisfied—our mind labels "suffering." This is the way suffering exists, in mere name.

Since suffering is a dependent arising, depending on causes and conditions, it can be stopped by depending on other causes and conditions. If suffering were not a dependent arising, if it were independent, we would have no opportunity to stop it. Suffering comes from the mind, from attachment, anger, and ignorance, which are also dependent arisings. Past actions motivated by attachment, anger, and ignorance have left imprints of these on our mental continuum. These imprints cause attachment, anger, and ignorance to arise again when we meet the various desirable, undesirable, and neutral objects.

These imprints are present because they have not been eliminated. The remedy of the path has not been generated within our mind. However, even though the imprints are there in the mind, if we put the teachings into practice by remembering to apply the meditations while we are with the object of our attachment (or anger or ignorance), we can stop these delusions from arising towards that object. If we remember the meditations, we can control our mind so that there is no suffering, no confusion. If we do not practice the relevant meditations to control our mind when we are with the object, these disturbing thoughts arise, and we then experience problems.

We eliminate the imprints by actualizing the remedy of the path within our own mind. In our daily life,

each hour, even in this moment, if we are aware (watching our mind and remembering the various methods to control it), we can stop disturbing thoughts and problems. Because it is a dependent arising, the cause of suffering can be erased.

Just as non-virtuous thought is dependent on its cause and conditions, so is virtuous thought, the cause of happiness. By stopping the causes and conditions of the disturbing thoughts and by generating other causes and conditions, the mind is transformed into virtue.

Non-virtuous actions result mainly in the suffering of suffering, which is recognized as a problem even by those who are not familiar with Buddhist teachings. Basically, non-virtuous actions bring the suffering of suffering; virtuous actions bring happiness. In accordance with the result it brings, an action is labeled "virtue" or "non-virtue." This is how virtue and non-virtue are dependent arisings, empty of existing from their own side.

All of this is possible because of the basic nature of the mind, which is non-material and without color or shape. The mind is clear and knowing— that is, able to perceive objects. On the particular characteristics of this phenomenon, we have merely imputed "mind." Because the consciousness joins from one life to another, we label this "continuation of the mind." In dependence on each particular function, a different name is given. Since the mind arises in dependence upon the labeling thought and the base, we can see how the mind exists in mere name.

The mind that appears to us as a real mind, in the sense of existing from its own side, is a complete hallucination, completely false. When we think of the evolution, it is very clear that we give a different name to each of the mental factors. Our mind merely imputes, "This is patience. This is anger. This is loving kindness. This is compassion. This is feeling. This is recognition." The mind that exists is merely imputed on the base by thought. What appears to us as a mind existing from its own side is completely empty, a total hallucination. We should realize that this mind, existing from its own side, is empty. If we realize this, we have realized the secret of the mind. This emptiness is the clear light nature of the mind, the absolute nature of the mind.

It is the same with the I. There is no reason at all to say, "I am sitting here," except that your aggregates, the association of your body and mind, are sitting on this cushion. That is the only reason. The I is merely imputed on these aggregates by the thought. At the moment your aggregates are performing the action of sitting, you say, "I am sitting." When your aggregates perform the action of listening, "I am listening" is labeled on that. Afterwards, when you get up, when the aggregates change their action from sitting to standing or walking, then you label, "I am standing" or "I am walking." Right now, you might label, "I am sleeping. I am tired. I am exhausted from listening to all these mumblings." Each time the I is merely imputed on the base by thought. No I , in addition to this, exists. Not the slightest atom more than this exists. Whether you believe this or not, this is the reality. The I who experiences all this happiness and suffering, who performs all these activities, who can benefit others, who can achieve enlightenment, is merely imputed; existing in mere name on these aggregates.

However, the I does not appear in this way; instead, it appears as unlabeled, existing from its own side. This I that appears as unlabeled, as real, is the object to be refuted. Realizing that this I is empty is realizing the absolute nature of the I. This is the middle way. By realizing this, we can remove the ignorance that believes that the I, which is merely labeled, exists from its own side as unlabeled. By

developing the wisdom that realizes the absolute nature of the I, one can remove this ignorance (the root of the whole problem). By doing this, one also removes all of samsara and achieves liberation. By developing this wisdom (especially with the skillful means of bodhichitta), one is able to achieve enlightenment, the state of omniscient mind, for the sake of all sentient beings. On the basis of the Paramitayana path, one develops the greatly skillful means of tantra, especially Highest Yoga Tantra. With the generation and completion stages of the deity yoga of Highest Yoga Tantra, one achieves great bliss and the illusory body. With Highest Yoga Tantra, one is able quickly to achieve the incomparable happiness of the state of omniscience; then, by revealing the various methods that fit the various levels of mind of sentient beings, one is able to lead every single sentient being to the incomparable happiness of enlightenment.

The heart advice

All this success depends on how much we practice the good heart in our everyday life. As Shantideva mentions in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life:* "As long as you do not drop the fire, you cannot stop the burning. Following the self-cherishing thought is like holding a red-hot coal in your hand. As long as you do not drop it, you cannot stop the burning. In this same way, if you do not give up your selfish mind, if you do not give up yourself, you cannot abandon suffering. To pacify your own suffering and the sufferings of other sentient beings, give up yourself for other sentient beings and cherish them as yourself." This is very clear, very essential advice to you from the great bodhisattva Shantideva. From all the words of sutra and tantra, this is the essential advice of all the buddhas of the three times, including Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. This is the heart advice.

If you follow this advice, you and all other sentient beings will find happiness, now and in the future, always. I definitely believe that if you put this Buddhist psychology of thought transformation into practice, there will be immediate benefit. It is only a question of whether you put it into practice or not when a problem arises. It is only a question of that.

In one lam-rim teaching Lama Tsongkhapa explains, "One follows desire to gain satisfaction, but the result is only dissatisfaction." The result is that the problem, dissatisfaction, goes on and on. We have the problem for much longer in this life, and in future lives, especially in future lives.

It is not only that you have to experience the problem for such an inconceivably long time, but also that it is unbearable. There are so many problems. Many other problems arise from this one problem. When you follow desire, and you do not get what you want, anger and jealousy arise towards other people. Many other problems result and each of these problems creates more problems, just as a tree with thousands of branches arises from one tiny seed. What Lama Tsongkhapa says is completely clear and accords with our experience. Think deeply about this.

Colophon:
Taken from *Practicing the Good Heart*, a Wisdom Intermediate Transcript *(out of print)*.
Reprinted here with permission from Wisdom Publications.

The Nature of Compassion

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Training in compassion

It is extremely important always to train your mind in compassion. The more compassionate you are in your daily life, the more happiness you experience. A person with compassion causes less confusion in others because compassion does not allow thoughts of jealousy and anger, which are harmful to others, to arise. If your mind is in the nature of compassion, you benefit other living beings instead of harming them.

The definition of compassion is "wishing other suffering beings to be free from suffering." If your mind is compassionate in nature, you seek the methods to benefit others; you attempt to free them from their sufferings.

When a compassionate person lives with others, he or she brings them happiness and harmony. Because of the quality of that person's mind, simply seeing him makes one feel happy. Even though such a person does not seek praise or a good reputation, other people admire and respect him, so he automatically has a good reputation. Other people enjoy seeing, being with, and helping him.

It is very important to understand and meditate upon the sufferings of others, to be constantly aware of them. Think of the sufferings of other sentient beings, even of one sentient being who has much greater problems than the problems you believe you have. When you think of even one being with greater problems, your own problem disappears.

Usually we are concerned only about ourselves, thinking only of our own problems and not of the problems of others. We repeat over and over, like reciting a mantra or prayer, "I have this problem. I have that problem." We exaggerate our problems in our own mind. In this way, because we are thinking only of our own problems, we feel as if we are the only one on earth who is suffering. This makes us so depressed that we cannot even do our daily work. Even if we are living in a beautiful, expensive apartment that has everything, we cannot enjoy it. Even if we are trying to eat food that costs hundreds of dollars, we cannot enjoy it. It makes no difference to us whether we are eating food that costs five dollars or a hundred.

However, if we constantly train our mind to be aware of the suffering and kindness of others—how all our happiness and comfort have been received through the kindness of others—our own problems become completely insignificant. Even thinking of just one other being's problems makes a difference; our own problems become less important. Whatever trouble you have does not seem so important when you think of that other person. Then, when you think of the hundreds or millions or numberless other beings who are suffering, your problems become nothing. There is no space in your mind or time to think of yourself. You are just one person. Even if you are suffering, it is just the suffering of one

person. The thought of others who are suffering overwhelms your concern for yourself. There is no time to think of yourself, no time to work for yourself—only time to think of and work for others.

In your mind, others become more important because there are so many of them; they are uncountable in number. Their suffering is unbearable. In your life, day and night, your very first concern should be for others. There is nothing more important than this.

Suffering body

Simply look at a mosquito; it is so fragile, so pitiable. It has no power, no strength. Think about taking a body, the sight or sound of which makes others angry and want to kill. A mosquito's body is seen as very undesirable. Look at its long, thin legs. Simply look at its body and compare it to your own. There is no choice; compassion has to arise. Then look at a slug. We do not want to have such a body for even a second—not even as an experiment! Merely looking at its body is unbearable. It is so weak and powerless, so pitiful. When the monsoon stops, all the slugs die.

Look at a buffalo, a cow, a sheep, a goat, a dog, a monkey. Just by looking at their bodies, you can see they are so pitiful. You can easily see the pitiful, suffering nature of monkeys. Even when they find food, they are scared of being attacked by other more powerful monkeys. They have to look in the ten directions: "Is anybody going to come to attack me if I eat this food?" Just from the suffering nature of their bodies, you can see why these animals are so pitiful.

Spiders, snakes, scorpions, and all the other animals have not taken their bodies purposely, by planning carefully: "I want to be born as a snake," or "I want to be born as a scorpion." The main thing to understand is that they have not taken such bodies purposely, but instead without choice, by creating karma out of ignorance. First they create karma out of ignorance; then, without choice, their consciousness migrates to that body.

Even with human beings, when somebody criticizes or treats you badly, simply look at their body. When you think of the suffering nature of their body—without even considering how their mind is suffering!—you have no choice: compassion has to arise.

No matter how angry a person is (or how great he may think he is), inside of him is a skeleton. It is covered by skin, so that you cannot see it, but look at his body and remember that skeleton inside. That body is actually a very frightening object: pieces of flesh encircled by veins, and filled with blood, pus, and bad smells, with some hair growing on the top. Just looking at the body, you can see that it is suffering and pitiful. There is no way that you could be encouraged to harm it. When you see such a body, there is no way that the thought to harm that being could even arise.

Suffering mind

It is similar with the mind. When someone is overwhelmed by anger, he is the servant of his own anger: his body, speech, and mind become the servants of his anger. The person, who is labeled on that association of body and mind, has no freedom at all but is completely under the control of anger. Because of his anger, he has no happiness. Instead of thinking of the person and his anger as inseparable, you should see that he is completely controlled by anger. When you see that he has no freedom at all, you have no choice: compassion has to arise.

The teachings say that it is pointless to get angry with the stick that is used by someone to beat you. The stick itself has no freedom; it is simply wielded by the person to beat and hurt you. In a similar way, the body and mind of the person who beats you have no freedom; they are simply used by anger. Therefore, the teachings say, there is no point at all in becoming angry with someone who is beating you. That person should be an object of only your compassion.

In a similar way, you can meditate on compassion in relation to attachment, pride, and jealousy. It is very helpful to remember this, especially when you have some problem in your life.

Merely labeled by the mind

In daily life, when a person's body gets out of bed, he labels that: "I am getting up." When her aggregates perform the action of eating breakfast, she labels that: "I am eating breakfast." When his body does the action of washing, he labels that: "I am washing." When her aggregates perform the action of speaking, she labels her body doing that action: "I am speaking." As the mind is thinking, the person labels that: "I am thinking." As the person is meditating, watching the breath, or trying to train his mind in the path—in renunciation of samsara, bodhichitta, or the wisdom realizing emptiness—the person labels that: "I am meditating." Like this, from morning until night, constantly, according to what our body, speech, and mind are doing, we label: "I am doing this; I am doing that."

To give an example of labeling: Before someone is told that a person who dresses in a certain way and performs certain functions is called a "policeman," they have no perception of policeman. After they are told what a policeman is and believe what they are told, they then put the label "policeman" on a person dressed in that way. Only afterward do they have the perception of policeman.

The appearance of policeman comes from the person's labeling. If it is actually analyzed (perhaps not in the very first second, but immediately after that), the appearance of policeman seems to be unlabeled. This unlabeled appearance is completely opposite to reality. This appearance of an independent, unlabeled policeman existing from his own side is completely false.

The actual evolution is that you label "policeman" on the aggregates that do the particular work of asking questions, checking papers, and so forth. Unless your mind labels "policeman," even though the body and uniform of the policeman may be there in front of you, policeman does not exist. If there is no thought that labels "policeman," the policeman does not exist at that time. Even if there is the thought to label "policeman," if there is no base—no aggregates dressed in that particular uniform—policeman still does not exist. If the base (a body dressed in a particular way, performing police activities) exists, your mind puts the label "policeman" on that base.

You can see that the policeman exists on those aggregates in mere name, being merely labeled by thought. The policeman exists under the control of the mind of the person who does the labeling. The policeman does not exist in the slightest from his own side; he exists only as he is labeled by those aggregates of thought. This merely labeled policeman is the one who exists and performs all the police activities. This is the reality.

However, the policeman appears to you as unlabeled. He never appears as merely labeled by your own thought, but as existing completely from his own side. This appearance is opposite to the reality. In

reality, the policeman is merely labeled; he exists in mere name. This other appearance is completely false, a hallucination. This appearance of a policeman existing from his own side is the same as a policeman you see in a dream—completely non-existent.

Think about the I in the same way . Without labeling "I" on the aggregates, there is no appearance of I. It is very clear that all the appearances arising from the six consciousnesses come from labeling, from your own mind.

Even though the I is merely labeled on our aggregates by our own thought, it always appears as independent and existing from its own side, and we completely trust this as true. In reality, it is the merely labeled I that is getting up, eating, drinking, talking, meditating, traveling, doing business, and experiencing happiness and suffering. This merely labeled I is the one that achieves enlightenment by practicing the path or experiences samsaric suffering by creating its cause, disturbing thoughts and karma.

However, what constantly appears to us is this independent, truly existent I, existing from its own side without depending on anything. This seems to be what is eating, working, meditating, and experiencing happiness and suffering. This truly existent I in which we believe does not actually exist. It is completely empty. There is no such truly existent I doing all these activities. This appearance is completely opposite to reality; it is completely false. If we can recognize this appearance as false, it takes just a minute for us to realize the emptiness of the I; then, we have the opportunity to cut the root of samsara, the true cause of suffering. By cutting this, we are liberated from true suffering as well and have the opportunity to achieve liberation.

Because we are under the control of ignorance—not having realized emptiness and completely hallucinated as to reality—nothing appears to us as merely labeled. We trust completely in the appearance of this unlabeled I existing from its own side, and we are hallucinating about sense objects in the same way. Sense objects, which are merely labeled, do not appear to us as merely labeled, so when we meet undesirable objects, anger arises, and when we meet desirable objects, attachment arises. It is the same with jealousy and all the other disturbing thoughts. We then accumulate karma, the cause of samsara. Because of this karma we have to wander and take rebirth again and again in the six realms. Relating this to ourselves and our suffering becomes the cause of renunciation.

In this way, numberless other sentient beings also circle in samsara and experience sufferings in each realm. Meditate on how others are hallucinating, ignorant of the reality of self and phenomena. They do not believe in what exists, but they believe in what does not exist. If we think in this way, again we have no choice: compassion has to arise.

Taking responsibility for others

Lama Tsongkhapa, like a second Shakyamuni Buddha, acheived the whole path to enlightenment and did great works benefiting many sentient beings and the Buddhadharma. He explained the suffering of sentient beings in this way:

Mother sentient beings are constantly swept along by the four strong rivers of ignorance, craving, grasping, and wrong views. Their limbs fastened by the chain of karma, which is very difficult to break, they are trapped in the iron cage of I-grasping ignorance. Their minds completely gloomed with the

darkness of ignorance, they take birth again and again in samsara, continuously experiencing the three types of suffering.

All these mothers, who have been extremely kind to you, are bound with chains and being swept away by water. Not only that, they are in an iron cage in complete darkness; they cannot see any light. If your mother, who has been extremely kind to you, were suffering like this, you would find it unbearable. It is even more unbearable that sentient beings are completely trapped by I-grasping ignorance, taking birth and suffering in the six realms because of the four delusions of ignorance, craving, grasping, and wrong views.

You need to make a decision about how to live your life. No matter how much you are suffering, you are just one person. Even if you achieve liberation, this is nothing to be excited about—you are just one person. No matter how great a problem you have, there is nothing to be very depressed about—you are just one person. When you think of two other sentient beings who, under the control of disturbing thoughts and karma, are suffering in a similar way, because there are two of them, their suffering is more unbearable. It is more important that you sacrifice yourself and dedicate your life to working for these two other beings, in order to free them from the suffering of samsara and lead them to ultimate happiness. Even in terms of temporal happiness, these two are greater in number than you, so they are more important.

You are just one person, yet you think, "I am very important. Obtaining my happiness by solving my problems and eliminating my suffering is very important." But these two other people are greater in number, so it is more important to obtain their happiness and to eliminate their suffering.

However, it is not just two others, it is not just a hundred billion others; it is numberless others who, like you, want happiness and do not want suffering. An uncountable number of beings are suffering, devoid of temporal and ultimate happiness. When you think of this uncountable number, you yourself become completely insignificant. If you forget all these uncountable other beings, even for one minute, even for one second, and are concerned only about working for yourself, you are completely crazy. You have lost your mind.

Every hour of your life, there is nothing more important than sacrificing yourself to free all the numberless other suffering sentient beings from true suffering and the true cause of suffering and to lead them to temporal and ultimate happiness, especially the perfect happiness of enlightenment. There is nothing more important to do in your life than this.

When your mind understands the sufferings of others, there is no way you can relax. Compassion has got to arise. You must do something. If, like a rock or a tree, you had no mind, it would be different. But since you have a mind, which is clear and knowing, which understands that others are suffering, there is no way for you to relax, even if you are not capable of helping them. If your mother were drowning in a river, even if you were without arms and unable to help her, there would be no way you could relax and ignore what was happening. You would still be concerned about saving her.

In the same way, in your daily life you should use whatever capabilities you have to pacify the mental and physical suffering of others. There is no question that you should benefit others by preventing their problems and obtaining their happiness, even the temporary happiness they need, especially since

you have the opportunity to do this. You have received a perfect human rebirth with eighteen very rare qualities, and you have met the Dharma, the teachings of Buddha. You have met a perfect virtuous teacher who can reveal the complete path to enlightenment. By practicing the complete path to omniscience, you can become a perfect guide, with perfect understanding, power, and infinite compassion, and work extensively for all sentient beings.

By generating and training your mind in the complete Mahayana path, you have the opportunity not only to give temporary happiness to others, by freeing them from everyday problems, but to free them completely from even the cause— karma and disturbing thoughts— and lead them to the highest happiness, the state of omniscient mind.

If you, who have all the opportunities to help others find temporal and ultimate happiness, do not help, who will? If you, who have all the possibilities to develop your mind and perfectly guide others, do not do this, who will do it? For example, there is someone who has broken his leg and needs to go to the hospital. If you do not help carry him, who will? Since you have the capability, you have the responsibility to help.

Practicing moral conduct

There is no other way for you to offer ultimate benefit to sentient beings, perfectly guiding them to liberation and enlightenment, other than by achieving buddhahood, the state of omniscience. There is no other way. Achieving the state of omniscience depends on generating the path within your mind, and the foundation of the path is moral conduct. There is nothing more important or meaningful in life than benefiting other sentient beings; so, practically speaking, what can you do to benefit others?

The first thing is to stop harming others with your body, speech, and mind. The basic foundation of the path, the whole essence of the Dharma, is not to harm other sentient beings but instead to benefit them. Moral conduct, which involves protecting karma, is such an important practice because it means not harming others. For example, you can take a vow not to kill. You are just one person, but you have the potential to harm numberless people and animals. Even if you do not temporarily benefit others by giving them food, clothing, or shelter, simply by living in the vow not to kill, you prevent the potential harm of killing numberless sentient beings. Because you take the vow on the basis of every sentient being, you stop harming numberless sentient beings.

When one person takes a vow not to kill others, numberless sentient beings benefit by receiving less harm. If two people take a vow not to kill, others receive that much less harm. When more and more people live in the vow of not killing, the rest of the numberless sentient beings, who want happiness and do not want suffering, receive less and less harm. Not being in danger of being killed is itself a benefit. Even if you do not give mountains of food and clothing for disaster relief, simply living in the vow not to kill brings unbelievable benefit. Right from the second the vow is taken, numberless other suffering beings receive benefit from you.

If you then take the vow not to steal, others receive still more benefit and their lives become less dangerous. As you take more and more vows—five precepts, eight precepts, etc.—other sentient beings receive more and more happiness through receiving less harm from you. You can see that living in moral conduct, protecting karma, is very practical. When you give food or money to others, you cannot

give enough to cover all sentient beings. And, from their side, as long as they do not meet Dharma and do not understand karma, even though they receive food or medicine, this time, and are relieved from starvation or physically cured, they will again create the cause for these problems. Unless they abandon the cause of suffering and practice the cause of happiness, they will experience the problems again. As long as their eyes of Dharma wisdom are blind, they will create the cause again and again. Thus, their suffering has no end.

Therefore, on the basis of moral conduct, you listen, reflect, and meditate. You listen to the extensive teachings of the whole path to enlightenment, reflect on their meaning, and meditate on the path. Eventually, you can reveal Dharma to others, enabling them to open their Dharma wisdom eye and stop creating the cause of suffering. This is how their suffering can be ended. This is real moral conduct.

There is a difference between taking a vow and not taking a vow. If you do not take a vow, there is no benefit to others and you do not gain the merit from living constantly in the vow. You do not create negative karma, but there is no benefit from the merit of living in the vow. If you take the vow not to kill, you constantly create merit, good karma. So there is a difference. According to your capability, you should take one, two, three, four, or five vows.

Taking refuge in Dharma means not harming others. This is essential; it is the main cause of developing your mind and benefiting yourself in this life. Even in daily life you will have less confusion. Harming others creates confusion, bringing problems in your life and in the lives of others. Taking refuge in Dharma results in peace in your life and in the lives of others.

Living in whatever number of vows you take, avoiding that much harm to others, is the basic cause to develop your own mind, your own happiness, in this life and in the future, from now to enlightenment. This is the most practical thing you can do right now to benefit everyone. If you are concerned about bringing peace to the world, living in moral conduct is the real method to do this. Not harming others and, if possible, benefiting them are the essence of Dharma. This is the way to practice Dharma.

Success in your Dharma practice and in your ability to live in moral conduct depends on having a good heart, which means less self-cherishing thought. The less self-cherishing you have, the more quickly you will attain realizations in meditation, and the more successful you will be in the basic cause of this moral conduct. The more selfish your mind, the more obstacles you will experience. There are generally more obstacles to success, but especially to success in Dharma practice, which is the most important. In everyday life, not having obstacles depends on not letting yourself be under the control of the self-cherishing thought, but instead, cherishing others. All happiness comes from cherishing others, from loving kindness and compassion; all suffering comes from cherishing the self.

Basically, all problems and failures come from the self; all happiness and enjoyments come from others. Therefore, the heart practice of Dharma is cherishing others. This applies even to those who do not practice Dharma, who do not seek liberation or enlightenment or even the happiness of future lives but just want everyday happiness in this life. Since you want happiness, the essential method is cherishing others, not allowing yourself to be under the control of self-cherishing thought. This is the essential method to practice. All of the 84,000 teachings of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, all of the teachings of sutra and tantra, no matter how extensive or secret, come to this basic point: you need to renounce self-cherishing.

How to make life meaningful

The answer to the question, "Since I have to go back to the West, how should I live my life?" is very simple. Practicing the good heart is the most practical thing to do. This brings temporal and ultimate happiness, now and in the future, to you and every other being. Practicing the good heart, as much as possible not following self-cherishing, is the essential method to cut off the obstacles to success.

In addition to that, if you can find the time, do lam-rim meditation. Meditation helps the practice of the good heart, and the practice of the good heart helps meditation. Then your life becomes practical and meaningful. You will be very happy, because you are doing something correct and reliable. By doing this practice, you know that you can definitely achieve the result of happiness for yourself and for others. In this way, your life has purpose. Because you are benefiting yourself and others, you will be happy, rather than living your life in depression.

You should feel very happy. One year ago, a few months ago, there was no meaning in your life. You did not even know that you could have happiness after this life; that you could be reborn and have happiness in your next life; that you could have continuation of happiness in future lives; and also, that you could develop your mind and help others in future lifetimes. Before, you did not know that with this precious human body you could achieve, even in each hour, the three great purposes: happiness after this life, liberation from samsara, and the peerless happiness of enlightenment. With this body you can achieve any of these three. Even in one hour you can create the cause for any of these. You now know that you have the opportunity to achieve any happiness you wish in the next life; and higher than that, the opportunity to achieve liberation from samsara; and even higher than that, the opportunity to attain the state of omniscient mind, with the ability to guide all sentient beings perfectly.

By having met the Dharma, you now understand that you can achieve any or all of these by practicing the ten virtuous actions, the three higher trainings, bodhichitta, the six perfections and, especially, tantra. Knowing that you have these opportunities, you should feel extremely fortunate.

Colophon:
Taken from *Practicing the Good Heart*, a Wisdom Intermediate Transcript *(out of print)*.
Reprinted here with permission from Wisdom Publications.

Living with Bodhichitta

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The statues in Bodhgaya advised Lama Atisha that the quick way to achieve enlightenment is to practice bodhichitta. To train the mind in the ultimate good heart, bodhichitta, is also the best method for quick and extensive purification of negative karmas and extensive accumulation of merit in order to achieve enlightenment. Even if you know by heart all the secret, profound teachings of the first and second stages of tantra and can explain them extensively, and even if you practice them, without bodhichitta this does not become the cause of enlightenment. You may be able to generate heat and bring the drop down, but these are general attainments, experienced even by Hindus, who do not have refuge in their minds. Without bodhichitta, nothing in tantric practice becomes the cause of enlightenment.

There are many stories of meditators who spent their lives meditating on tantra, generating themselves as deities such as Yamantaka, and were then born as pretas similar in aspect to their visualized deity. This happened due to their unskillful tantric practice. They focused only on tantra and forgot the lam-rim practices of renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness. Without lam-rim practice or realizations, they practiced deity meditation and were born as very powerful, terrifying pretas. Lama Atisha told the story of one meditator who practiced the Hevajra tantra. He meditated on the generation stage, which is supposed to make it quicker to achieve enlightenment, but instead fell into the Hinayana path.

The way to make extremely meaningful this precious human body qualified with eight freedoms and ten richnesses, with which you can achieve the three great purposes, is by training your mind in bodhichitta. To make this precious human body most meaningful and most beneficial for yourself and all other sentient beings, train your mind in bodhichitta. You should not think that by doing some practice other than bodhichitta, you can achieve enlightenment quicker and complete the works for yourself and others.

After meditating on the three great puposes you can accomplish with this perfect human rebirth, meditate like this: "Every day from my birth until now, all the actions of my body, speech and mind have been done out of the selfish attitude, following worldly concern. None of these actions will become the cause of enlightenment, so I have wasted them. I have wasted so much of this highly meaningful perfect human rebirth."

Again, try to feel that this is a greater loss than losing diamonds equalling the number of atoms of this earth. Try to feel an incredible loss. "So far, all the actions of my body, speech and mind have not become even the cause of liberation, because they have been done out of attachment and the dissatisfied mind. I have wasted so much of my highly meaningful perfect human rebirth. So far, none of my everyday actions have even become holy Dharma, the cause of happiness in future lives. My actions

haven't even become the cause of happiness. I have wasted so much of my meaningful perfect human rebirth."

Even though we are trying to practice Dharma, it is very difficult for our actions to become holy Dharma. Most of our normal actions of sitting, walking, eating and sleeping do not become Dharma. Meditate like this on how much of our life has been wasted, how our actions have not even become Dharma. "If I had been practicing correctly and continuously from the time I met the virtuous friend and received lam-rim teachings up to now, after so many years I would have generated bodhichitta, or at least renunciation of samsara. By now I would have reached the first, if not the second, stage of tantra."

Thinking of how we have wasted our time an and not made any progress makes us more aware of how we live our life. We should be sure to make our life meaningful through practicing Dharma and thus have accomplishment in this life. As Kunu Lama Rinpoche explains in *Admiring Bodhichitta:*

When you eat, eat with bodhichitta. When you stand, stand with bodhichitta. When you sit, sit with bodhichitta. When you sleep, sleep with bodhichitta. When you look, look with bodhichitta. When you speak, speak with bodhichitta.

During the entire twenty-four hours, every action you do should be done out of bodhichitta, not for yourself but for others. Do every action—meditating or whatever—out of bodhichitta. As much as possible, try to make every action become a remedy to self-cherishing thought. If your daily actions oppose self-cherishing thought, they become the cause of a good rebirth and whatever happiness you wish in your next life, the cause of liberation from samsara, and the cause of enlightenment, which is the greatest advantage. All your actions then become Dharma. If your actions are against self-cherishing thought, they become the method to achieve all success. As long as your actions do not oppose self-cherishing thought, even if they are not done out of worldly concern and become holy Dharma, they are of limited advantage and bring limited happiness.

We should focus our whole life on this point. We should plan to live our life with this attitude, then all temporal and ultimate success will follow. All your wishes and those of others succeed because of this attitude. Whether you wish to have quick realization of the path or peace of mind and fewer problems in your everyday life, doing all your actions out of bodhichitta (which means opposing self-cherishing thought) is the most important and skillful practice. This one solution cuts off so many problems, both for you and for others.

Making your life meaningful

To make your life most meaningful and beneficial, live your life with bodhichitta, the ultimate good heart. Try to do every action during the entire day with the ultimate good heart of bodhichitta. Even if you cannot practice bodhichitta, the altruistic mind wishing to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, as much as possible try to live your life with a generous, good heart. The ultimate good heart is the thought seeking enlightenment in order to work for other sentient beings. Even if you are not doing the profound practice of the ultimate good heart, it is important if you have a job not simply to think: "I'm doing this work to survive. I need the money for food I have to eat." If you live your life with this attitude, you are thinking about nothing other than yourself; it shows no concern

for others. Among all the sentient beings, you are thinking about nothing except this one sentient being—and that is not even another person, but yourself!

With the attitude that you are working just to survive, your mind is not happy or relaxed. If you look at it, it's not a comfortable attitude, but painful and sad. Being concerned only about yourself, doing everything for your own happiness, is the principal cause of depression. All the problems of depression and aggression that lead you to depend on a psychiatrist or psychologist, making your life expensive, come from the selfish attitude. The selfish attitude also makes you busier, because you then have to earn the money to pay for the psychiatrist and so forth.

At this time you have a human body, not the body of an animal such as a pig or a horse. You have taken a superior rebirth with an incredible capacity to think and to perform superior actions, which animals and lower beings cannot do. You have much potential to think in a better way, and have the opportunity to benefit all sentient beings. It is not simply a matter of attitude; a precious human body actually can benefit all sentient beings. To have taken such a precious body that, unlike the bodies of other beings, can offer incredible benefit to others, and have an attitude that is not even superior to an animal's is very sad. With such a poor attitude, your life is not happy.

Even if you cannot generate compassion for all beings, when you get out of bed, dress, and get ready to go to work, at least think in this way: "My survival today comes from my employers. Because they have given me a job and money, I have all these comforts and enjoyments. My ability to survive as a human being and benefit others comes from the kindness of my employers. Even though I have an education, if they hadn't given me this job, I would have been in trouble. They are extremely kind."

Then think to repay their kindness: "I want happiness and don't want suffering, as do my employers. We are the same. As they want my help, I want their help. As I am dependent on their help, they are dependent on my help. Their happiness depends on me. If I need their help, they should help me. So why shouldn't I help them? They work for me, so why don't I work for them?"

Think: "I am going to do this job because I need to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Because I need the necessary conditions to practice Dharma, I am going to do this job." The work itself is then done completely for other sentient beings. Even if you cannot think of the highest goal of enlightenment, of working for all sentient beings, at least think: "I am going to do this work to obtain happiness for these particular sentient beings, who want happiness and don't want suffering, exactly like me. I am going to work to bring them happiness."

Then feel happy and rejoice: "How wonderful it is that these sentient beings find my life and body useful in stopping their problems and obtaining their happiness." Generate happiness, rather than being so concerned about yourself, always thinking: "I don't have this, I don't have that—I should have it!" By thinking like this, you create your own depression and aggression. This unskillful way of thinking unnecessarily fills your mind with aggression and depression instead of happiness. Passing your life with constant problems and unhappiness for one day, two days, three days, one week, one month, one year, comes from your way of thinking. The whole thing depends on your attitude.

Instead of beginning the day with worry and self-concern, with the thought that if you don't go to work you won't get any money, get up happily. Think: "I am going to work to obtain happiness for

these sentient beings and to prevent their problems. They want happiness and don't want suffering, just as I do. How wonderful it is that I can benefit at least some sentient beings. Even though I can't benefit all sentient beings, who equal the infinite sky, my life and limbs at least benefit some sentient beings. How wonderful it is that I am able to make them happy!"

Constantly practice awareness of this when you are getting up at home, driving to the office and while you are working there. Of course if you work for a large group of people, there is no question that you should feel happier because you are working for more sentient beings. But even if you are working for just one sentient being, you can still rejoice: "This human body is not useless. It is benefiting one sentient being, helping him to achieve happiness. This is great!"

By remembering the kindness of others, you are very happy and relaxed, and there is no depression. Because you are happy when you are at home, and even when you come to the office, you help create a very happy environment. Because you have a very peaceful mind, with loving kindness and concern for others, when you come to the office, other people who are depressed become happy when they see you. It is no help at all when they are depressed if you are also depressed. It simply makes everyone more depressed. Your being happy and relaxed makes others feel good and changes their minds. At least, this is how it should be with the people with whom you work.

Even though the work is the same, one unskillful way of thinking brings unbelievable problems into your life, making your life into a hell; another skillful way of thinking brings many different levels of happiness. You can create this happiness with the wisdom understanding Dharma. If you have an attitude of loving kindness towards a group of people—or at least one person—because you are more concerned about them and not so concerned about yourself, jealousy, anger and so forth and all other problems are lessened.

In regard to doing every activity with bodhichitta, there is another story about Gen Jampa Wangdu, who is a heart son, a very close disciple, of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and who is also my teacher. One day Gen Jampa Wangdu came here to Tushita to see Lama Yeshe and me. Gen Rinpoche told us that one day in his room he checked up to see how many years it had been since he had asked other people for anything for himself—it had been ten years. When he went to other people, it never concerned himself, always someone else. Isn't that amazing? I think it is incredible!

Whenever he would meet Gen Jampa Wangdu, most of the time Lama Yeshe would make jokes and put down him and any of their other friends who were ascetic lamas. Lama would always joke: "You people live in a cave with nothing—how can that be ascetic? How can that alone be an ascetic life? The whole world comes to me. I enjoy everything; I have everything." Lama was always joking about and putting down the ascetic meditators.

In the general view, in terms of the Dharma, and particularly the tantric, texts that Lama read, the advice he gave in everyday life, his actions, and his hidden practices that nobody outside knew about, Lama Yeshe's practice and realizations were not lower than those of ascetic meditators who have lived many years in mountain caves with no possessions—perhaps they were even higher. In terms of external appearance, it might seem that Lama Yeshe did not live an ascetic life and did not practice Dharma. Those who didn't know Lama well, who didn't live with him and know his daily life, might have thought such things. Older students who received many tantric teachings from Lama can understand

the high level of his realizations of second stage tantra. They can figure it out from how effective his teachings were.

When Gen Jampa Wangdu said this about working only for others, Lama simply said: "Oh, that is good." He didn't rate it very highly, just said: "That is good." But from the heart, Lama Yeshe liked Gen Jampa Wangdu very, very much and Gen Jampa Wangdu also had incredible heartfelt respect and admiration for Lama Yeshe, even more so during the last few years of Lama's life. Gen Jampa Wangdu himself was a great practitioner of tantra, with the perfect base of experiences to be labelled "yogi of Vajrayana." He had reached a very high level of the tantric path.

What Gen Jampa Wangdu said is very inspiring and you should use it as an example for your own life. If it is possible for ascetic meditators such as Gen Jampa Wangdu to generate bodhichitta, to change their attitude from self-cherishing to cherishing others, and to generate first and second stage tantric realizations, why not you? You are a human being; so are they. You have the same gurus and have received the same teachings. The only difference is if, from your side, you don't practice—that's all.

Even if you do not know about or meditate on the lam-rim, even if you do not think of the actual way of training your mind in bodhichitta with the preliminary renunciation of samsara, do everything in your daily life with the thought of loving kindness. Even if you are living in a city like everybody else, take care of your family or work in your job with the thought of loving kindness. Like you, your family are also sentient beings wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. The actual purpose of your life is to eliminate the sufferings of other sentient beings and bring them happiness. Your being alive as a human being is not for yourself but for others.

What you should do, in fact, is purify obscurations and accumulate merit for three countless great aeons by following the path, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did. In his lives as a bodhisattva, Buddha offered his holy body, eyes and limbs as charity to other sentient beings, numberless times and in many different places.

One recent lam-rim lineage lama, Je Drubkhangpa, who had a cave above Sera Monastery in Tibet, had several gurus, but from one particular guru he received many teachings on bodhichitta; I am not sure whether this was the first guru from whom he received teachings on bodhichitta. It seems that this guru was not a monk, but had long hair rolled up on top of his head and lived in the forest. He wasn't sleek or well-dressed and didn't live in a good house.

One day, from a short distance, Je Drubkhangpa saw his lama in the forest, crying. He was reading a scripture and crying very much. And even though he was alone there in the forest, he was giving the "thumbs up" sign a lot, which means "very good." In Tibet, this sign is also used for begging, where it means: "Please give!" or "Please help!" However, it also means "very good."

Not immediately but after some time, Je Drubkhangpa asked his guru: "Before, when I saw you crying very much in the forest and giving the "thumbs up" sign, what were you doing? What made you cry?" The lama explained: "The reason I cried was that I was reading Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's lifestories as a bodhisattva."

There are about thirty-four stories of Buddha as a bodhisattva, *The Jataka Tales*, which tell of how he

offered charity to, guided and benefited other sentient beings in many different ways. For example, once there were five hundred traders on a ship that was about to sink. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who was then still a bodhisattva who had taken the form of a huge turtle in that life; the turtle lifted up the ship and saved the traders from drowning.

At another time, when thousands and thousands of fish were about to die because they were stranded on a beach, Buddha recited the holy name of The Buddha Having a Jewel Ushnisha (Chom-dän-dä dezhin-sheg-pa rin-chen tsug-tor chän). If you recite this Buddha's name in the ear of an animal or human, particularly at the time of death, they cannot be born in the realm of the suffering transmigratory beings; it causes them to receive the body of a happy transmigratory being in their next life. When The Buddha Having a Jewel Ushnisha was a bodhisattva, he prayed that simply the recitation of his name would be able to benefit sentient beings and guide them from suffering. By reciting this Buddha's name to the thousands of fish, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as a bodhisattva saved them from the lower realms.

In another story Buddha offered charity to others of all his limbs, so that only the trunk of his holy body was left. The village people then thought: "Now he doesn't have any limbs, what is the use of him?"—and threw the remaining part of his holy body on the refuse heap. However, even on the refuse heap Buddha did great work for other sentient beings by offering what was left of his body to ants, worms and other creatures. There are many incredible stories of how Shakyamuni Buddha guided sentient beings, even when he was a bodhisattva.

Reading the Jataka tales, Je Drubkhangpa's guru thought: "This Guru Shakyamuni is a mother's son; he was born from a mother—I am also a mother's son. But there is a big difference. He was able to sacrifice himself for the mother sentient beings, and I haven't done anything. We are the same in being mothers' sons, but Guru Shakyamuni has been a very worthy son. He has saved so many sentient beings from suffering, offered much charity and borne much hardships for others. I am also a mother's son, but I haven't done anything worthwhile."

So, reading the stories, Je Drubkhangpa's guru was crying very much and making the "thumbs up" sign. He was giving Buddha the "thumbs up" sign to say: "Very good. Very worthy son." He cried very much on seeing the unbelievable dedication Guru Shakyamuni Buddha had for sentient beings and his practice of bodhichitta.

On one of the last times they parted, when Je Drubkhangpa was going away to another place, his lama accompanied him a short distance. Je Drubkhangpa had already spent years studying in a monastery and had become a geshe, but he had been told by one of his gurus to do retreat and experiment on the path. As they parted, Je Drubkhangpa's guru again emphasized: "Don't forget bodhichitta practice. Unless you practice bodhichitta, other paths won't come to anything. Even if they are called 'secret' or the 'quick path to enlightenment,' they won't fulfil your wishes completely." He was saying that without bodhichitta, one cannot achieve the sublime, peerless happiness of enlightenment.

Je Drubkhangpa, with some confidence in his own practice and experience of bodhichitta, showed a little of his experience to his guru by saying: "Bodhichitta is a causative phenomenon. I am also a causative phenomenon." For example, with dough mixed from flour and water, you can make many different kinds of food: noodles, chapatis, cakes and so forth. Because it a causative phenomenon, a

dependent arising, you can change the dough into many different types of food. In a similar way, Je Drubkhangpa is saying, it is possible to change the mind. By creating the cause, one is able to generate the result of bodhichitta within one's heart, just as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did as a bodhisattva. For three countless great aeons he accumulated extensive merit, then achieved enlightenment and revealed the path in order to liberate sentient beings from all obscurations and lead them to enlightenment.

And this is exactly what we should do. The purpose of our life is to benefit every sentient being. Think: "Even if I cannot sacrifice myself for every sentient being as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did, how wonderful it is that at least I am able to use my body, speech and mind to benefit my family and make them happy. How fortunate I am! I should actually offer my body as charity to other sentient beings, but at least I am serving this small number of sentient beings and bringing them happiness." You should rejoice from your heart. Whether working in a family, at a Dharma centre, in a hospital, or in the community, you should offer service to others with a sincere attitude and good heart, remembering their kindness. In this way your mind will be very happy all the time. Because all your activities will be done with loving kindness and the thought of cherishing others, depression won't arise.

Even if you working for just three people in your family, or even one person, since your work is done with a sincere attitude, with the thought of loving kindness cherishing others, even if you do not know how to transform your actions into virtue, your everyday activities will naturally become virtue. Even if a person has never heard of the lam-rim, his everyday activities done with this sincere attitude become pure Dharma. Because they are unstained by self-cherishing thought, these activities are the most difficult to do, but the purest holy Dharma.

Dharma means protecting oneself from suffering, from samsara. If someone is in danger of falling down a precipice, you can save him with ropes. Dharma is the rope that stops a person falling down into the sufferings of the lower realms. Your own virtuous actions, Dharma, protect you from true suffering and true cause of suffering.

Even if someone doesn't know about Buddhadharma or the lam-rim teachings, if their everyday life is lived with the thought of cherishing others, it becomes the purest holy Dharma. It is the best protection and the best cause of happiness in this life, and in the lives after this. Otherwise, if all our activities are done with non-virtuous motives, out of selfishness and worldly concern, only for the happiness of ourself and of this life, every activity in the day becomes the cause of suffering, since non-virtue is the cause of suffering and confusion in this life, and in future lives.

Instead of creating the cause of happiness, it sometimes looks as if all our education is used to create negative karma. After he gains a degree, a person may go to an office and work there until he retires. But no matter how many years—even forty!—the person does the job, if his attitude is one of worldly concern, all those years of work become negative karma. Because of the selfish attitude, worldly concern clinging to the happiness of the self and this life arises. If there were no selfish attitude, there would be no space in the mind for worldly concern, as well as the many other disturbing thoughts such as anger.

If the selfish attitude is replaced by loving kindness and bodhichitta, the thought of cherishing others, these other confused minds don't arise. In this way there is much peace and happiness in the person's life. And much happiness and harmony for his family and the other people around him. As a result of

his good heart in this life, the person will experience much peace of mind and happiness not only in this life, but in his next life.

If you do your everyday actions with bodhichitta, practicing taking others' sufferings and dedicating your body, possessions and merit to them, you accumulate much merit all the time. Each time you meditate on bodhichitta, or even generate the motivation of bodhichitta, you collect merit equalling the infinite sky. In that minute, by generating the motivation of bodhichitta, even if you don't have the actual realization of bodhichitta, you accumulate infinite merit.

Realizing emptiness quickly

Practicing bodhichitta is also the quick way to realize emptiness. If you wish to realize emptiness, understand Madhyamika philosophy, really experience Nagarjuna's teachings, and realize the meaning of *The Heart Sutra,* heart of the whole Buddhadharma, the best method is to practice bodhichitta. To realize emptiness, the absolute nature of the self, one has to be extremely fortunate; it is not enough just to be smart or be able to debate well. You can study the teachings, take refuge in the explanations of Lama Tsongkhapa, Nagarjuna or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and parrot what the texts say, but repeating the words of a text is not enough.

To realize emptiness, a person needs to create the cause, which means much purification and the accumulation of much merit. By doing powerful purification with prostrations or Vajrasattva practice, and meditating, you develop the devotion to see the guru as buddha and correctly devote yourself to him in thought and action as Buddha taught. When your guru devotion is deep and strong, you then use powerful methods to purify your obscurations and mental defilements. As these become thinner, any lam-rim meditation you do—the graduated paths of the small, intermediate and great scopes; renunciation of samsara, emptiness, bodhichitta—makes much more sense. Your mind becomes extremely soft and pliable, rather than solid as a rock. When you meditate you feel confident that if really tried for some weeks or some months, you could definitely generate the realization of the meditation. You feel this strongly from your heart with every meditation you do. Ideas that were mere words in the beginning, you now feel strongly from your heart.

At this time, even seeing a few words such as "on the vase there is a vase existing from its own side" has an incredible effect, like waking from sleep. At the moment our problem is that we haven't recognized the object to be refuted. If we purify our obscurations, accumulate much merit and develop our guru devotion, even though we haven't studied all the extensive scriptures by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, and we don't understand everything, just two or three pages of a teaching on emptiness, or even the words "on the vase there is a vase existing from its own side" are like waking from sleep. We are able to recognize the object to be refuted. Suddenly, after seeing just two or three words, you look at external objects and recognize clearly how things appear to be truly existent. And when you look at the I, you immediately recognize the object to be refuted, that on the I, there is an I that appears to exist from its own side.

In this way it doesn't take long to realize emptiness. Once you have recognized the I existing from its own side, like pressing a button in an elevator, everything lights up and works. Once you have recognized the object to be refuted, the I that doesn't exist, even if you don't use the four analyses and all the many logical explanations from Madhyamaka philosophy, just concentrate one-pointedly on the I. You

see an I existing from its own side, but at the same time you are aware that this is what is actually empty. The object to be refuted, the I existing from its own side, has no choice—it cannot abide. One-pointedly focus right on the I existing from its own side and recognize that this is what the teachings call "the object to be refuted."

Simply remember that the I is a dependent arising. While focusing on this truly existent I, which seems to exist from its own side, be aware that it is empty. Actually, there is no choice you realize that it is completely empty. Even though ignorance clings to the object to be refuted, if you can see that not even an atom of it exists from its own side, you experience the I to be completely empty. From your own experience, you actually come to know how the I exists. Through realizing unmistakenly that the truly existent I in which you believe doesn't exist, without need to push, you experience how the I actually exists.

You are then able to realize the subtle dependent arising of the I—that the I exists under the control of name, being merely labelled on the aggregates by thought and name. This becomes your own experience, not just words. Before, you were simply imitating the teachings, but when you realize the subtle dependent arising of the I, it is no longer mere words. When you speak of these things, you are talking from your own experience.

Colophon:
Extracted from *Perfect Freedom: The Great Value of Being Human*, a Wisdom Intermediate Transcript *(out of print)*.
Reprinted here with permission from Wisdom Publications.

How to Generate Bodhichitta

by Venerable Ribur Rinpoche

The essence of Buddha's 84,000 teachings is bodhichitta: the awakening mind that aspires towards enlightenment so as to have the perfect ability to free all beings from suffering and lead them to peerless happiness.

On his two visits to Singapore in 1997, Venerable Lama Ribur Rinpoche taught extensively on how to generate that precious bodhimind. Using scriptural understanding and his personal experience, Rinpoche also gave insightful teachings on lo-jong (thought transformation), the practice of which enables one to transform the inevitable problems of life into the causes for enlightenment.

Preface

In 1997 the students of Amitabha Buddhist Centre were blessed to receive teachings from the great master Ribur Rinpoche. Rinpoche visited us twice and stayed for a total of three and a half months, during which time he taught *lam-rim* and *lo-jong* (thought transformation). This small booklet is extracted from Rinpoche's teachings.

A Brief Biography

Ribur Rinpoche was born in Kham, Eastern Tibet, in 1923. He was recognized at the age of five as the sixth incarnation of Lama Kunga Osel, a great scholar and teacher who spent the last twelve years of his life in strict solitary retreat. All five of the previous incarnations were principal teachers at Ribur Monastery in Kham.

When Ribur Rinpoche was fourteen he entered Sera monastery, one of the great Gelug monastic universities in Lhasa, to begin intensive studies in Buddhist philosophy, which culminated in his receiving the geshe degree at the age of 25. During his stay at Sera Monastery Rinpoche also attended many teachings and initiations given by his root guru, Pabongkha Rinpoche, the greatest Gelug lama of the time. After receiving his geshe degree, Rinpoche returned to Kham where he spent many years doing retreat in a small hut he had built in the forest. But after the Chinese Communist invasion in 1950, the situation in Kham became increasingly dangerous, and in 1955 he was advised by one of his gurus, Trijang Rinpoche, to return to Lhasa, where he continued to take teachings and do retreats.

But Lhasa itself soon became unsafe. From 1959 (the year of the Tibetan people's uprising) to 1976, Rinpoche experienced numerous hardships and difficulties such as imprisonment and physical abuse, and being a helpless observer of the terrible destruction of the Cultural Revolution. However, during

this time he was able to keep his mind peaceful and even happy by practising the teachings he had learned. As Rinpoche described his experiences, "I didn't really experience the slightest difficulty during those adverse conditions. This was due to the kindness of Lama Dorje Chang [Pabongkha Rinpoche]. From him I had somehow learned some mental training, and in those difficult times, my mind was immediately able to recognise the nature of cyclic existence, the nature of afflictive emotions, and the nature of karma and so forth. So my mind was really at ease."

Following the Cultural Revolution Rinpoche worked with the Panchen Lama to restore many of the lost spiritual treasures of Tibet as they could. His main accomplishment was recovering the two most precious statues of Shakyamuni Buddha: the Jowo Chenpo and the Ramo Chenpo. These two statues, originally brought to Tibet by the Chinese and Nepalese wives of King Songtsen Gampo (ca 617-698), were taken to Beijing during the Cultural Revolution and kept in various warehouses along with thousands of other statues for 17 years, until Rinpoche found them and returned them to their respective temples in Lhasa.

In 1987 Rinpoche left Tibet and travelled to Dharamsala, India, to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Since then he has lived at Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala, where, at the request of His Holiness, he wrote a number of biographies of great lamas and an extensive religious history of Tibet. Rinpoche has also visited and taught in several foreign countries – Australia, New Zealand. America, and around Europe. His warmth, humour, profound wisdom and practical, down-to-earth teachings have endeared him to many students around the world.

Background of the Teachings

More that 2,500 years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment and then proceeded to teach the path to enlightenment so that others could follow. His teachings have been kept alive to the present day through the great kindness and efforts of an unbroken lineage of practitioners who learned them from their masters, put them into practice, and then passed them onto followers. In Tibet, the essential points of Buddha's teachings were formulated into a system known as the lam-rim, or stages on the path to enlightenment, which explains all the steps or practices one needs to follow in order to attain enlightenment.

The lam-rim consists of three main stages or levels, according to three different reasons or motivations for practising Dharma. The first level, known as the "small scope," starts from taking an interest in one's future lives. This comes about when we realise that this present life could end at any time, and that after death, we will be reborn in an unfortunate state (as an animal, hungry ghost or hell being), and to achieve a fortunate state (as a deva, titan or human being), by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and by living our lives in accordance with karma, the law of evolutionary actions and their results.

The second or "intermediate scope" involves developing the aspiration to become free once and for all from the cycle of death and rebirth. Within this scope, one focuses on the Four Noble Truths: the sufferings of cyclic existence, the causes of suffering (delusions and karma), the state of freedom from all suffering (nirvana), and the means to achieve it by practising the three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom.

The third level, the "great scope," involves opening one's heart to consider the situation of all beings. Realising that all beings experience suffering that they don't want and they fail to find the peace and happiness that they wish for, one develops the aspiration to attain full enlightenment in order to help everyone reach that perfect state as well. That altruistic aspiration is bodhichitta.

This booklet contains extracts of Ribur Rinpoche's precious teachings on how to develop bodhichitta, and how to practise thought transformation through which we become less self-centred and more concerned for others.

Numerous people contributed to this work. Rinpoche's teachings were beautifully translated into English by Fabrizio Pallotti. Several ABC students kindly transcribed the tapes, and I edited the transcript with assistance from Doris Low and Rise Koben.

Any errors in the text are entirely the fault of the editor.

Sangye Khadro
October 1998

The Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect Instruction

Bodhichitta, the aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, is something that is truly inconceivable, truly splendid and marvellous. One of the great gurus of Lama Atisha told him that an attainment such as clairvoyance, or a vision of a deity, or concentration as stable as a mountain, is nothing compared to bodhichitta. For us, these attainments seem amazing. If we ourselves, or if someone we heard of, had a vision of a deity, achieved clairvoyance, or through practising meditation attained concentration as stable as a mountain, we would think this to be unbelievably wonderful. However, Atisha's guru said to him: "These are nothing compared to bodhichitta. Therefore, practise bodhichitta."

Even if you practised mahamudra or dzogchen or the two stages of highest yoga tantra [generation stage and completion stage] and even if you achieved the vision of many deities, these are not beneficial if you do not have bodhichitta.

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said, "If you churn the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, their essence is bodhichitta." By churning milk we get butter, which is the very essence of milk. In the same way, if we examine and churn all the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, their very essence is the practice of bodhichitta. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to strive to achieve the uncontrived, effortless experience of bodhichitta. At the very least, we should try our best to generate the contrived experience of bodhichitta, the bodhichitta that arises through effort.

There are two main lineages of instructions on the basis of which you can practise and generate bodhichitta. The first is the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction on exchanging oneself and others.

The first, the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction by which you generate bodhichitta on the basis of developing affectionate love towards all sentient beings, is a practice which was used by such great Indian pandits as Chandrakirti, Chandragomin, Shantarakshita, and so forth. The second, the instruction on exchanging oneself with others, comes mainly from Shantideva. Whether you choose to train your mind in the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction or in exchanging oneself with others, the result is that you will generate bodhichitta in your mind.

The great saint Atisha showed extraordinary interest in bodhichitta. In order to obtain the complete instructions on the practice of bodhichitta, he embarked on a long journey to the Indonesian island of Sumatra to study with the great master Serlingpa, not caring about the many hardships he endured on the way. Today we can travel to Indonesia by a very fast ship or by airplane, but at that time it took Atisha thirteen months to reach Indonesia. Once he arrived, he received the complete experiential instruction on both the seven-point technique and exchanging oneself with others from the master Serlingpa. He then practised for twelve years at his master's feet, until he fully developed bodhichitta.

Thus Lama Atisha came to possess both instruction lineages: the seven-point technique and exchanging oneself with others.

Although he held both lineages, Atisha would teach only the seven-point technique in public, to large assemblies of disciples, and would teach instructions on exchanging oneself with others secretly to a select group of qualified disciples. When Atisha went to Tibet, he gave the instructions on exchanging oneself with others only to his principal disciple, Dromtonpa.

Later, the great Lama Tsongkhapa, the protector of all beings, incorporated the two sets of instructions into a single practice consisting of eleven points. When you are receiving teachings on bodhichitta, you receive the two sets of instructions separately, but when you are actually meditating on bodhichitta—training your mind—then you combine both instructions and meditate on the eleven points. Combining the two instructions into a single practice for the purpose of training the mind in meditation is said to be a particular greatness of the Gelug tradition.

In a prayer composed by Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang requesting to meet the doctrine of Lama Tsongkhapa, he wrote: "By merging the practices of the seven-point mind technique and exchanging oneself with others of the precious mind, this greatness which is not shared by others, may I thus be able to meet the doctrine of Lama Tsongkhapa." "Not shared by others" means that this merging of the two practices devised by Je Rinpoche is a unique approach which is not found in other traditions. I first received these teachings from the holy mouth of the incredibly kind Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang, when he taught the eight great lam-rim texts over a period of four months at Sera Monastery in Tibet. At that time I was very young. When he reached the point of explaining exchanging oneself with others, he gave teachings on *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*. Later I received these teachings twice from the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche.

The Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect Instruction

As for the seven points of the cause-and-effect instruction, one begins by meditating on equanimity and then proceeds through the following steps:

1. Recognising all sentient beings as one's mother
2. Recognising the kindness of mother sentient beings
3. Repaying their kindness
4. Affectionate love
5. Great compassion
6. The extraordinary intention
7. Bodhichitta

The first six points, recognising all sentient beings as one's mother and so forth, are the causes which give birth to the result, bodhichitta.

The way in which these realisations come about, step by step, is that bodhichitta, the thought of attaining enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, arises from and must be preceded by a sense of responsibility. In Tibetan the term is *lhagsam*, which is sometimes called "extraordinary intention", or "exceptional attitude, or "universal responsibility"—it is a feeling of responsibility to benefit all sentient beings. For this intention to come about you must have a powerful wish for all sentient

beings to be free from suffering: That is great compassion. For that to arise you must have developed affectionate love towards all sentient beings. At the moment we have affectionate love for our dear ones, but we don't have affectionate love for those who are not dear to us. In order to generate this affectionate love for everyone, you must develop a deep sense of closeness toward sentient beings, and the way to do that is by recognising all sentient beings as your mother, recognising their kindness and generating the wish to repay their kindness. This instruction is called the cause-and-effect technique because the later points arise after generating the preceding points.

You should not approach this practice with a short-sighted mind, thinking, "Oh, this practice is too advanced for me. It will require so much time and energy. I will not be able to develop such a precious mind." This is not the right attitude. You should not have such fears because these instructions are very profound and powerful. If you continuously train your mind, step by step, with persistence, there is no doubt that you will succeed. Generally speaking, all the instructions from the old Kadampa tradition are very powerful and effective. On top of that, there are the instructions combined by the great Lama Tsongkhapa, whose experience was based on his special relationship with Manjushri, with whom he had direct communication. These instructions are extremely powerful and effective, so you should not think they are too advanced for you and that you will not be able to develop bodhichitta.

Equanimity

Before beginning to train your mind in the first step, recognising all sentient beings as your mother, you should develop the thought of equanimity. It is similar to painting a picture: if you want to paint a picture on a surface, you must first make sure that the surface is smooth and even and has no rough or uneven spots on it. In the same way, before you can train your mind in the meditation on recognising all sentient beings as your mother, you must make your mind even with equanimity towards everyone. In other words, you must learn to stop discriminating among sentient beings, feeling close to some and distant from others, and the way to do this is by developing equanimity.

Now I will explain the way to meditate in order to develop equanimity. Those who are familiar with these instructions, please meditate while I am explaining. Those who are new, please pay special attention and try to retain the instructions in your mind. All of you please try to have the intention to develop bodhichitta, thinking that you must generate this realisation in your mind. As I mentioned before, these instructions of the Kadampa lamas are so powerful and effective, especially the instructions on merging the seven-point cause-and-effect technique and exchanging oneself with others as taught by Lama Tsongkhapa. So please be attentive and generate this strong intention: "I am definitely going to practise and develop bodhichitta in my mind."

Visualise in front of you three people: first, someone who upsets you—just by seeing or thinking about him or her, your mind becomes unhappy. Next to him or her, visualise someone you love and are close to—just by seeing this person your mind becomes happy. And next to that person, visualise a stranger, someone who is neither beneficial nor non-beneficial. When you think about these people, you feel aversion towards the person you dislike, attachment towards the person who is close to you, and indifference towards the stranger.

Now, thinking about the person you dislike, ask yourself, "Why do I dislike this person? What is the reason I get so upset? What has he done to me?" You will realise that this is because he has harmed you

a little bit in this life. At this point you should think about the uncertainty of friends and enemies as explained in the lam-rim, in the section for the person of intermediate scope. This is one of the disadvantages of cyclic existence: you cannot be sure of friends and enemies; sometimes a friend becomes and enemy and sometimes an enemy becomes a friend. Think in this way: "Although this person has given me a small amount of harm in this life for a very short time, in many previous lifetimes since beginningless time, this person has shown me great affection and has been very close to me for a very long time. The harm he has given me in this life is so small compared to the closeness and affection we have had since beginningless time, yet I treat him like my ultimate enemy, the ultimate object to be avoided. This is completely wrong!" You need to think in this way again in order to subdue your feelings of aversion for this person.

Next to him is the person you feel close to, who makes you feel so happy as soon as you see him or her. You regard this person as your ultimate friend, the person who is closer to you than anyone else. You have so much attachment for this person you may feel that you don't want to be separated from him or her for even a moment. If you examine the reasons why this is so, it is because in this life he has benefited you in some way such as with resources and so forth. On the basis of some very small benefits and for very limited reasons, your mind becomes so happy and excited. However, you should think, "Although in this life he has benefited me a little, he has not always been my friend. In many previous lifetimes since beginningless time, he has been my enemy. He harmed me so much that just by seeing him I felt very strong aversion. It is not reasonable for me to have so much attachment and desire for this person just because he has benefited me, is beneficial to me and will benefit me, because he has also been the opposite." By thinking in this way over and over again, you can subdue your feelings of attachment.

Now turn to the stranger. The attitude you have toward this person is: "I don't know this person and I don't care about him. He hasn't connected with me in the past, he is not connecting with me now and he will not connect with me in the future, so who cares." This attitude is also completely wrong, so you should think, "In this life, this person is neither an enemy nor a friend, but in previous lives he was my enemy many times, and also many times he was my dearest friend, someone I was very close to. Therefore, it is completely unreasonable to be indifferent to this person." Just as you equalised your feelings towards the friend and the enemy, you should equalise your feelings towards the stranger by thinking this way again and again.

Therefore when you meditate, you first think that there is absolutely no reason to be so upset and feel so much aversion towards the enemy who has been your dearest friend so many times. You need to think about this again and again in order to subdue your aversion and equalise your mind towards this person. Likewise, think that there is no reason to be so attached to the person you are close to, your friend, because he has been your enemy so many times. Think about this again and again to subdue your attachment and equalise your mind towards this person.

When we perceive these three different people, we perceive them in terms of these three categories: friends, enemies and strangers. However, none of them exists in this way forever—no one is a friend, enemy or stranger for all time. Therefore, they are all the same. There is absolutely no reason to feel attachment towards one person, to feel aversion towards another, and to feel detached and indifferent towards yet another.

If we examine what they actually are, from their side, they are sentient beings. And they are all exactly the same in that they all wish to be happy and free from suffering. Thus there is not the slightest reason to discriminate between them with attachment, aversion and indifference. They are all exactly the same. You must come to this conclusion and meditate on it again and again. By meditating on this over and over again, you will reach the point where you actually develop equanimity towards all sentient beings. You will feel that they are all the same to you; your feelings towards them will be equal. This is the result that should come about.

Although you might recite every day the prayer of the Four Immeasurable Thoughts "May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes; may all sentient beings be free from suffering and its causes" and so forth—until you have actually developed equanimity, in reality it will be as though you are saying, "May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes and be free from suffering and its causes—but only those I like and not those I dislike." No matter how frequently and fervently you recite the Four Immeasurable Thoughts, until you have developed equanimity, they are only words. They don't become the actual Four Immeasurable Thoughts. Therefore, it is extremely important to develop equanimity, and even if you spent months and years meditating solely on equanimity in order to develop this realisation, it would be an extremely worthwhile method of practising meditation. If you can pacify your feelings of attachment and aversion towards friends and enemies, it will be very beneficial to your mind.

Recognising All Sentient Beings as One's Mother

The next point, recognising all sentient beings as one's mother, is actually the first step in developing bodhichitta. Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang said that this point is not easy and takes quite a long time to develop. However, it is crucial and indispensable, because only on the basis of this recognition can you develop the following steps. We cannot progress without it, so it is very important to give it a lot of attention.

In general, when you meditate you use perfect reasoning as well as quotations. Here, with this point of recognising all beings as your mother, it is very important to use reasoning. Although you can also develop the same understanding on the basis of quotations, there is a difference in the way the mind is activated on the basis of quotations and on the basis of reasoning—it is more powerful on the basis of reasoning. The specific reasoning to be relied upon here is the beginningless continuity of mind.

First you have to establish that the continuity of the mind is beginningless. Start by thinking that your mind of today is the result of the mind of yesterday. And yesterday's mind came from the mind of the day before yesterday. In that way, you go back, day by day. Each day's mind is the result of the mind of the preceding day. Also, the mind of each moment is the result of the preceding moment.

Continue to go back, all the way to the moment of conception, and think about how the mind of the newborn baby is also a continuity which needs a preceding moment of mind in order to be generated. The mind of the newborn baby is the continuation of the mind of the foetus which was in the womb of the mother. And if you go back in this way, you will not be able to find a beginning.1 You cannot find a moment which you can point to as the beginning of the mind and say, "The mind began there." this is because any moment of mind would need a preceding moment in order to be generated. In this way you can establish that the continuum of the mind is beginningless. There is no single moment of

mind which you can point to as being the first.

Following these reasons, you conclude that the number of times you have taken rebirth is countless. Not only that, but in all those rebirths, just as in this life, you needed a mother. For one hundred rebirths, you would need one hundred mothers; for one thousand rebirths, you would need one thousand mothers, and so forth. Since you have had countless rebirths, you have had countless mothers.

So if you think very carefully about these points, you will realise that not only have you had countless rebirths, you have also had countless mothers. Furthermore, although sentient beings are also countless, the number of sentient beings that exist is fewer than the number of mothers you have had. You have taken rebirth countless times in all different types of bodies, and the number of sentient beings you need to have been your mother is greater than the number of sentient beings in existence. Therefore, since the number of times you have taken rebirth and the number of mothers you have had is greater than the number of sentient beings, it means that every single sentient being has been your mother not just once, but countless times.

Start with your own mother, thinking that you mother of this life was your mother countless times in previous rebirths. When you have gained some experience of this idea such that your mind is transformed towards your mother, then think about it in relation to your father—that your father has been your mother countless times. Following that, think about how your friends have been your mother countless times. Then think about your enemies—even your enemies have been your mother so many times. Finally, widen your scope to include all sentient beings—meditate on how all sentient beings have been your mother.

You have to meditate on this subject again and again over a long period of time. While you are training your mind in this subject, you should rely on different lam-rim scriptures which explain various points and ways of meditating and can give you a lot of inspiration. You should request your spiritual teacher to give you explanations to help clarify your mind, and you should also discuss the subject with your Dharma friends. By thinking in this way again and again, you will reach the point where you realise that all sentient beings have been your mother, even down to a tiny insect like and ant. Even when you see a tiny insect you will feel certain that many times this being has been your kind mother, who took the greatest care of you and in whom you placed your trust. It is said that the great Atisha—who completely realised this point —would be immediately filled with a deep sense of respect whenever he met any sentient being. He would fold his hands and say, "Precious sentient being, so kind."

Recognising the Kindness of Mother Sentient Beings

The next step in the meditation is recognising the kindness of mother sentient beings. It is not enough just to recognise that all sentient beings have been your mother, you must also recognise the depth of their kindness. For example, your mother of this life was so kind, carrying you within her for nine long months from the time of conception, always being very careful about what she ate and drank, and doing everything with the sole thought of taking care of you. Even the fact that you are alive and are able to learn and practise the Dharma is completely due to the kindness of your mother, who carried you in her womb and took such good care of you since the time of conception.

She took care of you while you were in her womb, and also after you were born. When you were born you were completely helpless, like a little bug, unable to do anything. Nevertheless, your mother treated

you as if you were a priceless jewel—continuously taking the greatest care of you, day and night, with no other thought in her mind than concern for your welfare. She fed you, bathed you, dressed you in soft clothing, took you here and there to make you happy, and even made funny faces or gestures to make you smile. Because of her constant feeling of love and concern for you, her mind was always full of worry that you might get sick or hurt—so much so that she would have difficulty sleeping at night. You learned how to walk because of the kindness of your mother—she would help you stand up and take your first step, then the second step, and so forth. You also learned how to pronounce your first words because of the kindness of your mother and also your father. As time went on, you were able to study and learn many other things, but only on the basis of knowing how to walk and speak, which you learned because of the kindness of your mother.

In the preceding step you realised that all sentient beings have been your mother, and with this meditation you realise that not only has your mother of this present life been incredibly kind to you, but all the countless sentient beings have been just as kind.

Repaying their Kindness

The next step is generating the wish to repay the kindness of all mother sentient beings. Ask yourself, "Am I able to repay their kindness?" Then think, "I should be able to repay their kindness because I'm in such fortunate circumstances: I have met the Dharma, I have met perfect teachers, I have met the path, and I have all the right circumstances to practise. Therefore I must do as much as I possibly can to liberate them from their suffering and to bring them the happiness that they wish for. I must do this in order to repay their kindness."

Of course, repaying the kindness of sentient beings includes helping them on a conventional level, by doing as much as you can to give food to those who are hungry, drink to those who are thirsty, clothing and other material things. But the most important way of helping is by completely relieving all sentient beings of all their sufferings and giving them all the happiness that they could wish for. You should bring this thought to your mind again and again.

Affectionate Love

The next step, affectionate love, is the kind of love that a mother feels when looking at her only child. When a mother looks at her child, he appears to her in a very beautiful way, and she feels great love for him. Here, you generate this same kind of affectionate love towards all sentient beings, perceiving all beings in a beautiful, glowing way.

Actually, if you generated to previous step of recognising all sentient beings as your mother, recognising their kindness and wishing to repay their kindness, then you won't need extra effort or extra thought in order to develop affectionate love. It will arise spontaneously, due to the force of the preceding realisations.

When you meditate on affectionate love, you also need to reflect on the fact that all sentient beings, although wishing to be happy, are completely devoid of happiness, especially pure, uncontaminated happiness. By meditating in this way, you generate the strong wish that all sentient beings possess happiness and its causes, and that they actually abide in happiness. On top of that, you should also generate the wish that you yourself will make that happen. From the depths of your heart, request your

lama to grant you blessings to be able to do this.

Great Compassion

The next step is great compassion. This is one of the special characteristics of the Buddha's teachings, and Lama Tsongkhapa in particular placed a great deal of emphasis on it as a very special cause that gives rise to very special effects. Also, the great Chandrakirti, in the introduction to his Entering the Middle Way, pays homage to great compassion, saying that it is extremely important at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. At the beginning, it is the seed which enables you to enter the Mahayana path. In the middle, while you are engaging in the bodhisattva's practice of the six perfections, it is the very soul of your practice. At the end it causes the result, buddhahood, to ripen and makes possible all the Buddha's wonderful deeds for the benefit of sentient beings. Therefore, great compassion is praised as being extremely important at the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

It is said that in the beginning, in order to develop great compassion, it is very beneficial to observe and reflect on the way a butcher slaughters an animal—cutting the throat, ripping out its insides, pulling off its skin. Using this as an example is an easy and powerful way to meditate on great compassion. Here in Singapore, there is a market where we go to buy animals to liberate. It would be extremely beneficial to go there and observe the situation, reflecting both on the animals which are being slaughtered and those who are slaughtering them.

Once you have started to generate great compassion, then you reflect on the same meditations that you used while training your mind in the small scope section of the lam-rim, by thinking in detail about the sufferings of the three lower realms, the hells and so forth.2 However, this time you generate compassion by thinking of the sufferings of the specific sentient beings: the sufferings of extreme heat and extreme cold of the hell-beings, the sufferings of extreme hunger and thirst of the pretas, and the sufferings of the animals.

What is the measure or sign of having generated great compassion in your mind? It is that you feel towards all sentient beings the same wish for them to be free of suffering that a mother would feel for her only child. When a mother sees her child going through intense suffering, she feels an unbearable wish for the child to be completely free from this suffering. Feeling this same strong wish towards each and every sentient beings is the sign that you have generated great compassion.

The Extraordinary Intention

The next step is the extraordinary intention. This is when you have the feeling that you yourself, alone, have the responsibility of eliminating all the sufferings of all sentient beings and bringing to them all the happiness that they wish for. It is the same sense of responsibility that a child would feel towards his or her mother—feeling responsible to make her happy and free from suffering. So when you feel that way towards all sentient beings and feel that you yourself alone will achieve this goal, then you have generated the extraordinary intention. It is "extraordinary" because it is more exceptional or supreme than the intention of the Hearers and Solitary Realisers, those who practise the individual vehicle.

The extraordinary intention is similar to being in the position of saving someone from falling off a cliff, where you feel responsible to save the person. In the same way, when you feel a deep sense of responsibility for eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings and for giving them all the happiness

they wish for, that is the extraordinary intention. It can also be called the "exceptional attitude" or "universal responsibility".

Bodhichitta

The next step is the actual generation of bodhichitta, also called "the generation of the mind". This comes by reflecting, "Do I really have the capacity to accomplish this goal of eliminating all the suffering of sentient beings and bringing them to happiness? Actually, at this point I can't accomplish that even for one sentient being. And if I check who does have the complete capacity to accomplish this goal, it is only the Buddha. Only the Buddha has the right qualities, because of his power, his knowledge, and his capacity to accomplish spontaneously the benefit of all sentient beings." At this point you have to reflect on the qualities of Buddha as a worthy object of refuge, as you did in the lam-rim meditation of the individual of the small scope.

Following this, you generate the thought that you will accomplish the benefit of all sentient beings by achieving the qualities of the Buddha yourself. This means that you generate the mind of bodhichitta, thinking, "I must achieve the supreme enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings." This wish to become a buddha is not just to abandon whatever has to be abandoned in order to achieve the complete purpose for yourself. Previously you generated great love and great compassion in order to achieve the benefit of all sentient beings, therefore it is for that purpose that you now generate the wish to become a buddha.

You must also check: "Am I actually able to do it?" Yes, you are definitely in a position where you can become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. In fact, there is no better situation than the one you are in now. You have a precious human rebirth, and you have met perfect teachers and the Mahayana path. This means you are actually in the best situation to achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Furthermore, you have met the perfect teachings of the great Lama Tsongkhapa. By relying on these incredible teachings, many practitioners of the past, on the basis of having achieved a precious human rebirth, were able to achieve the supreme realisation in that very lifetime. Some individuals, such as the omniscient Gyalwa Ensapa, were able to achieve this realisation in an even shorter period of time—twelve years or even three years. These practitioners had the same basis—the precious human body and other conditions— that you now have. Therefore you should feel a sense of confidence in having the basis that enables you to become a Buddha.

The contrived form of bodhichitta—the experience of bodhichitta which arises through effort—is known in Tibetan as "the bodhichitta which is like the outer layer of the sugarcane". The uncontrived form of bodhichitta is when the thought of wanting to achieve supreme enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings arises spontaneously in your mind as soon as you meet any sentient being, no matter who he or she is. Having the uncontrived, effortless experience is the sign that you have achieved the actual realisation of bodhichitta. And once you have generated the realisation of bodhichitta, you earn the name "Child of the Victorious Ones".

This concludes the explanation on how to generate bodhichitta by way of the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction.

Notes

1. The implication here is that the mind of the newly-conceived child is the continuation of the mind of a previous life, which in turn came from another life, and so on without beginning.
2. In the small scope section of the lam-rim, one imagines being reborn in the lower realms so as to generate a healthy fear and the determination to avoid such rebirths by taking refuge and living in accordance with the law of karma.

Exchanging Oneself and Others

The second method of generating bodhichitta is that of exchanging oneself with others. The practice of equalising and exchanging oneself with others combined with the practice of *tong-len*, or giving and taking, is known as "training the mind" (*lo-jong*). If we look at the lineage of these instructions, they began with Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjushri and were handed down from them in an uninterrupted lineage of great masters including Shantideva. The great master Atisha received the lineage from Lama Serlingpa. When Atisha went to Tibet, he taught the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction publicly, and gave the instructions on exchanging oneself with others only to Dromtonpa, because he felt that his other disciples were not fit vessels for such instructions.

Dromtonpa himself kept this lineage very secret—among his many disciples, he gave it only to his spiritual disciple, the foremost Kadampa virtuous friend, Geshe Potowa. Geshe Potowa also kept this instruction very, very secret. Although he too had many disciples, he gave these instructions only to the great Langri Tangpa and Geshe Sharawa. Geshe Langri Tangpa, on the basis of having received and realised these instructions, composed the renowned text, *The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*. Because these instructions had been put into writing, they became more widespread and many people were able to learn and practise them. Later, the great master Chekawa came to know them. Geshe Chekawa was a scholar learned in all the five sciences but was not satisfied with his knowledge and wished to learn the Dharma. One day he heard two lines of *The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, which said,

> Give to others all gain and fortunes,
> And take on yourself all loss and defeat.

Geshe Chekawa was intrigued by these lines and wanted to understand how to actually practise giving to others whatever victory and goodness there is and taking upon oneself all loss and defeat. Thus he went in search of these instructions. He travelled to the region of Penbo in Tibet, where Geshe Langri Tangpa lived, but discovered that this great master had already passed away. Fortunately, he met a disciple of Geshe Langri Tangpa, the master Geshe Sharawa, who gave him the complete instructions on exchanging oneself with others. By practising these instructions, Geshe Chekawa gained the full realisation of bodhichitta in his mind. He taught these instructions to many lepers, who were able to cure themselves of leprosy by practising exchanging oneself with others and *tong-len*. These instructions thus came to be known as "the Dharma of lepers." Meditating extensively on *tong-len*, with clear and powerful visualisation, is actually the supreme treatment for leprosy.

Geshe Chekawa, thinking that it would be a great loss if these instructions were kept secret, began to teach more publicly the practices of exchanging oneself with others and giving and taking.

The practice of *tong-len*, giving and taking, is indeed an inconceivably wonderful practice. In the past,

when someone was sick, or had a spell cast on him, or was experiencing obstacles of some kind, he would seek the help of a Kadampa lama. The Kadampa lama would do the tong-len practice, taking upon himself both the suffering of the one who was being harmed and the one who was causing the harm, meditating on compassion especially toward the harm-giver. The lama would take upon himself all these sufferings with great compassion, and with great love would give away all virtues and benefits. The Kadampa lamas considered this practice to be the best remedy against spells, obstacles, sickness and so forth.

The instructions on exchanging oneself with others consist of five main points:

1. Equalising oneself with others
2. The disadvantage of cherishing oneself
3. The advantages of cherishing others
4. The actual thought of exchanging oneself with others
5. The meditation on giving and taking (tong-len)

Equalising Oneself with Others

At what point should you begin to meditate on the first subject, equalising oneself with others? Prior to this meditation, you should meditate on the first five steps in the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction: equanimity, recognising all beings as your mother, remembering their kindness, wishing to repay their kindness, and the affectionate love which sees them as beautiful. Thus you begin to meditate on equalising yourself with others after having gone through these five steps, which I already explained. How should you equalise yourself with others? First of all, you need to understand what you mean by "self", when you think in terms of yourself. When we think "myself and others", this "myself" has a sense of great importance, whereas "others" has a sense of much less importance.

So when you think in terms of "me" or "myself", there is a much greater sense of importance than when you think in terms of others. Whatever concerns you becomes extremely significant—whether you feel good or bad, whether you are cold or hot—it is always more important than how others feel. Also, everything related to you—"my body, my possessions, my friends, my family, my kids," everything which is part of your life, yourself—has a much greater sense of importance than the same things related to others—"their bodies, their families," and so forth.

Thinking in this way you can see how you do not regard self and others as equal—you esteem yourself much more than others. However, consider it from the point of view of numbers: you are just one, whereas others are countless. So there is a discrepancy in the way you regard yourself and others: although there are so many more others than yourself, you regard yourself as more important than others. This is completely wrong.

You should decide that your objective in this meditation is to correct this discrepancy and learn to equalize yourself and others. The way to do this is by thinking that you and all other beings are exactly the same in wanting to be happy and free from suffering. You need to think over and over again about the fact that there is not the slightest difference between yourself and others in terms of wanting to be happy and wanting to be free from suffering. In this regard, you and others are exactly the same.

If you compare the instructions of the seven points of cause-and-effect and exchanging oneself with

others, the five points of recognising all beings as mothers, remembering their kindness, wishing to repay their kindness, the extraordinary intention and bodhichitta, are the same. However, there is a difference when we come to the two points of affectionate love and great compassion. The strength of these feelings is different in the two practices. How is that? It is because when you meditate on the kindness of sentient beings according to the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction, you recollect how kind they were when they were your mother, whereas when you meditate according to the instructions on exchanging oneself with others, you recollect their kindness not only when they were your mother but also at other times, when they were not your mother. This meditation is more extensive. Therefore, when you train your mind in the instructions of exchanging oneself with others, the strength of your affectionate love and great compassion will be greater than when training the mind in the seven-point technique of cause-and-effect.

The aim of these instructions is to train your mind in actually exchanging yourself with others, and the way to push the mind in that direction is by contemplating both the faults of cherishing oneself and the advantages of cherishing others. Therefore the next step in the meditation is contemplating the many faults or disadvantages of cherishing oneself.

The Disadvantages of Cherishing Oneself

The sources of these instructions on recognising the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought or egoism are texts such as Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*), and *The Guru Puja*. There is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says:

> This chronic disease of cherishing ourselves
> Is the cause giving rise to our unsought suffering;
> Perceiving this, we seek your blessings to blame, begrudge
> And destroy the monstrous demon of selfishness.

A verse from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* says: "All the suffering in the world comes from the desire for one's own happiness" and so forth. In the root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, it says: "Banish the one to blame for everything." This means that all suffering – whatever unwanted problems, obstacles, shortcomings, and sufferings that exist – should be blamed on the self-cherishing thought alone. "All suffering" includes not only the problems that you yourself experience in your life, but from a larger point of view, it also includes wars between countries, disagreements between the leaders of different countries, disagreements at work, arguments within a family such as husband and wife fighting or parents and children fighting, and so forth. All these unwanted experiences come from egoism, the thought of cherishing oneself, and thus they should be blamed on the self-cherishing thought.

As another example of the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought, let's say you eat too much and get indigestion, and maybe even die from indigestion. Although it may seem that the cause is some kind of digestive ailment, in fact the real cause of the problem is that your self-cherishing mind was not satisfied but wanted more and more food. So you died not from indigestion but due to the self-cherishing thought.

Even in situations where it seems you are not responsible – for example, you are falsely accused of having done something wrong, or you are robbed of your possessions or killed – even in these situa-

tions, the cause is the self-cherishing thought. These experiences are the result of your past evolutionary actions [karma] which were motivated by the self-cherishing thought. In past lives, due to egoism, wanting happiness just for yourself, you harmed others, robbed and killed. In this life you are experiencing the results of those actions; therefore those sufferings are to be blamed only on egoism, the self-cherishing thought.

In the past, you were born countless times in the three lower realms, and this too is due to self-cherishing. The self-cherishing thought motivated you to create the causes to experience the sufferings of rebirth as a preta [hungry ghost], as a hell being and as an animal. For example, being born as a preta is the result of miserliness, which in turn comes from egoism, cherishing yourself more than others. Also, if, out of self-cherishing, you point out the physical faults of someone, saying that his face resembles that of an animal, you create the cause to be born as an animal. Therefore, all the sufferings you experienced in countless rebirths in the three lower realms come from nothing other than the self-cherishing thought.

Even from an ordinary point of view, the egoistic self-cherishing thought causes us so much harm. For example, because of holding yourself in high esteem, feeling that you are so great, when you meet someone who seems better than you, you become miserable with envy. When you meet someone who is equal to you, you will want to compete with that person. For example, you could be a businessman who always wants to be on top – that competitive attitude leads to so many problems. Then, when you meet people who are lower than you, you bully them, put them down and point out their faults. All this comes from the self-cherishing thought, feeling that you are so important, so high, so good. Because of these actions you create a great deal of problems in the present as well as the causes for future suffering. Actually, if you really think about all the disadvantages of egoism, the self-cherishing thought, they are inconceivable.

In brief, all the sufferings and difficulties you have encountered from beginningless time until now, all the unwanted experiences in cyclic existence are caused by egoism, the self-cherishing thought. In fact, all the sufferings of cyclic existence are caused both by self-grasping ignorance and the self-cherishing thought. From the philosophical point of view these are two different things, but in the context of mind training they are considered to be the same. On the one hand there is self-grasping—grasping at a true identity, a true I—and on the other hand there is a mind that, instead of letting go of the I, cherishes it, thinking, "I want to be happy, I need this, I need that." That is the self-cherishing thought, and on that basis all suffering, all unwanted experiences and all negativities are generated. Therefore it is the one to blame for everything.

Those of us who practise the Dharma must think continuously over and over again, about the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought and the advantages of cherishing others—taking care of others rather than oneself. We also need to consider the disadvantages of taking care of this life and the advantages of preparing for the next life. These are things that we need to do.

The Advantages of Cherishing Others

The next point is contemplating the advantages or qualities of cherishing others, or altruism.

This point is clearly stated in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* by Shantideva, which says, "All the happiness of

the world comes from altruism." Also, there is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says,

> I see that cherishing these beings, my mothers,
> Is the thought that leads to happiness
> And the door leading to infinite qualities.

The root text of T*he Seven-Point Thought Transformation* says, "Meditate on the great kindness of all sentient beings."

On the basis of these quotations you should realise the advantage of cherishing others. For instance, all the happiness of the human rebirth and other fortunate rebirths – having perfect wealth, surroundings, relations and so forth – comes from altruism, cherishing others. Why? Due to cherishing others' lives you abandon killing, and the result of abandoning killing is a fortunate rebirth and also a long life. So having a long life and a fortunate rebirth come directly from having abandoned killing because of cherishing others' lives. Also, having perfect wealth and surroundings is the result of abandoning stealing and practising generosity, both of which are done on the basis of cherishing others.

In brief, as it says in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, "There is no need to elaborate more than this; just look at the childish beings who work for their own benefit, and the buddhas who work for the benefit of others." And there is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says, "In short, childish beings work only for their own welfare, while Buddha Shakyamuni acted solely for the benefit of others."

Childish beings act solely for themselves, thinking of their own happiness, in the same way that a child thinks only about himself. On the other hand, the buddhas became enlightened by cherishing others. Without needing to go into detail, just by looking at the differences between these two types of beings and their actions, we can clearly recognise the differences between self-cherishing and cherishing others.

Consider Buddha Shakyamuni – in the past, since from beginningless time, Buddha Shakyamuni had been like us, trapped in cyclic existence. Then, at some point, He began to cherish others and on the basis of practising altruism, was able to fulfil the two purposes [of attaining enlightenment and leading others to enlightenment]. Now look at ourselves – because of continuously caring for ourselves alone, cherishing ourselves, we haven't been able to achieve even our own purpose but have been wandering in cyclic existence and the three lower realms again and again since beginningless time. We don't need to go into much detail, just compare the results of Buddha Shakyamuni's actions and our own – one comes from cherishing others and the other comes from egoism, cherishing ourselves. Therefore, by following the self-cherishing thought, no good will come about – only the three unfortunate rebirths. At this point, Lama Dorje Chang Pabongkha would tell stories from the life of Drukpa Kunley, a great meditator of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition who was famous for having an unusual way of speaking which made people laugh.

One day Drukpa Kunley went to Lhasa and paid a visit to the Jokhang, the main temple of Lhasa where you find the Jowo, a very famous statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. Normally, you enter and pay homage to the Jowo, then you circumambulate and take blessings. Drukpa Kunley did this – he circumambulated the statue and took blessings – but then he stood directly in front of the Jowo and said, "In the past you and I were the same, but then you began to practise altruism and to take care of others, so you have become a perfect Buddha. I have been taking care only of myself and I'm still in

samsara. Indeed I should now prostrate to you."

Drukpa Kunley was an unconventional yogi; he would express the Dharma truth in a very humorous way. It is said that he once visited the Bouddhanath Stupa in Nepal, which has an unusual shape, unlike other stupas which are built in one of eight standard designs. When he arrived at the stupa, he prostrated and said "Although you look like a round heap and unlike one of the eight stupas gone to bliss, I still prostrate to you."

Another time he said, "I've lost three important, precious things." When asked what it was he had lost he said, "One precious thing which I lost is called ignorance, another one is called desire, and the third is called aversion. I have lost these three things which others regard as important and cherish so much." This shows his achievements, but it was expressed in an unusual, funny way. At any rate, Drukpa Kunley was a great adept, and I think that there is a translation of his biography containing all these stories.[1]

Therefore, we should consider what Buddha Shakyamuni achieved by cherishing others and compare this with the difficulties we are still experiencing because of cherishing ourselves alone. It is very useful to read the stories of Buddha Shakyamuni's previous lives when he was still practising on the path as related, for example, in *The Jataka Tales*. These stories show how he performed many incredible deeds in order to cherish others, and thus they can inspire us to practise thought transformation.

It is at this point in the meditation that you reflect on the kindness of sentient beings, both when they were your mothers and when they were not. This reflection becomes very helpful because you realise even more reasons to cherish others rather than to cherish yourself. To give an easy example of the kindness of others when they were not your mothers: the simple fact that we are able to gather in this room and enjoy listening to the Mahayana Dharma is completely due to the kindness of others. Many people put in a great deal of effort so that we can be here. First of all, there may have been another building here that had to be torn down, and that required a number of workers. Then other people worked to design the new building and buy the materials such as bricks, cement and so forth. Other people were needed to operate the machines, since machines don't work by themselves, and to do the actual construction work on the building. Then, when the building was finished, people worked on decorating the interior and collecting the representations of the Buddha's Body, Speech and Mind to place on the altar. Therefore, the fact that we can enjoy coming together here today and listening to the Mahayana Dharma is entirely due to the kindness of others, isn't it?

The same applies to your own home, your belongings, the things you enjoy – all of these are due to the kindness of others. You might say, "No, this is not true. I bought my house with my own money; I bought my clothes with my own money." Yes, that is true, but you earned your money on the basis of others. "Okay, I got the money from others but this is because I worked hard: I did something to receive this money in return." Yes, but the fact that you are able to work is because of others, isn't it? If you think about it carefully, you will see that whatever happiness you now enjoy comes exclusively from the kindness of others.

When you reflect on the advantages of cherishing others, it is very effective to incorporate all these different thoughts. You can also contemplate that all the benefits right up to the attainment of Buddha's state come about because of cherishing others. How is this? If you want to become a buddha, you

must generate the precious mind of bodhichitta, because without bodhichitta, there is no Buddha. The generation of bodhichitta comes about because of the wish to benefit others: "I must achieve the state of enlightenment in order to benefit others." Also, the exceptional cause of bodhichitta is great compassion, and great compassion comes from cherishing others. Therefore, it is because of others that you generate great compassion.

Furthermore, the practice of the six perfections depends on others. For example, you practise morality in relation to others, and in order to practise generosity and patience you need an object, and these objects are others. It is so true what Shantideva taught in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, when he says,

> Both the Victorious Ones and sentient beings are indispensable to achieving the supreme enlightenment, and since I pay homage to the victors, why don't I pay homage to sentient beings as well?

This is saying that the achievement of supreme enlightenment is half due to the kindness of the Buddhas and half due to the kindness of sentient beings. When we give so much importance to honouring the buddhas, why don't we give the same importance to honouring the sentient beings who are equally indispensable to our achievement of enlightenment? As the great master Langri Tangpa says in his *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*,

> I can achieve the supreme state of enlightenment due to the kindness of sentient beings, therefore they are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel and I should cherish them to that extent.

There are so many heart-warming instructions on the kindness of sentient beings.

This great master Langri Tangpa was so exceptional, he was truly a superior being. (By the way, he is in the line of the previous incarnations of the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche.) It is said that Langri Tangpa was always very serious and smiled only three times in his whole life, so he was known as "Langri Tangpa of the black face" (in Tibetan the term "black face" means "serious"). He spent all of his time meditating on the disadvantages of cyclic existence and bodhichitta, and that is why he didn't find many occasions to laugh.

I'll tell you the story of one of the three occasions when Langri Tangpa laughed and what made him laugh. This story is about his mandala set. In the Kadampa tradition and in the tradition of Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang, the practice of offering the mandala is very much emphasized. When I was young in Tibet, most of us would bring our mandala sets to teachings, so that at the point of offering the mandala very few would be without one. In the row of the tulkus [reincarnated lamas], each tulku would have his own beautiful mandala set – some made of gold, some of silver – but the top would always be of gold. It was quite scene when all the tulkus offered their mandalas! But that was in the past, and then at a certain point everything was taken away. My own mandala set was taken away. There is also a particular implement used to offer the hundred tormas, which is a kind of flat container decorated with symbols. I had one of these because the Kadampa tradition places so much emphasis on the practice of offering tormas, but that was taken away as well. By "taken away" I mean confiscated by the Communists. Nowadays, I use something very simple.

Anyway, one day Langri Tangpa was meditating, and he had his mandala set on the table next to him.

It was probably a simple mandala set, not a beautiful or elaborate one. As he was meditating, he noticed that a mouse had come and was eating some of the grains of his mandala. Among the grains was a big turquoise and for some reason, the mouse was attracted to the turquoise and started to pick at it, trying to get hold of it, but it was too big for him. Then another mouse came and began helping the first one, so both of them were trying to get hold of it. Pretty soon there were five mice and they devised a way to get the turquoise: one mouse lay on his back and held the turquoise on his stomach, and the other four mice held his head and legs and were pulling him along. Langri Tangpa had been watching the mice and when he saw this he broke into a slight laugh. Why did he laugh? Because he thought that in cyclic existence when it comes to fulfilling one's needs, animals are more clever than human beings. It's true; sometimes animals can be smarter than human beings in taking care of the needs and happiness of this life.

The Actual Thought of Exchanging Oneself with Others

So now we come to the fourth step in the meditation, which is the actual thought of exchanging oneself with others. What is meant by exchanging oneself with others? Prior to this, we contemplated deeply the disadvantages of cherishing oneself, realising that all unwanted experiences and bad things come from egoism. Like a chronic disease which slowly, gradually destroys your health and physical form, the self-cherishing thought has, from beginningless time, been the source of all your suffering and problems. On the other hand, all the good things– good qualities, happiness, advantages and so forth – derive from cherishing others, from altruism. Realising this, you now begin to train your mind in exchanging the thought which cherishes oneself and disregards others for the thought which cherishes others and disregards yourself.

Until now we have been disregarding others and taking care of ourselves, but from now on, we have to take care of others and disregard ourselves. Exchanging oneself with others doesn't mean that you take others in your place and put yourself in others' place. Instead it means that you exchange the mind which cherishes oneself and ignores others with the mind which cherishes others and ignores oneself. You need to meditate on this again and again, continuously, and in this way train your mind in exchanging yourself with others.

The Meditation on Giving and Taking (Tong-Len)

On the basis of the thought of exchanging oneself with others, you practise the meditation on giving and taking. What is giving and taking? With the mind of compassion you take on the suffering of others and with the mind of love you give them happiness. The root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation* says, "giving and taking should be practised alternately." In the Tibetan term, tong-len, giving comes first—tong means "giving" and len means "taking"—but in actual practice, you first train your mind in taking—taking upon yourself the suffering of others—and leave aside the practice of giving.

Taking

You begin the practice of taking by contemplating the sufferings of the precious mother sentient beings until an unbearable sense of compassion arises within you. Then you visualise that suffering in the aspect of black light, which separates from the sentient beings in the same way that hairs separate from your skin when you shave. You visualise that this suffering in the aspect of black light comes and

absorbs into the self-cherishing thought which is at the centre of your heart.

You can do the meditation in an elaborate way, going one by one through all the different realms of the sentient beings, starting from the hells. For example, you can think about the sufferings of sentient beings in the hot hells – sufferings due to the intense heat, fire and so forth – and then take upon yourself this suffering in the form of hot fire, visualising that it absorbs straight into the centre of your heart, into the egoistic, self-cherishing thought.

You continue to meditate in this way, gradually progressing through all the different levels and kinds of sentient beings all the way up the bodhisattvas of the tenth bhumi, taking all their suffering into the centre of the self-cherishing thought in your heart. You take on not only their sufferings but all the obscurations and negativities as well, wishing that they actually ripen upon you, and feel that in this way, all these negativities are completely purified.

For some individuals, it may be difficult immediately to visualise taking the sufferings of others, such as those of the hell beings, pretas and so forth – upon yourself. If that is the case, you need to first train your mind in taking on your own suffering. As mentioned in the root text, "You should begin by taking from yourself." The way to do this is to consider the sufferings that you will experience tomorrow, and take these sufferings upon yourself in the aspect of black light as I explained before. Then take on the sufferings you will experience the day after tomorrow, and so forth – contemplating and taking on all the sufferings of the coming month, the coming year, the rest of your life, the next life, and all the future rebirths – you gradually take on all these sufferings in the aspect of black light, and they absorb into the self-cherishing thought in your heart.

Once you have trained your mind in this meditation and become familiar with taking upon yourself all the sufferings you will experience in the future, from tomorrow through your future lives, then you train in taking on the sufferings of loved ones: your parents, relatives, friends and those who are close to you. Then, when you are familiar with this, train in taking on the sufferings of strangers, those for whom you feel neither attachment nor aversion. Then you switch to your enemies. In this way, meditating with the thought of compassion, you gradually widen your scope to include all sentient beings, taking upon yourself their sufferings in the aspect of black light that ripens in the centre of your heart, the self-cherishing thought.

Giving

Taking is practised on the basis of intense compassion, and giving is practised on the basis of love. The way in which you meditate on giving is as explained in the verse, "In order to benefit sentient beings, may my body turn into whatever they wish for." You emanate replicas of your body and visualise that these bodies transform the environment and sentient beings. Let's say you start with the hot hells: you first send out countless bodies which become a cooling rain that completely extinguishes the fires of the hells. Due to the soothing rain, the bodies of the hell-beings transform and they achieve precious human rebirths, with the freedoms and endowments. The bodies you send out also transform into pleasant, enjoyable things such as the objects of the six senses, and in this way you completely fulfil their wishes. Then you again emanate countless bodies which take the aspect of spiritual masters teaching Dharma to those beings who then practise Dharma and gradually achieve enlightenment.

Next, you move on to the sentient beings in the cold hells. This time the bodies you emanate become bright sunlight which completely warms up the freezing environment, and you provide the sentient beings with warm clothes. Again, the beings of the cold hells transform and achieve precious human rebirths, and by emanating countless bodies in the aspect of spiritual guides, you teach them the Dharma and they all reach enlightenment.

You progress through the meditation on each type of sentient being in the same way. For the pretas, the bodies you emanate become food and drink; for the animals, they become wisdom that clears away their ignorance; for the titans, they become armour to protect their bodies; for the devas, they become enjoyments of the five senses; and for human beings, who have such strong desire, they become whatever people need or desire. For the buddhas and spiritual masters, when you train in giving, you emanate inconceivable clouds of offerings and make prayers for their long lives.

While you are training your mind in the practice of taking and giving, you should also practise the following advice given in the root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*: "The instruction to be followed, in brief, is to take these words to heart in all activities." This means that in your meditation and in all your activities, you should use the special words of the *tong-len* practice as a way to recollect and empower your meditation. For example, you can use the verse from *The Guru Puja* which says:

> O venerable, compassionate guru, bless me.
> May all the sufferings, negative actions and obscurations
> Of all beings, who were once my mothers,
> Ripen on me now, without exception.
> May I give all my happiness and virtue to others
> And may all beings have happiness.

So while you are training, in your actual meditation and throughout all your daily activities, you should continuously recite this verse. These words from *The Guru Puja* are so powerful, so full of blessings, that it is indeed very important to recite them all the time. There is even a practice of accumulating 100 thousand repetitions of this verse while meditating, and this would be an excellent practice to do.

In the prayer, you first entreat the lama by saying, "O venerable, compassionate guru," and then you say, "bless me – may all the sufferings and negativities of all the precious mother sentient beings ripen on me right now, without exception. And bless me to give all my roots of virtue and goodness to others, so that these may ripen upon them." The verse concludes with the prayer: "May all sentient beings have happiness." This is really an exceptional, powerful prayer.

It has become a tradition that when *The Guru Puja* is recited, this verse is repeated three times. This tradition was initiated by Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang. Before his time, *The Guru Puja* would be recited straight from the beginning to the end, but because he placed so much importance on this verse, he began the practice of reciting it three times. So the fact that this tradition has continued up to now is due to the kindness of Lama Dorje Chang.

Practising Giving and Taking with the Breath

The next verse in the root text says, "These two, taking and giving, should be made to ride on the breath." This means that after you have become familiar and proficient with the meditation as ex-

plained, then you should combine the meditation with your breathing. The way to do this is as follows: while you are breathing out, think that you breathe out all your goodness, and this transforms into whatever is needed for the benefit of sentient beings. You breathe whatever goodness there is within you – your body, virtues, richness, and so forth – and this transforms into whatever benefits all sentient beings.

Then, when you breathe in, think that along with the flow of your breath come all the sufferings of all sentient beings in the form of black light. These sufferings in the aspect of black light enter you and go straight to the source of all the negativities and sufferings you have experienced since beginningless time – your egoistic, self-cherishing thought – and they ripen right there, in your heart. Your see, the mind and the breath are inseparable. The mind rides on the breath, so this visualisation that combines giving and taking with the breathing becomes a powerful cause for generating bodhichitta. It's also similar to the vajra recitation which is found in the practice of highest yoga tantra.

It is very beneficial to do this practice as you are going to sleep. Before you go to sleep, generate the thought of love and do the visualisation of giving while breathing out; then with the thought of compassion do the visualisation of taking while breathing in. If you go to sleep doing this practice, then the whole time you are asleep, especially if you like to sleep a lot – until eight or nine in the morning!

As for myself, the more I progress in years, the more I need to sleep, and also my sleep gets deeper. But when I was young and studying at Sera Monastery, I had the habit of staying up all night. The night is very long and you can do so many things – you can do prayers, read texts, whatever you want to do. In the early morning, at dawn, I would feel so happy. My mind would feel very fresh and I would rejoice from the depths of my heart, thinking, "How lucky I am! I was up all night and was able to do these things while the majority of the people around me were asleep." I would consider myself so fortunate to be able to stay up all night and practise. This is something Venerable Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche does. But now, as I grow older, I need more sleep, so I am unable to stay awake all night even if I want to.

I really want to stress the importance of transforming sleep into virtuous practice because if you calculate the way you spend your life, almost half of it is spent sleeping. Therefore it becomes very crucial that the time you spend sleeping becomes virtuous practice, doesn't it?

In his *Songs of Experience*, Milarepa said, "At night, sometimes I sleep, and when I sleep I practise merging sleep with the clear light, because I have received instructions on the clear light of sleep. Other people do not have these instructions – how lucky I am!" There are very few people who are actually able to merge sleep with the clear light practice, so for the majority of us who are beginners, it is extremely practical and useful to go to sleep while meditating on giving and taking. In this way, the entire time you spend sleeping becomes the actual practice of *tong-len*, and thus becomes virtuous.

Practising in Daily Life

Actually it is extremely important that all the actions we do – sitting, walking, going, coming and so forth – become Dharma. If you divide twenty-four hours into two parts, almost the whole of one part is spent sleeping, and if your sleep is not transformed into virtuous practice, then it becomes empty and even non-virtuous. That means that half the day has disappeared in non-virtue. Then you wake up

and, even if you generate a very strong motivation to practise virtue during the day, it is extremely difficult to maintain it. When you sit down to do your prayers, sometimes your mind is so distracted and goes in so many different directions that you're not even sure whether or not you have done all the prayers up to the point you've reached in your recitation. So you have to go back and recite those prayers all over again to make sure that you have at least completed all your commitments.

If it is difficult to generate a pure, virtuous state of mind when reciting prayers, how much harder it is to do so during the day when we are engaged in social activities, especially when most of our time is spent gossiping. Whenever we have the chance to talk, right away we start talking and then we spend so much time gossiping, which is a non-virtuous action, isn't it? Therefore it is extremely crucial that we transform as many of our actions during the day and night as we possibly can into virtue, into Dharma practice.

If we transform our actions into Dharma then we will make our life meaningful. The most important thing is to begin in the morning, as soon as we open our eyes, by generating a very strong motivation. We should think, "I'm still alive this morning, so I'm very fortunate. Due to the kindness of the Three Jewels, I didn't die last night. Therefore I must make this coming day as meaningful as possible by practising Dharma."

After generating a strong motivation in the morning, you should carry it through the day, reminding yourself of it again and again, in all your activities. Normally, the first thing you do after getting up is to jump into the shower, so while taking a shower you can practise the yoga of washing together with the ablution mantras, or do a purification practice. Following that, if you don't have to go to work, you can sit down and begin your daily meditation commitments. Otherwise, if you have to go to work, you can use your time at work to create virtue. If your job mainly involves physical activity, then you can turn your speech and mind to virtue – the mind especially can be made virtuous by recollecting again and again the motivation you generated in the morning.

Then you come to lunchtime. We normally eat at least three times a day, and when eating we can practise the yoga of taking food, which is part of deity yoga. There is a quotation from the great yogi Drogchen Lingrepa which says, "All the holy places are in your body – in your chakras. You don't have to go away. If you want to make pilgrimage, visit there. If you want to do the practice of purification and collecting merit, do it there, in your chakras, in your holy places." According to the practice of deity yoga, the assembly of deities resides in the subtle body of the psychic channels and chakras. Therefore, when you practise the yoga of eating, you visualise the deity's holy body or the body mandala and use the food to make tsog offering. Lama Dorje Chang used to quote this verse – it's very nice.

As you continue with your usual daily activities, remind yourself again and again of the motivation you generated in the morning. Then at night, before going to sleep, think over what you did during the day and check whether or not you have acted in accordance with your motivation. If you realise that you did any negative actions, confess and purify them, but if you realise that your actions were completely compatible with your motivation, then rejoice in all the virtues you created throughout the day.

The Kadampa lamas of the past used to keep count of their virtuous and non-virtuous actions. They kept two piles of stones, one black and one white. Whenever they noticed a delusion or a disturbing thought in their mind, they would add a black stone, and whenever a virtuous thought rose, they would

add a white stone. At the end of the day they would count the black and white stones. They would confess and purify the delusions and negativities they had created, and generate the strong intention to keep their mind free from those negativities the following day. They would rejoice in whatever virtues they created and resolve to create even more the next day. Then they would go to sleep doing the practice of merging sleep with the clear light. This may be very difficult for us to practise, so it is important for us to go to sleep merging our sleep with the practice of *tong-le*n.

The Eleven-Point Meditation of Developing Bodhichitta

As I mentioned earlier, when you actually undertake the practice of training the mind in bodhichitta, there is a way of combining the two sets of instructions – the seven-point technique of cause and effect and exchanging oneself with others – into eleven steps. This is according to the tradition of Lama Tsongkhapa. By meditating on either of the two techniques alone, you will definitely generate bodhichitta. However, this uncommon way of merging the two and meditating on the eleven points enables you to generate bodhichitta more quickly and with less hardship.

How do we merge the two techniques into eleven steps?

(1) First of all you meditate on equanimity, visualising a friend, enemy and stranger.

(2) The second point is to recognise all sentient beings as your mother, by using the reasoning of the beginningless nature of the mind and by reflecting on different quotations.

(3) Third is recognising the kindness of sentient beings when they were your mother, just as your mother of this life is kind to you in the beginning, middle and end.

(4) Next is the uncommon point of recollecting the special kindness of sentient beings when they were not your mother.

Then you meditate on:

(5) the equality of self and others,

(6) the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought; and

(7) the advantages of cherishing others.

(8) Following that, with a mind filled with compassion, you do the meditation of taking upon yourself all the sufferings of sentient beings, and later incorporate this meditation with the breath.

(9) Then with a mind of incredible love, you give all sentient beings all your goodness and roots of virtue, sending these out with the breath as you exhale.

10) At this point you generate the extraordinary intention by thinking, "I have been meditating on taking upon myself the suffering of all sentient beings and giving them all my goodness and roots of virtue, but this has been only on the level of visualisation—it hasn't actually happened, but I am definitely going to make it happen in reality. I myself will definitely take on the suffering of all sentient beings and give them all the roots of virtue and happiness that they wish for." Thinking this way you generate a very special sense of responsibility.

11) In order to fulfil this responsibility, you generate bodhichitta: "I am going to become a buddha in order to help all sentient beings."

At this point you take the result of bodhichitta into the path by visualising that you transform into the aspect of Buddha Shakyamuni, emanating countless rays of light which purify all sentient beings and lead them to the state of the Buddha. Visualise that they all transform into buddhas, and stabilise your meditation on this. Conclude the meditation session by rejoicing that you have actually been able to bring all sentient beings to the state of enlightenment.

Transforming Adverse Circumstances into the Path to Enlightenment

The next section of the root text, *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, deals with transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment. This practice is absolutely crucial, especially for the present degenerate time in which we live. In this degenerate age there are so many obstacles, especially for Dharma practitioners. This practice enables the practitioner to take all the obstacles, all the adverse circumstances, and transform them into conducive circumstances and even into the actual path to enlightenment. In fact, it enables the practitioner to not have any obstacles at all.

This section is divided into two points: transforming adverse circumstances by way of thought and by way of action. The first, transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment by way of thought, is further divided into two: by using reasoning and by using the view.

With regard to the first, using reasoning, the root text says, "When the environment and its inhabitants overflow with unwholesomeness, transform adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment." And the commentary quotes from *The Guru Puja*:

> Should even the environment and the beings therein be filled
> With the fruits of their karmic debts
> And unwished-for sufferings pour down like rain,
> We seek your blessings to take these miserable conditions as a path
> By seeing them as causes to exhaust the results of our negative karma.

For example, when we get sick we tend to think that it is because of the food we ate, or because of spirits or obstacles, or because someone had cast a spell on us. These are the reasons that come to our mind. This is a clear indication that we are not able to recognise the real root of the sickness and to understand why we are experiencing that particular problem. We need to go back and look at [the section in the lam-rim on] the training for the individual of the small scope, which explains the teachings on evolutionary actions and results. Here it clearly explains that results are experienced due to karma, due to actions which we created in the past. It does not explain that a result such as sickness comes from eating a particular kind of food, or because someone has cast a spell on us, or because we are possessed by spirits. It explains that the results we experience are due to evolutionary actions created in the past. Therefore it really is indispensable to know how to transform adverse circumstances such as sickness into circumstances conducive to the attainment of enlightenment.

If you pay very careful attention to the advice of the old Kadampa lamas, it is so beneficial for the mind. They said, "Sickness and pain are the broom which sweeps away negativities." If you think about this advice, it is really powerful. It means that what bring the results of sickness, pain and suffering are

the negative evolutionary actions which you accumulated in the past. By experiencing the result, that particular negative karma is cleared away, swept away by the broom of suffering. The advice of the old Kadampa lamas is so powerful.

This advice must be practised continuously. We should think in this way whenever we experience physical or mental suffering. In particular, we should think that up to now we have meditated so much on tong-len, giving and taking, and have made many prayers that all the suffering of all sentient beings without exception may ripen upon us. Now our prayers are bringing some result – we are getting what we wished for – therefore we should rejoice. We should even wish for more suffering to come – the more suffering, the better. Why? Because the more suffering we experience, the more accumulated negativities are cleansed. We can actually get to the point where we wish for more suffering to ripen upon ourselves because we understand that that is what cleanses the negativities.

There is nothing more beneficial that the practice of lam-rim and thought transformation at times of experiencing physical and mental suffering. This is something I have experienced myself. For instance, there were times when I experienced incredible hardships, incredible sufferings of body and mind. At those times, I was able to think that all these sufferings and hardships were the result of past evolutionary actions and that by experiencing them, the negativities will be completely purified. Then in my mind came the thought that the more suffering that comes, the better it is, because in that way more negativities will be purified. It is due to the kindness of my gurus – having received the teachings of thought transformation from Lama Pabongkha Dorje Chang and also many times from the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche – that when I went through incredible pain, suffering and hardships of body and mind, I experienced the thought of not wishing the suffering to end. When difficulties come, I don't need to be afraid. In Tibetan the word for "existence" is *sipa*, which also means "possible". In existence, anything is possible, anything can happen. However, on the basis of practising the teachings of lam-rim and thought transformation, you can reach a point where no matter what hardships or difficulties occur, your mind is unshakeable. Your mind cannot be shaken by suffering, hardship or adverse circumstances.

The sayings of the Kadampa lamas are so true. For example, they say, "Adverse circumstances are an incentive for practice," and "Sprits and possession are manifestations of Buddhas, and suffering is the manifestation of emptiness." Another saying goes, "I don't like happiness, but I like suffering." Why did they say this? When we experience happiness, we consume the merits accumulated in the past; when we experience suffering, we purify negativities accumulated in the past. Therefore it is much better to experience suffering that happiness. As for ourselves, we like happiness and don't like suffering, but the advice of the Kadampa lamas is completely opposite: "I don't like happiness because in that way I consume merits, but I like suffering because in that way I purify negativities."

Another advice of the Kadampa lamas is, "I don't like a high position, I like a lower position." For us it is completely the opposite: we always like to be on top and don't like to be down below. However, the lower position is the position of the Victorious Ones, which allows one to proceed to become a buddha. The Kadampa lamas also said, "I don't like praise, but I like criticism." Why is this so? Although we feel uneasy when we receive it, criticism is actually very beneficial because it allows us to see our faults and to change on the basis of that. If we receive nothing but praise, the only thing that increases is our pride. Praise is therefore not beneficial, and it is even damaging because it increases our

delusions. Criticism on the other hand allows us to identify our faults and work on them.

Transforming Adverse Circumstances by Way of the View

So now we come to the thought transformation practice of transforming adverse circumstances into the path by way of the view. This is done by reflecting again and again on the fact that if you search for the actual entity of what an adverse circumstance appears to be, if you search in depth, you cannot find a single atom which exists on its own, by its own nature. Instead, what you find is just what is merely labelled. It is completely unfindable in nature; ultimately it is not there. You have to bring this thought into your mind again and again.

However, if you are not proficient in analysing the nature of phenomena with the view, then you should think in this way, "Whatever happens to me in this very short life, whether it is happiness or suffering, at the end of this life all those experiences will be just memories. They are like dreams, completely insubstantial, so there is absolutely no reason to grasp at them with attachment or aversion. There is not even a single atom of them that I can grasp with attachment or aversion."[2]

The Importance of Bodhichitta

In conclusion, the most important thing is to apply one's energy as much as possible towards the development of bodhichitta in this life. The significance of bodhichitta was shown by the way Lama Atisha greeted people. When we meet people we usually say, "How are you?" or Ni how ma? Lama Atisha, however, would greet people by asking, "Do you have a good heart?" or "Has the good heart arisen within you yet?" This showed the importance he gave to the practice of bodhichitta.

As I mentioned earlier, the great master Shantideva said that just as we churn milk to extract its essence, butter, we should extract the essence of the 84,000 heaps of teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni – this essence is bodhichitta. Therefore, as bodhichitta is the essence of the entirety of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, we must definitely make an effort to develop bodhichitta in our mind in this very life.

Notes

1. See Keith Dowman & Sonam Paljor, *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. London, 1980.
2. Earlier Ribur Rinpoche mentioned that one can also transform adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment by way of action, but he did not elaborate on the point. As found in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend* (Geshe Rabten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey; Wisdom Publications, London, 1986, pp. 68–9), this includes the practice of accumulating merit, purifying negative karma, and making offerings to harmful spirits and Dharma protectors.