

Beyond All Attachment

It's not enough just to renounce attachment to this life, says the Sakya Trizin. To be truly liberated we must transcend the idea of a solid reality altogether.

If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person.

If you have attachment to the world of existence, you do not have renunciation.

If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment mind.

If grasping arises, you do not have the view.

—Root verses of *Parting from the Four Attachments*,
Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (1092–1158)

This teaching is from the category known as mind training (*lojong*). It was given directly by the great bodhisattva Manjushri to the great Lama Sakyapa, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, who was the first of the five great founders of the Sakya order.

Analyzing this teaching, the young Lama Sakyapa realized that these four lines included the entire profound practice of the sutric path.

I myself received this teaching from my main guru, Dampa Dorje Chang of Ngor Monastery. I also received this teaching from His Eminence Chogyé Trichen Rinpoche.

This type of teaching is known as a pith instruction. The Buddha gave innumerable teachings of many different types and levels. In general, these can be classified into two kinds: vast, general teachings, like sutras and commentaries, that are studied over a long period of time and slowly put into practice; and pith instructions for those who do not have time for vast and detailed study. Great masters who have accomplished high realization write pith instructions based on their own experience that provide a guide for practice in a nutshell, which disciples can put straight into practice.

At all Sakya monasteries, this is the preliminary teaching. Because it is a very authentic and profound pith instruction given directly by Manjushri, it is recognized as a profound teaching by all of the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. It is included in many collections of mind-training teachings.

*If you have attachment to this life,
you are not a religious person.*

To practice this meditation, sit in a conducive place where there are no external disturbances. Try to also avoid internal disturbances such as conceptual thoughts. Sit cross-legged, and after reciting the refuge and generating enlightenment mind, contemplate the first line of the teaching, which is: “If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person.”

The general contents of this first line are common to the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. The first line directly describes the right way and the wrong way to practice dharma. Right dharma practice, pure dharma practice, is not attached to this life. Practicing dharma with attachment to



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by Gonkar Gyatso

this life is not real dharma; it is still worldly activity. Just like a mirage that appears to be water but does not quench thirst, such activity is apparently dharma but does not liberate you from the sufferings of samsara.

If you practice dharma with attachment to this life, any practice that you do, whether it is moral conduct, study, contemplation, or meditation, will not even result in the accomplishment of prosperity in this life. If the goal of dharma

practice is to gain fame, disciples, or wealth, the practice will become the seed of the lower realms and samsara instead of becoming the seed of liberation and enlightenment. It is not actual dharma practice. The great Indian master Vasubandhu said:

*Upon a base of sound moral conduct,
hear, contemplate, and
thoroughly apply yourself to meditation.*

Practicing dharma with attachment to this life is not real dharma. Just like a mirage that appears to be water but does not quench thirst, such activity is apparently dharma but does not liberate you from the sufferings of samsara.

To be pure dharma, whatever practice you do should not be mixed with attachment to this life. This is because this life is very transient. Very few people live longer than a hundred years. This life is also without essence: everything is impermanent and it is not really worthy of any attachment.

The goals of the dharma path have many different levels. To say nothing of liberation or enlightenment, we should at minimum practice for a purpose beyond this life—in other words, at least for the benefit of our next life.

While the first line of the teaching, “If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person,” directly explains the right and wrong way to practice dharma, indirectly it points to the difficulty of obtaining a precious human birth endowed with the eighteen prerequisites. It also, because of impermanence, indicates the importance of diligently practicing dharma without any delay.

If you have attachment to the world of existence, you do not have renunciation.

The second line, “If you have attachment to the world of existence, you do not have renunciation,” means that if we are attached to the three realms—the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm—then dharma practice does not lead us to enlightenment.

The first line, “If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person,” explains that human life is not permanent; this current life will someday come to an end. When it does, our mental consciousness will not disappear; it will continue from life to life. Indulgence in nonvirtue will cause us to fall into the lower realms, where the suffering is immense. From fear of the suffering of the lower realms, we pray to always be reborn in the higher realms. For that to occur, we must practice virtuous deeds. It could be said that the first line explains what is known as the “small person’s path,” because

HIS HOLINESS THE SAKYA TRIZIN



The current Sakya Trizin, or “Sakya Throne-Holder,” is the forty-first in a family lineage stretching back to eleventh-century Tibet. Like the Dalai Lama of the Geluk school and the Karmapa of the Kagyu school, the Sakya Trizin is the supreme authority of the Sakya school, from which some of Tibet’s most innovative and influential scholars have emerged.

The 41st Sakya Trizin was born in Tibet in 1945. His early years were in many ways tragic: his mother passed away when he was three, his older sister when he was five, and his father shortly thereafter. He had already begun traditional Buddhist training under his father, but after his father’s death, his aunt became his primary caregiver and arranged his education under other masters. He received extensive training in Buddhist ritual, philosophy, and meditation until his studies were disrupted when he fled to India amid the tumult ensuing from the 1959 Tibetan uprising against the Communist Chinese invasion that had begun nine years earlier.

In India, the Sakya Trizin faced the challenge of continuing his studies while creating a new Sakya community in exile. With limited means, in 1964 he established the Sakya Center in Dehradun, which served as the new headquarters for the order. Eight years later, with the help of the Dalai Lama, he and the late Khenpo Appey Rinpoche established Sakya College, also in Dehradun, which became a major center for advanced studies in Tibetan Buddhism. Since then he has created other important institutions for Tibetans in exile, including a Sakya nunnery, an advanced college for nuns, and a hospital.

The Sakya Trizin has embarked on a teaching tour in the West that includes scheduled Padmasambhava and Chakrasambhava empowerments in Boston in late May, a monthlong Path and Result teaching cycle in Walden, New York, in June, and a Manjushri empowerment in Los Angeles in mid-July, as well as teachings and empowerments in Canada in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto during August. Teachings are also planned in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Brazil. Visit sakyatour.org for more information.

—Rory Brendan Lindsay

Personal liberation is the greatest obstacle to accomplishing full enlightenment.

although it is a spiritual path, it does not aim beyond the cycle of existence. The aim is to avoid falling into the lower realms and to be continuously reborn in the higher realms, such as the human realm or the gods' realms.

However, the second line explains that not only are the lower realms characterized by great suffering, but even in the higher realms there is no real happiness; there is nothing worthy of attachment. Therefore, we should develop renunciation, which is the thought to completely renounce the entirety of samsara. To develop renunciation, we must understand that all of samsara is suffering.

When we realize that the entirety of samsara is nothing but suffering, then we no longer have any wish or place to stay, just as when a lake is frozen, swans have no place to stay, or when a forest is burned, birds have no place to stay. Thus, realizing that the entirety of samsara is nothing but suffering, we very sincerely and wholeheartedly wish to renounce samsara and attain liberation. This type of path, where liberation is sought for one's own self, is called the middle person's path.

Thus the teaching explains two main subjects: the faults of samsara, which produces renunciation, and the law of karma, or cause and effect, which explains how our own actions bind us within samsara.

*If you have attachment to your own purpose,
you do not have enlightenment mind.*

The third line is "If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment mind." Based on the second line, we realized that all of the worlds of existence are nothing but suffering, and we developed the sincere wish to be free from those experiences. In setting out to accomplish that result, we perform many lesser and middling virtuous deeds and finally achieve the state of personal liberation, which is the realization of the pratyekabuddhas and shravakas. These two types of personal liberation are great in the sense that all gross suffering and its causes have been completely eliminated.

Personal liberation, however, is not the final goal. Although personal liberation is great compared to samsara because one who attains that level is free from suffering, all of the good qualities are not fully developed because only the obscuration of the defilements has been removed. The state of personal liberation is still limited by the obscuration of knowledge, which blocks the achievement of full enlightenment. Because the good qualities of those on the stage of personal liberation are not developed to their fullest potential, they cannot benefit other sentient beings, and thus neither their own nor others' purposes are fulfilled. Attaining personal liberation also hinders accomplishing full enlightenment because, having reached that state, beings remain there for a very long time. If you build a house, it is difficult to tear it down and rebuild it again in a different way. Likewise personal liberation is really the greatest obstacle to accomplishing full enlightenment.

Once when Lord Buddha was in India, his disciple Ananda was about to give a teaching to five hundred disciples. Just before he began, Manjushri appeared. Ananda requested Manjushri to give the teaching instead. It is said that if Ananda had given the teaching, all five hundred disciples would have achieved the nirvana of personal liberation. After Manjushri gave the teaching, however, it became apparent that all five hundred disciples would be reborn in the hell realms. Seeing this, Ananda reported to the Buddha, "Today, Manjushri did something very bad. If I had given the teaching, all of the disciples would have accomplished nirvana. But because of Manjushri's teaching, now they will all fall into the hell realms." The Buddha replied, "What Manjushri did was right. If you had given the teaching, they would have accomplished nirvana, but it would have been very difficult for them to achieve full enlightenment; it would have taken a very long time. Thanks to Manjushri's teaching, all of their negative karma ripened very quickly, so although they will fall into the hell realms, they will begin the path toward full enlightenment and reach the highest attainment faster than they otherwise would have."



New image of Wheel of Life 7, 1993
by Apichai Piromrak

This story shows that it is not right to seek liberation only for our own purpose. The goal for which we all should aim is full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Such enlightenment does not arise without a cause, from an incomplete cause, or from the wrong cause and condition. For example, if we plant a rice seed during the winter, then although the correct seed was planted, still rice will not grow. Likewise, if we plant a wheat seed, rice will not appear. To grow rice, we need a rice seed as well as the proper temperature, moisture, and time. All of the correct causes and conditions must be present for the rice to grow.

In a similar way, accomplishing full enlightenment requires the proper seed, the proper cause, and all of the necessary conditions. As it is said in the *Mahavairochana Tantra*, “The root cause of enlightenment is great compassion, and the conditions are enlightenment mind and the performance of

skillful means.” Possessing the root cause, the conditions, and performing skillful means, we will accomplish full enlightenment. To accomplish these three, we need to meditate on loving-kindness, compassion, and enlightenment mind, and to observe the precepts of the bodhisattva’s conduct.

If grasping arises, you do not have the view.

The fourth line, “If grasping arises, you do not have the view,” means that although we have now developed relative enlightenment mind based on the practice of the third line, we still cling to phenomena as real. As a result, we fall into either the extreme of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism. As long as we remain in these extremes, we cannot accomplish enlightenment. To overcome such grasping at substantiality and essential characteristics, we must meditate on calm abiding

Insight wisdom consists of three steps. The first is to establish all outer appearances as your own mind. The second is to establish all mental objects as illusory. The third is to establish all illusions as devoid of inherent nature.

(shamatha) and insight wisdom (vipashyana). The actual method of eliminating the defilements is through the practice of insight wisdom. Before practicing insight wisdom, however, we must first develop a base of calm abiding, or concentration. All together, the practice of the fourth line includes three stages: meditation on calm abiding, meditation on insight wisdom, and meditation on the combination of these two.

Calm Abiding It is necessary to do calm-abiding meditation before attempting to practice insight wisdom, because at the moment our minds are very busy with many streams of thoughts. With such a busy mind, we will be unable to meditate properly on insight wisdom.

To meditate on calm abiding, we need to find a place that is free of what are called the thorns of meditation, namely a place free of external and internal disturbances that hinder practice. It should be a secluded place pleasing to the mind. There, begin with the preliminary practices such as taking refuge and generating enlightenment mind, just as we do in all meditation sessions. Then, if you are able, sit in the vajra position, also known as the lotus position: the two feet crossed, two hands in meditation posture, the tip of the tongue lightly touching the palate, the spine straight, and the eyes half closed. Thus meditate in the proper position.

There are many different ways of practicing calm-abiding meditation, including many types of concentrations on outer objects and inner objects. For beginners, it is easier and more appropriate to focus on outer objects. Among the many outer objects it is possible to focus on, the best is an image or statue of the Buddha. By focusing on an image of the Buddha, we not only develop concentration; we also accumulate great merit.

If you choose to meditate on a mental image of the Buddha, then visualize a golden Shakyamuni Buddha seated on a

jeweled throne upon a lotus and moon disc. His right hand is in the earth-touching gesture and his left hand is in meditation posture face up in his lap. He is wearing the three robes of a fully ordained monk and sitting in the full vajra position, his feet face up on the opposing knees. Either by looking at a statue, or visualizing very clearly, focus on the body in general, and particularly on the space between the eyebrows, where there is a white hair curled in a spiral. Then, instead of looking at the various colors and shapes of the visualization or statue, try to bring your mind, eyes, and breath together and remain focused on that single spot without any distractions.

In trying to develop calm-abiding meditation, it is said that there are five faults that hinder the practice. Fortunately there are eight antidotes to counter these five faults. There are also nine methods to aid the meditation. Of the five faults, the main one is laziness or unwillingness to do the meditation. The antidote to laziness is recollecting the benefits of calm-abiding meditation. Try to develop sincere faith that through this meditation, you will accomplish mundane attainments, such as physical and mental well-being and bliss, as well as the ultimate attainment of enlightenment.

If you meditate with a steady body, a steady object of meditation, no blinking, and no bending of the body, the first experience that will arise is the perception that even more streams of thoughts are arising in the mind than before. In fact these streams of thoughts are always present in the mind, one after another, but normally we are so busy with other activities that we do not recognize them. When we sit down and try to concentrate, then we see the thoughts arising. Seeing the thoughts arising is actually a positive sign, so do not feel discouraged.

By continuously practicing in this way, you will slowly be able to reduce the number of thoughts in the mind. Eventually, with the right conditions and sufficient merit, you will be

(Detail) *The Wheel of Life*



able to remain single-pointedly in complete tranquillity without any disturbances or thoughts. This is the attainment of calm abiding.

Insight Wisdom Calm-abiding meditation alone is not enough. It is only the basis for the practice of insight wisdom, which is the second stage. Without insight wisdom, it is not possible to destroy defilements from the root. Thus the main practice is actually insight wisdom, the wisdom of discernment. Using very sharp logical reasoning, you examine the nature of reality or the ultimate reality of all external and internal phenomena. Through this you see that the ultimate reality of all phenomena is away from the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, and devoid of all extreme views, such as existence, nonexistence, permanence, nothingness, and so forth. The attainment of such a state of understanding is the accomplishment of insight wisdom. Combining it with calm-abiding meditation allows you to dwell single-pointedly on the insight wisdom that has been realized.

Insight wisdom consists of three steps. The first is to establish all outer objects or outer appearances as your own mind. The second is to establish all mental objects as illusory. The third is to establish all illusions as devoid of inherent nature.

Outer appearances are your own mind. The first step is to establish all outer appearances as your own mind. The meaning of this is that all the objects that you see and all the appearances or visions that you encounter every day—such as the elements, sentient beings, atoms, and so on—are not without a cause, are not created by an outside force, and are not inherently existing. In reality, they are all mentally projected. From beginningless time until now, our habits of perceiving these phenomena has left impressions, in the form of latent propensities, on our minds. As a result, when suitable conditions come together, these tendencies project the phenomena around us. In fact, there is no creator of these objects apart from our own minds.

This is similar to the phenomenon of dreams. In dreams we

see many things, such as different countries, animals, and other beings. We have happy dreams, sad dreams, nightmares—dreams of all kinds. These dreams can cause joy, sadness, fear, and so on. Even so, there is no outside object. Dreams are nothing but our own minds. But while we are dreaming, our dreams appear as real as this present life. Similarly, this life that we experience is also like a dream. There is no difference between dreams and this present life. Dreams are experienced by yourself; this life is also experienced by yourself. Dreams can provoke many types of feelings; this life can provoke many types of feelings. The only real difference is the length of time—dreams are much shorter than the present life. Apart from that, there is no difference.

In this way, all objects that appear externally are actually not separate from your own mind. If the outer world were separate from your mind, then its characteristics would always be the same for everyone, but we can see that this is not the case. For one person a certain place might seem to be a very happy place, but for another person it might be a very unhappy place. Furthermore, a single person may see it as very happy at one time and very unhappy at another time. In this way, it is easy to see that all the things you encounter are actually projections of your own mind.

Mental objects are illusory. Having established that all outer appearances are your own mind, the second step is to establish all mental objects as illusory. As it is said in the sutras, “Just as the appearance of various illusory forms of horses, elephants, and carts made by magicians are not true whatsoever, just so should all dharmas (phenomena) be known.” As this states, all these phenomena are like magical illusions. When a magician combines certain special ingredients with the power of an incantation, it is possible for us to see many things, such as elephants, horses, and so on, although none of these actually exist. In this way it is said that the various outer appearances are like a magical illusion.

Through the combination of compassion and the realization of emptiness, all illusory visions are transformed into wisdom.

When the causes are gathered together, something appears. But when we examine that thing to try to find out what it is, we cannot find it at all. Put another way, as long as a thing depends on causes and conditions, it is shown to be devoid of existing inherently. If it existed inherently, it would not depend on other causes and conditions. As soon as one of its causes is missing, it will not appear.

Television provides an example of this. An image appearing on a television screen depends upon many conditions, such as the presence of electricity, a functioning cable or antenna, the television signal, and so on. If any of these conditions are missing, even if the tiniest wire or circuit is broken or absent, the image will not appear. When all of the causes and conditions are gathered together, then the image appears. Even so, although the image appears, still it is not real.

Reflect on this, thinking that all mental appearances are like illusions in a magical show or like the moon's reflection in water. When the conditions gather together, the phenomena appear. Meditate until you have certain knowledge of this.

Illusions are devoid of inherent nature. The third stage is to establish that all illusions are devoid of inherent nature. On the relative level, all these objects, which arise because of the gathering of causes and conditions, appear unceasingly. If we try to examine them, however, we cannot find anything that exists inherently. Put another way, on the relative level, because they are interdependently originated, visions or appearances never cease. On the absolute level, they are all emptiness. Emptiness does not mean that things do not exist; emptiness is just a word that we use to describe actual reality, which is beyond words such as existence, nonexistence, neither, or both. Reality is both unceasing clarity and emptiness, and the two do

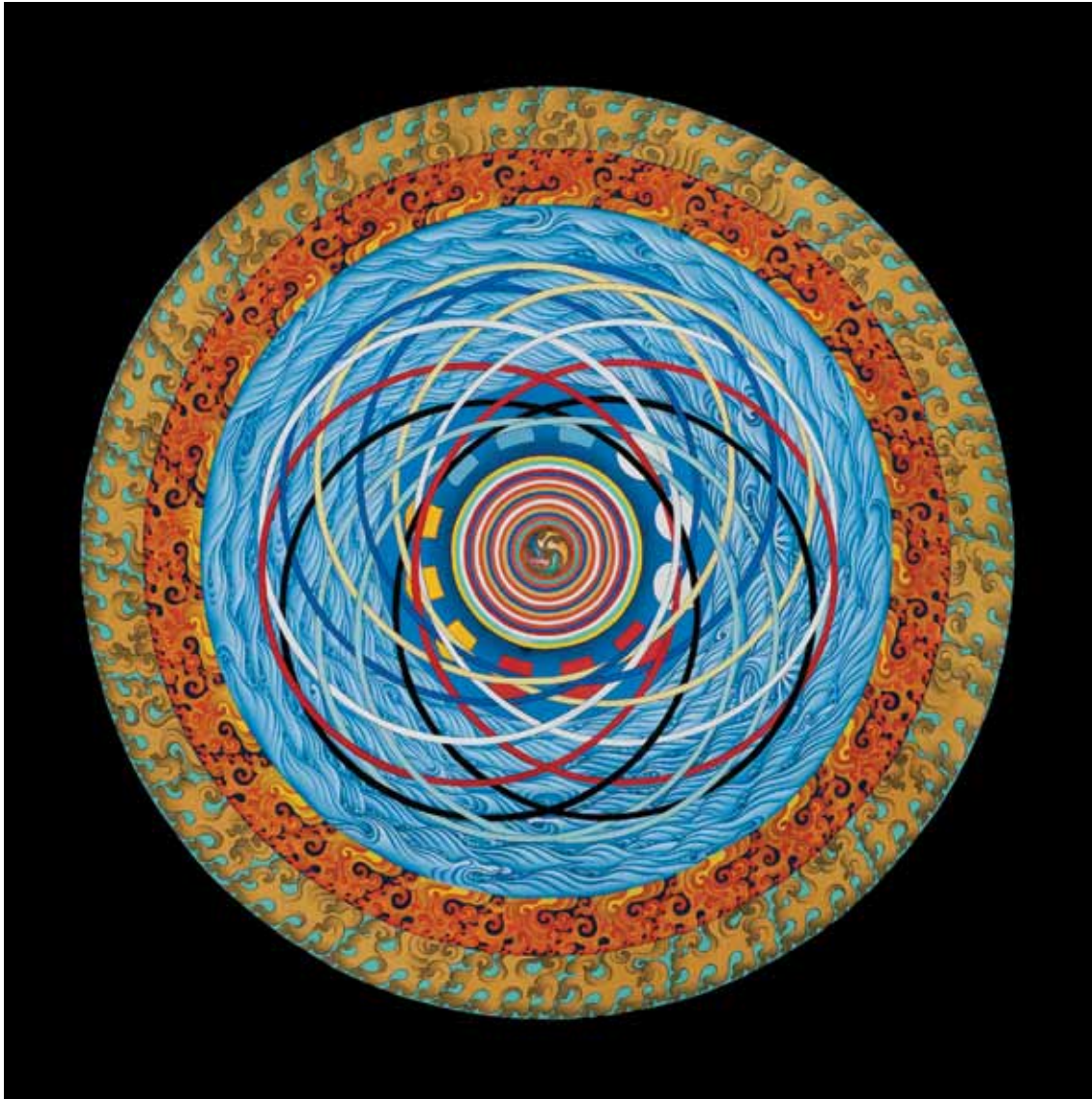
not contradict. As long as appearances and emptiness do not contradict, they become nondual appearance and emptiness, nondual sound and emptiness, and nondual awareness and emptiness. This is actual insight wisdom.

Union of Calm Abiding and Insight Wisdom

Having developed calm abiding and insight wisdom, the third stage is to merge these two together. This, too, is done step by step. The first step is to establish all outer appearances as mind, all mental objects as illusory, and illusory visions as devoid of inherent nature. Then the analytical mind that realizes this emptiness and is beyond all description is merged with the actual or object reality, which has from the very beginning been free from all extremes. These two merge together inseparably, just like water mixing with water or melted butter mixing with melted butter. Meditate on this realization and remain in this state single-pointedly, like candlelight in the absence of wind. When there is no wind, a candle's light is very steady and tranquil and it glows very clearly. Meditate in this state.

With practice, you will gradually become more and more familiar with this state. The closer you are to ultimate truth, the more compassion arises for those sentient beings who do not realize this truth and as a result experience much suffering. Through the combination of compassion and the wisdom that realizes emptiness, all illusory visions are transformed into wisdom. Eventually, full enlightenment endowed with the three kayas and unceasing great activities will be accomplished.

This completes the explanation of the fourth line of *Parting from the Four Attachments*, "If grasping arises, you do not have the view."



Cosmic Mandala, 2006
by Ang Tsherin Sherpa

Conclusion: Dedication of Merit

The third and final part of the teaching is the dedication of merit. At the end of every meditation session, it is important to dedicate the merit. Without dedication, the merit of whatever virtuous deeds have been accomplished can be destroyed by a strong opposing factor, such as anger or hatred. By dedicating the merit skillfully, however, not only is it unaffected by opposing factors, but it also increases continuously until we reach the ultimate goal.

To dedicate the merit, first think that all the merit you have gained through this very profound meditation is combined with the merit of all the virtuous deeds you have accumulated in the past, are accumulating now, and will accumulate in the future. Because all reality is mind, it is even possible to

dedicate the merit that you have not yet accumulated. Then with all these combined together, think “Through the power of performing these virtuous deeds, may I and all sentient beings attain enlightenment.”

When dedicating the merit, recall that all phenomena are like a dream or like magical illusions. Aspire to dedicate your own merit just as the great bodhisattvas dedicated theirs, and in this way follow in their great footsteps.

This completes the teaching on *Parting from the Four Attachments*. **BD**

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