

Basic Teachings of the Sakya Tradition

Tsechen Kunchab Ling Publications
Walden, New York

Tsechen Kunchab Ling Publications

First printing 2017

This booklet was prepared by His Holiness Kyabgon Gongma Trichen Rinpoche's devoted students under the direction of Venerable Khenpo Kalsang Gyaltzen. Jia-Jing Lee transcribed the teaching. Chodrung-ma Dr. Kunga Chodron served as general editor. Jon Mark Fletcher did copy editing and layout. Tulku Tsultrim Pelgyi sponsored preparation and design of the booklet. The 2017 North American Monlam Committee sponsored the printing. By this merit, may the lives of His Holiness Kyabgon Gongma Trichen Rinpoche and all holy teachers be long and their teachings flourish.

There is no charge for this book. Donations to the publication fund are greatly appreciated and will help us to print more copies to distribute to others.

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ISBN 0-978-1-947047-18-1

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Basic Teachings of the Sakya Tradition

by His Holiness the Sakya Trichen

In this world, there are many different races, cultures, religions, philosophies, and so on. But one thing they all have in common is that everybody wants to be free from suffering and everybody wants to be happy. Individuals and countries make strenuous efforts to achieve happiness. Because of these efforts tremendous strides have been made in technology and science. But one question remains, does this progress and these developments achieve the goal of creating happiness? It is very clear that if we seek outer material progress without also seeking inner spiritual progress, we only create more suffering.

Therefore, although our lives present many opportunities to create and accomplish our goals and wishes, the most important goal is spiritual development. Only through spiritual development can we bring our mind to real peace and happiness. Toward this end, there are many different religions and teachings in the world. Each of the major religions and teach-

ings has its own beauty and ways to help humankind solve problems. But what is lacking is people practicing these great teachings in daily life. Because of this, many problems and great sufferings arise in the world. In order to establish peace and happiness within our local community and the world as a whole, individuals must make efforts toward spiritual development. We all have the potential to make this effort.

These are the same teachings by which the great masters achieved realization. They were also once ordinary people like us, but they made diligent efforts and then achieved realization. Therefore, it is imperative to not only know spiritual teachings, but to put every teaching we learn into practice in our daily lives.

I. The Buddha's Teachings

The great Lord Buddha resolved to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings without exception. His primary goal was to achieve enlightenment and remove all sentient beings from the suffering of saṃsāra. Thus he created enlightenment thought. After that, he accumulated enormous amounts of wisdom and compassion and finally attained perfect enlightenment, at which point he left behind all obscurations and attained every possible good quality. After attaining enlightenment, he performed many great activities—physical activities, verbal activities, and mental activities. Among all of these great activities, the most important activities were verbal, namely, the turning of the wheel of Dharma. Through the turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha taught what

he realized to sentient beings so that we, too, can be led to the path, proceed along it, and gain liberation and enlightenment ourselves.

But sentient beings are limitless. Since space itself has no limit, therefore sentient beings have no limit. All sentient beings have different minds, mentalities, propensities, tastes, and so forth. So in order to suit every condition and mentality, the Buddha gave an enormous number of teachings. Like a skillful physician who uses many different medicines to cure many different diseases, the Buddha gave many different teachings in order to help sentient beings at different levels.

The Buddha has many types of teachings, which we can summarize and divide into various categories. Categorized in terms of the time they were given, there is the first turning of the wheel of Dharma also known as the first Dharmacakra, the second Dharmacakra, and the third Dharmacakra. Categorized in terms of subject, the collection of the Buddha's teachings is known as the Tripiṭaka, which consists of the Abhidharma, Vinaya, and the Sūtra.

The whole purpose of turning the wheel of Dharma is to tame our mind, which is sullied by three main defilements. As the antidote for desire, the Buddha taught the vinaya, which explains how to maintain and discipline our moral conduct. As the antidote for hatred, he taught the sūtra, which explains all the different meditations that control and calm our mind. And the antidote for ignorance is the abhidharma, which explains wisdom.

Additionally, there are two types of followers: those who strive to attain the smaller goal and those who strive to attain the greater goal. Based on the differing goal, the Bud-

dha's teachings can be categorized with two main vehicles: the Hīnayāna or Lesser Vehicle, which aims for the smaller goal, and the Mahāyāna or Greater Vehicle, which aims for the greater goal.

Tibetan Buddhism

Although Buddhism started in India and then went to many countries, only Tibet has all the teaching levels, the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, as well as other related teachings. Practitioners in Tibet are all Mahāyāna Buddhists. The Mahāyāna can be divided into two parts, the *cause yāna* and the *result yāna*. The general Mahāyāna is called the “cause yāna” because it takes a long time to work on the cause and thus it takes a long time to achieve results. The Mantrayāna, or Vajrayāna, is called the “result yāna” because it is easier to achieve results and the result emerges right from the beginning; the results can be taken into the path.

All of the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism are Mahāyāna combined with Vajrayāna methods and techniques. Thus, the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism are all similar in that there is no substantial difference between them from the first development of enlightenment thought up to the final attainment of enlightenment. There is only one noteworthy difference: the lineage. Different lineages formed based on where the teaching started in India. The lineages then came to Tibet through various translators and then down through various masters and have continued to this day. Since each lineage is different, the emphasis of each is somewhat different. Some

schools emphasize study, others emphasize meditation, and so on. But among the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the goal and motivation from the beginning to the end of the path is the same.

The Sakya School

Today, the Sakya lineage is the owner of many great and varied teachings in the sūtra and mantra vehicles. But the most important teaching in our tradition is the *Lam Dre*, which means “the path that includes the result.” This teaching originated in India from the great Mahāsiddha Virūpa, who was one of the eighty-four mahāsiddhas. Virūpa was born in a royal family and from a very young age, had very special qualities. He saw that everything in saṃsāra was suffering and so renounced it to become a monk. He entered the great monastery of Nalanda, where he first studied the Sūtrayāna teachings, and later received the Mantrayāna teachings and practices. Virūpa became very famous and later he became the abbot of Nālandā Monastery. He taught Mahāyāna teachings to hundreds and thousands of monks, held debate sessions, and composed many books on the general Mahāyāna. He also practiced the Mantrayāna in secret.

But after practicing for a long period of time, Virūpa did not experience significant signs of attainment. He felt that perhaps he did not have a karmic connection with tantric practice and so wanted to devote his time fully to the Mahāyāna teaching. But on the very night he made this decision, he saw in a vision Vajra Nairātmyā, the owner of all *dākinīs*. She said,

“What you have decided is wrong. I am your karmic link deity. You must continue your Vajrayāna practices.” After having this vision, he continued his Vajrayāna practice.

Shortly thereafter, Virūpa had another pure vision of the full mandala of Vajrayoginī, and received the empowerment of its special deity, Hevajra. Afterwards he achieved great realizations every night for six nights. On the first night, he realized the first *bhūmi* or stage of the bodhisattva path, realizing the ultimate truth. From the second night onwards, he attained one *bhūmi* every night in the bodhisattva path up to and including the sixth *bhūmi*, thereby becoming a great mahāsiddha. Virūpa then left the monastery and went on to perform many great miracles. He subdued many evils and corrected those on the wrong path. Many beings benefited just by hearing his name. He did a great service to the Buddha Dharma.

The Mahāsiddha Virūpa had many general Mahāyāna followers, but for the esoteric pith instructions, he had two main followers: Kṛṣṇācārya and Ḍombi Heruka. For Kṛṣṇācārya, Virūpa gave a teaching known as the *Vajra Words*. This very short teaching is the essence of all the Tripiṭaka and Vajrayāna; it is like butter churned from milk. This essence is the most important of all the Buddha’s sūtras and tantras in the form of pith instructions.

This particular teaching was then passed from Kṛṣṇācārya, to his disciple, and so on. Altogether, five Indian gurus received this teaching. The fifth Indian master was Gayadhara, who came to Tibet several times and gave this teaching to the great translator Drokmi Lotsāwa. Drokmi Lotsāwa was the first Tibetan to receive this particular *Lam Dre* teaching. Drokmi Lotsāwa was very great and had many disciples. Many of

them, both male and female, achieved great realizations.

Drokmi Lotsāwa gave the general tantric explanations and pith instructions separately. He would not give the tantric explanations to his disciples who had heard the pith instructions. Also, disciples who had heard the pith instructions were not given the tantric explanations because the tantric teachings were very precious. Consequently, none of his disciples were given both teachings at the same time.

Amongst Drokmi Lotsāwa's disciples, the most important was Seton Kunrig, who received the *Lam Dre* teachings and achieved high realization. Then Seton Kunrig gave the teaching to Zhangton Chobar, a "hidden yogi." To the general public, Zhangton Chobar appeared as an ordinary person working in other people's fields, but inwardly, he was a great yogi. He promised to work in a variety of fields simultaneously, and sent out emanations of his body enabling him to do so. He gave this *Lam Dre* teaching to the great Lama Sakyapa (Sachen Kunga Nyingpo), who was born in the Khön lineage.

The Khön Lineage

The Khön lineage is said to directly descend from celestial beings. These celestial beings dwelt in a heavenly realm known as the *rūpadhātu* or Form Realm, and when the time was ripe, they felt that it was necessary to descend to the human realm. Three brothers descended to the high mountains of Tibet. One of them settled in Tibet and his lineage continued. The first name of this lineage is the Clear Light Race. Then the celestial beings mixed with the *rakṣā*, which are local spirits.

Later there was some outward disagreement between the rakṣā beings and the celestial race beings, but inwardly it was a disagreement between perfect wisdom and ignorance. After that, the lineage became known as Khön and both the name and the lineage have continued to the present day. Before Buddhism came to Tibet, the Khön lineage were Bön practitioners. When Guru Padmasambhava brought Buddhism to Tibet, Khön Nagendra Raksita became his direct disciple. Guru Padmasambhava gave many teachings to Khön Nagendrarakshita, and he was one of the first seven Tibetans to receive the full Buddhist *bhikṣu* ordination.

The test of whether these seven Tibetans would be able to keep their *bhikṣu* monastic vows came out very successfully, and this marked the auspicious beginning of the monastic tradition in Tibet. After that, the entire Khön lineage became practitioners of the Nyingmapa tradition until the time of Khön Konchok Gyalpo. At that time, the Khön lineage felt it was necessary to start a separate school, so they concealed all the ancient teachings and started the Sakya order.

The Sakya Monastery was founded in 1073 by Khön Konchok Gyalpo, who was the father of the great Lama Sakyapa, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. At that time, Konchok Gyalpo was also a tantric disciple of Drokmi Lotsāwa. So Sachen Kunga Nyingpo received the *Hevajra Tantra* directly from his father, Konchok Gyalpo, who was a direct disciple of Drokmi Lotsāwa. However, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo did not receive the pith instructions from his father. Instead, he went to the great practitioner Zhangton Chobar for pith instructions.

At first Zhangton Chobar hesitated to bestow the pith instructions upon Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. But later, when he

found out that Sachen Kunga Nyingpo was his Dharma brother's son, he was more eager to give him the pith instructions. After doing so, Zhangton Chobar said, "For eighteen years, you are not allowed to disclose any of these pith instructions—not even the name of the instructions—to anyone. But after eighteen years you may disclose them to anyone and you can even write them down. It will be up to you. You are now the owner of this teaching."

In reality, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo was already a fully enlightened being. He was actually the emanation of Mañjuśhrī and Avalokiteśvara, the manifestations of all the Buddhas' wisdom and compassion together in one person. But in an ordinary person's view, he still possessed a human body and therefore had to follow the human way of life. Accordingly, for eighteen years, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo did not mention even the word of *Lam Dre* to anyone and thereby kept the teaching secret. During those eighteen years, the great Lama Sakyapa rehearsed the teachings only to himself.

At one point during that period he became very ill, and because at that time the *Lam Dre* was only transmitted orally, and none of the texts were written down, he forgot them. Sachen Kunga Nyingpo was very worried. His guru had already passed away and he felt that even if he went to India it might be hard to find a teacher because tantric practice was done only in secret places in the high mountains and the great forests; it was not commonly taught. And so he prayed very intensely. Then he then had a dream.

In Sachen Kunga Nyingpo's dream, his guru, Zhangton Chobar, came to give him the teaching again. After this dream, Kunga Nyingpo remembered much of the teaching. Again he

prayed, and finally in an exalted meditation, Zhangton Chobar appeared to give Kunga Nyingpo many teachings. As a result, he remembered most of the teaching he had forgotten.

One day Mahāsiddha Virūpa, who was the original founder of the *Lam Dre* teaching and received this teaching directly from the deity, appeared on the huge mountain near Sakya. The great mountain was at his back and Mahāsiddha Virūpa's body covered the huge mountain and he said, "This earth belongs to me." He then gave again the full *Lam Dre* teaching, as well as other related teachings, to the great Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. This is how the great Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo became the holder of all the Buddha's teachings. He gave all these teachings to his sons and many of his disciples, who have continued the lineage up to the present day. This is a very brief history of how the *Lam Dre* teaching began.

II. The Impure Vision

The *Lam Dre* teaching is profound and vast. It can be practiced in many ways. Those destined to follow the gradual path will begin with the Hīnayāna path and then continue with the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna paths. Others may be able to follow the direct path due to their state of mind and karmic connections. For this reason, there are many different ways to present the teaching to disciples. For most people, we typically present the whole teaching in two parts: the preliminary part and the main part.

The preliminary part is known as the *Triple Vision*. The *Triple Vision* is composed of the base, the path, and the result.

At the base are sentient beings. Because of our impure karma, defilements, and actions, we have the impure vision. The yogis who practice meditation and are practitioners of the path have the vision of experience. After working very hard on the path, you can achieve the final result of Buddhahood, at which point inner qualities are manifest which cause them to perceive the pure vision. The *Triple Vision* refers to 1) the impure vision, 2) the vision of experience, and 3) the pure vision. This is how the preliminary teaching is divided.

In the *Lam Dre*, as in all Buddhist traditions, the first step—the basic practice of all paths, the root of all the Dharma, the foundation of all the vows, and the difference between Buddhist practitioners and others—is taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. All the meditations in *Lam Dre* are divided into three parts: 1) taking refuge and creating the enlightenment thought, 2) the main part, and 3) the conclusion, which is a dedication. Like all other schools, the refuge section is further divided into five parts: 1) cause 2) object 3) method 4) benefit, and 5) the vows of refuge.

First, the causes of taking refuge are fear, faith, and compassion. Second, the objects of refuge are the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. In the Mahāyāna school, the Buddha refers to “one who possesses the three kāya, or bodies: the dharmakāya, nirmānakāya, and sambhogakāya.” The Dharma is the teaching and realization. The true Saṅgha is the bodhisattvas who have reached the irreversible state.

Third, the method of taking refuge is to hold in the Buddha as our guide, the Dharma as our path, and the Saṅgha as our spiritual companions. Fourth, the benefit of taking refuge is immense, as it is said in the sūtra, “If the merit we earn from

taking refuge had a form, the whole universe would be too small to contain it.” This means the merit from taking refuge is unfathomably immense. Fifth, the rules of refuge contain both general rules and specific rules which are fully explained after one receives the refuge vow.

Suffering

The explanation of the impure vision is given first in order to encourage renunciation. This relates to the Buddha’s first turning of the wheel of Dharma, known as the *Four Noble Truths*. The first of the four noble truths is the truth of suffering; the second is the truth of its cause; the third is the truth of cessation; and the fourth is the truth of the path.

In order to be free from suffering, we must know what we are suffering from. For example, when we are sick, in order to get treatment, we must first identify the disease. Without knowing the disease we cannot get proper treatment. Therefore, we must understand the first noble truth—the truth of suffering, which explains the suffering of saṃsāra.

There are three types of sufferings: 1) the suffering of suffering, 2) the suffering of change, and 3) the suffering of the conditional nature of all things. The suffering of suffering is the obvious suffering we all have, such as physical pain and mental anxiety. The animal realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the hell realm have a lot of this type of suffering. The suffering of suffering also exists in the higher realms, although we normally think that the higher realms are a mixture of suffering and happiness. But in reality, the experience of suffering in

the higher realms is merely different in degree than it is in the lower realms. We all experience the suffering of physical pain and mental anxiety.

Second is the suffering of change. Anything that is created by causes and conditions is impermanent. Anything that is impermanent is in a process of change; it is suffering if it is always changing. The entire world is changing. Outside, every year we have different seasons; inside, the young grow old, large families become small and small families become large, and so on. Phenomena are always changing.

The third kind of suffering is the conditional nature of all things. Feelings which we normally categorize as “happy” or “indifferent” exist only in relation to other feelings. But in reality there is no real happiness. Throughout saṃsāra as a whole, from top to bottom, there is no real happiness, although there are certain places with lesser rather than greater suffering. If poison is mixed with food, whether it is good food or bad food, it is harmful. Similarly, in saṃsāra as a whole, there is not a single place that is worthy of attachment.

In order to arouse renunciation thought, we need to think about the sufferings of the six realms in great detail. According to the teachings, the whole universe is divided into six realms. There are three lower realms (hell realm, hungry ghost realm, and animal realm) and three higher realms (human realm, demigod realm, and god realm). But in reality, none of these is a completely happy place worthy of attachment. In order to arouse a genuine inner urge to be free from suffering, the first preliminary practice is to concentrate on the different conditions and different levels of suffering.

Precious Human Rebirth

The second preliminary practice is to meditate on the difficulty of obtaining a precious human birth. Due to our karma and defilements, ordinary sentient beings like us have impure vision. Where did this impure vision come from? It came through our own actions.

The only way to be completely free from this realm of existence is to practice the holy Dharma. To practice the holy Dharma, we first have to attain a precious human birth. First of all, from many points of view, it is very rare to attain human birth. From the causal point of view, in order to be born as a human being, you must have very strong virtuous deeds—especially moral conduct which is supported by other good deeds such as generosity and sincere aspirations. The convergence of all these causes is very rare. When we think of the world today, how many people actually practice the spiritual path? Even many of those who appear to be practicing the Dharma are only doing so superficially. Since the cause is very rare, the result is also very rare. Therefore, from the causal point of view, it is very rare to have human birth.

Also, from a sheer numerical point of view, we assume that people exist in great numbers. But while it is very easy to count the number of people living in one house for example, it may prove impossible to count the number of insects and other small beings living in the same dwelling. Human birth is also rare in the context of nature as a whole.

Furthermore, taking into account the entire range of human life on earth in general, it is rare to be born free from the unfavorable states; or even to be born during the time when a

Buddha has come into the world and while his teachings are a living tradition and the conditions are right to practice the Dharma. And then even if we are fortunate enough to be born during that time, it is rarer still to be born with a sound mind to receive the teachings.

We must think that human life is very precious, more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. A wish-fulfilling jewel is the most precious possession you can have; with it, all of your material requirements such as food, medicine, and clothes can be fulfilled. But a wish-fulfilling jewel cannot bestow higher rebirth, self-liberation, or enlightenment. However, through this precious human body, if we work hard, not only can we achieve higher rebirth and personal liberation; even ultimate enlightenment is possible.

Therefore, we must not only intellectually understand the preciousness of a human birth, but also feel inwardly that it is very precious and rare. It is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel because through it, we can attain enlightenment. Then we will know that we have a precious thing; there is no greater loss than wasting this very precious opportunity. If we cannot utilize this precious body now, we do not know that such an opportunity will ever come again in the future. Therefore, it is very important for us to work toward enlightenment when we have all the right conditions and are free from all the unfavorable states.

Since everything is impermanent, we must understand that our precious human birth is impermanent also. The sūtras state, “The best offering to the Buddha is the contemplation of impermanence.” Thinking about impermanence will turn away attachments. It will speed up our practice and effort on

the spiritual path. It is also a great antidote for suffering. And thinking about impermanence will eventually help us to realize ultimate truth.

In this way, we must be mindful that this human existence that we now enjoy has no definite lifespan. We all know that people can die anytime: even before they are born or when they are babies, or when their children are grown, and so forth. Moreover, even if you have a certain life span to live out, there is no guarantee that you will necessarily make it, as anything could happen. It is the same as a butter lamp that can be blown out at any moment by a sudden gust of wind. Likewise, the precious life that we have right now can be affected by outer or inner obstacles even if one is young and healthy. Anything can happen, and at any moment one can die. Therefore, not only is it important to practice the Dharma, but it is very important to practice it quickly without wasting any time.

Law of Cause and Effect

The third preliminary practice is to contemplate the law of cause and effect. This is one of the unique teachings Lord Buddha gave in order to show what we must do and what practices we must follow. Everything we see and experience, including our current quality of life, has been created by our own actions. The teaching on cause and effect has two parts: the illusory vision and the karmic vision.

First, I will explain the illusory vision. The way we view the world now is grounded in dualism; we view the subject and object separately. Yet in reality neither exists. They are only

illusions, like a dream. When we are dreaming the experience seems real. But when we wake up, there is not even a trace of what we experienced in our dreams. Our life is also like a great illusory vision. When subject and object are viewed as separate, this is known as *dualistic illusory vision*. Every ordinary sentient being experiences the world we live in in terms of this dualistic illusory vision.

Second, the karmic vision consists of the different experience each sentient being has based on his or her karma. For example, some beings have more or less suffering, and so on.

The actions we perform are like shadows following us wherever we go. There are three kinds of actions: physical, verbal and mental. There are virtuous, nonvirtuous, and indifferent actions. Non-virtuous actions are those undertaken out of ignorance, desire, or hatred. There are ten non-virtuous deeds. Performing an action is like planting a seed. In due course the seed will ripen and produce results. If the root of a tree is poisonous, whatever grows on the tree, such as flowers and leaves, is also poisonous. Similarly, any actions undertaken from desire, hatred, or ignorance will lead to suffering in this life as well as in future lives.

Virtuous deeds are those that arise without the defilements; without desire and without hatred and ignorance. Virtuous actions are undertaken from loving kindness and compassion. For example, if the root of a tree is medicinal, anything that grows on that tree is also medicinal. Similarly, any virtuous deeds created without the defilements will create happiness in this life as well as in future lives.

Finally, there are actions that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous, such as walking and sitting. Since these actions

do not produce any negative results, they are better than the non-virtuous actions; but since they do not produce any positive results, they are inferior to virtuous deeds. It is important to turn indifferent deeds into positive deeds and to abstain from negative deeds.

If you wish to be free from suffering, you must abstain from negative deeds. Begin by abstaining from the cause; if you indulge in a negative cause, then you cannot expect to have happiness as the result. Therefore, abstain from even the tiniest negative deed, and try your best to practice even the smallest virtuous deeds. In the same way that an accumulation of drops of water forms a great ocean, even tiny virtuous deeds will gradually accumulate and produce a great beneficial result. Regarding indifferent actions that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous, you should change your motivation using the skillful means of following the bodhisattva's way of life. You should also try to purify negative deeds through diligent practice.

With this, I have briefly explained the impure vision, which is the first part of the teaching.

III. The Vision of Experience

The second part of the *Lam Dre* is the vision of experience, which has two parts: 1) the common vision of experience, and 2) the uncommon vision of experience.

The common vision of experience is experienced by common yogis and Mahāyāna practitioners. These practitioners apply themselves to common meditations on loving kindness,

compassion, and bodhicitta (enlightenment thought). Through this they attain the vision of experience.

In order to arouse the vision of experience, first we must practice loving kindness. To practice loving kindness we need to really understand that saṃsāra is full of suffering and that nobody wants to suffer. Everybody wants to be free from suffering, and we must work to free them from suffering.

First we aspire to gain personal liberation and freedom, and ultimately nirvāṇa, for ourselves. However, this is only an intermediate goal; if we carefully consider the situation, we can see that this is not the ultimate goal. Working for oneself alone is not the highest aspiration. For example, could you stay comfortably in a safe place if the other members of your family were in great trouble? If you are a good and kind-hearted person, you would not be happy but would rather go and try to help the other members of your family.

We believe that our present awareness is a continuum. Since our present body came from our parents' similar bodies, likewise, our awareness must have come from mind similar to what we experience now. From birth to old age, although our consciousness changes, that mental continuum remains the same. In this sense, there is no gap in the continuum—the same mind is simply taking different forms. This same example is used to prove that our mind must have existed before the formation of our physical body. Likewise, when we die, our mind will not be burned or buried, but will continue on in another form.

In this sense, an individual mind is not considered to have a beginning. From beginningless time until now we have continued in this realm of existence. We have taken birth, we have

died, and we have taken another body but the mind remains a continuum. Because we have had countless previous births, we believe that at one time or another, every sentient being has been our dear mother, father, relative, or friend. Abandoning other sentient beings in order to achieve our own salvation is not the proper goal of spiritual practice. We must continually work for the benefit of other sentient beings.

Loving Kindness and Compassion

When we begin to consider developing loving kindness, we should remember that every sentient being, even the most fearsome animal, has an instinctive capacity for loving kindness. Even fearsome lions tenderly love their cubs. We all have a certain level of loving kindness, but not a full capacity for it. So we must first cultivate kindness toward people toward whom this is easier, such as our own mother, or relatives, or friends.

We begin by cultivating the loving kindness we already have, and then work on increasing it. Next, we should try to develop loving kindness toward more difficult objects, like our enemies. We should attempt to transcend the superficial distinctions between people we see as friends, enemies, and those we treat with indifference. We should try to see that we have been closely related to all three: friends, enemies, and indifferent persons at one time or another.

By understanding our relatedness to others, and seeing that they have given us much love and kindness as our relatives and friends, we can finally develop loving kindness

for all sentient beings indiscriminately. It is possible for us to wish all sentient beings to be happy and to have the cause of happiness. In this way we must cultivate and build up loving kindness toward all.

After we develop loving kindness we must next develop compassion. Compassion is generated by focusing on a particular sentient being that is suffering, and wishing that they be free from suffering and its causes. As in the meditation on loving kindness, we start first with easier people, and then gradually build up to more difficult ones, and finally apply the meditation to all sentient beings.

Bodhicitta

On the basis of loving kindness and compassion, then create the enlightenment thought, also known as “bodhicitta.” Enlightenment thought is the resolution, “For the sake of all sentient beings, I must attain perfect enlightenment and shall undertake the bodhisattva path.” Loving kindness and compassion are very essential. But loving kindness and compassion without bodhicitta will not lead to ultimate enlightenment.

In order to be completely free from saṃsāra, one must completely cut the root of saṃsāra, which is self clinging. In reality there is no “self” to cling to. Yet due to delusion, which we call dualism, we experience defilements, and through defilements we perform negative actions which trap us in the realm of existence. We must create bodhicitta to crush self clinging, which is the source of all suffering. In order to crush self clinging, we must practice the two bodhicittas, which are

known as relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta. Relative bodhicitta can only suppress and deactivate self clinging; absolute bodhicitta will completely eradicate self clinging.

Relative bodhicitta has two parts: 1) wishing bodhicitta, and 2) entering bodhicitta. Wishing bodhicitta means having a sincere wish to attain perfect enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Entering bodhicitta means that you not only wish to attain enlightenment; in order to achieve it, you are actually doing the practice and proceeding on the path. This implies entering the path and proceeding with practice. After developing the wish to achieve enlightenment, any effort you make in order to gain enlightenment, such as study, contemplation, and meditation, is considered entering bodhicitta.

At the beginning of this practice you should see others as equal to yourself. This is an important practice because we are in the habit of believing that there is an enormous difference between ourselves and others. No matter how much we care for others, we care far more for ourselves. Self clinging is a propensity we have cultivated from beginningless time. Even when we consider another person “beloved,” typically we still care more about ourselves, and self clinging persists. To change this we must cultivate the practice of loving other beings as much as ourselves. Then gradually, as we habituate to this attitude, we become able to begin to give up our own happiness, benefit, and other good things for the sake of other beings. Then, we can begin to take others’ sufferings and the cause of their sufferings onto ourselves. If we had done this in the past, we would already be enlightened. But from beginningless time until now, we have only cared for ourselves.

We care more for ourselves so every effort we make is

for our own sake, but this just manages to achieve only more suffering. For this reason we begin to meditate on exchanging our happiness and others' suffering. First, we meditate on our dear ones and later we meditate on more difficult people, like one's enemies, and finally we meditate on all sentient beings. In this way we accumulate merit and eradicate selfish thoughts as well as the habit of self clinging.

Relative bodhicitta only suppresses self clinging, so that the defilements become inactive. In this sense, the defilements are not eradicated, but appear again in the future when the conditions are right. In order to completely eradicate the attitude of self clinging, one needs to practice absolute bodhicitta. Absolute bodhicitta is the experience of absolute reality, the true nature of all phenomena. This is not the sort of thing ordinary people generally think about.

Intelligent people try to examine and draw conclusions about questions such as, "What is the true nature of reality?" Or, "Why are we here?" This is the reason many different philosophical schools describing different views exist. Even in Buddhism we have different philosophical schools such as Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika, Vibhājyavāda, and the Mādhyamaka. Within these there are also internal divisions.

The Mādhyamaka (Middle Way) is the highest philosophical school because the Lord Buddha himself gave the prophecy that after his *mahāparinivāna*, there would be a *bhikṣu* named Nāga. He would be able to understand the true meaning of his teaching and would be able to explain the two views of the perfection of wisdom.

Based on the Buddha's prophecy, the great Nāgārjuna was born and studied and taught the Mādhyamaka view. Nāgārju-

na explained all phenomena based on the two truths: relative truth and absolute truth.

Nāgārjuna explained cause and effect and interdependent origination as relative truths. Nothing can independently exist due to the law of cause and effect; the result depends on its cause while the cause depends on its seed. Yet on the absolute level, as Nāgārjuna examined it with his very sharp logic, ultimate reality is beyond all extremes, such as existence, non-existence, both, neither, and so on.

The ultimate truth is completely beyond our relative mind's perception or description. Yet these two truths do not contradict each other. The visions we see now are all interdependent. Things do not arise from no cause, the wrong cause, or an incomplete cause. Each and every thing must have its own right and complete cause. And due to that cause, the result arises. In this way, we see things, hear them, taste them, and so forth. This is the relative vision. But in the absolute level, the same forms we see and sounds we hear, are beyond all description and beyond all extremes. Nevertheless, these two truths do not contradict each other.

Concentration Meditation (*Śamatha*)

The root of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, happiness and suffering, is the mind. It is the mind that experiences suffering. It is the mind that experiences happiness. It is the mind that causes us to be born in this realm of existence. It is the mind that attains liberation and enlightenment. Since the root of all things is the mind, by realizing the true nature of mind, then the truth of all

outer and inner phenomenon is realized. To give rise to this realization, you must practice concentration or *śamatha* and insight wisdom or *vipassanā*.

By removing obscurations of thought and remaining in the true nature of mind which is without obscuration and interference of thought, one enters a state of calmness which is known as concentration. Based on that, the practice of insight wisdom removes the curtain of duality. At present we see things in the duality of subject and object. Through the practice of insight wisdom meditation, the curtain of dualistic perception is removed and the true nature of mind is experienced.

According to the sūtras, concentration (*śamatha*) means that the mind remains in single-pointed focus without the interference of thoughts. Concentration is also known as calm abiding meditation or *śamatha* in Sanskrit. Then, insight wisdom, or *vipassanā*, allows us to see the true state of reality. In order to achieve insight wisdom, first we must practice concentration. To practice concentration, we must be free from all outer and inner obstacles. Outer obstacles are attachments to activities and so on. Inner obstacles are defilements such as desire and hatred. You should practice concentration in a place where you are completely free from all activities. In order to practice correctly, it is important to know the five faults and to apply the eight antidotes to the faults and also apply the nine methods.

The five faults are:

- 1) Laziness—you do not make the effort to practice virtuous deeds, especially meditation.
- 2) Forgetfulness—even if you try to practice, you forget the

techniques or instructions you have been given.

- 3) Sinking and scattering—even if you do not forget the instructions on how to practice, your mind may be drowsy or heavy and not fully awake, which is called sinking. Alternatively, your mind may be so agitated that your mind cannot remain single-pointed due to thoughts and distraction which is called scattering.
- 4) Incorrect application of the antidote—even though you know that your mind is veering into either sinking or scattering, you may not make the effort to apply the correct antidotes.
- 5) Over-application of the antidote—due to the over-application of antidotes, your meditation may become disturbed.

It is important to know these five faults so that you can apply the eight antidotes appropriately.

Eight Antidotes to the Five Faults

Laziness is the main fault in practicing concentration, and it has four antidotes. The first is to have a strong intention to practice meditation. The second is to exert effort in bringing your mind to the point of actual concentration. The third is to have faith that if you practice this meditation, you will achieve results. The fourth is to think that by relying on the result of calm abiding through practice of concentration, you will experience physical comfort and mental calmness.

Of these four antidotes, the second (effort) is the most important. The other antidotes which will remove the cause of

laziness are: remembering the cause of saṃsāra, the difficulty of obtaining precious human birth, and impermanence. Remembering these, you will remove laziness and bring your mind to actually do the meditation.

The antidote for the second fault, forgetfulness, is to mindfully remember the meditation techniques. When you receive the meditation instructions, carefully pay attention to them.

The third fault, mental sinking or scattering, is the main obstacle to meditation. You have to determine if your mind is sinking or scattering in order to apply the appropriate antidote.

The fourth fault is not applying the antidote. The antidote to this is to apply the appropriate antidote as soon as one's mind is scattering or sinking. The fifth fault is over-application of the antidote. For this we have to apply equanimity. It is important to maintain balance in every action and in every effort in order to fulfill our goal.

The root of all phenomena is the mind; if one realizes the true nature of mind, then one will realize all outer and inner phenomena. Therefore, it is important to understand and realize the true nature of the mind. Yet from beginningless time until now, our mind has developed strong propensities, defilements, and thoughts. Insight wisdom cannot be established when the mind is so busy. Therefore, concentration is very important. This teaching on how to recognize the five faults and apply the eight antidotes was given in order to achieve concentration.

The Nine Methods

The mind is brought to concentration using nine methods. It is difficult at first to concentrate on an internal object or visualization because the mind is constantly busy with different thoughts. So first place the mind on an outer object such as an image of a Buddha or a flower or an object.

- 1) On a table place the mind on an unmoving object. Place a solid object on a table about two feet away from the eyes. Concentrate on that object through the eyes, mind, and breath. Do not blink the eyes or move the body. When meditating, do not think about the quality of the object or its shape or color. Just place and hold the mind on the object without the interference of other thoughts.
- 2) Continually focus the mind. It is difficult for beginners to concentrate for a long period of time, so it is advisable to keep each session short and repeat the session several times.
- 3) Recognize distraction. Watch for and recognize distraction. Sometimes during meditation, the mind may become distracted, yet we do not even notice it. It is important to recognize distractions and instantly bring the mind back to the concentration object and continue the meditation.
- 4) Be mindful. Remain mindful throughout the session so that the mind does not scatter nor sink.
- 5) Tame the mind. Remember the great qualities and benefits of meditation in order to motivate yourself to do this meditation.
- 6) Pacify the mind. If an outer distraction occurs during meditation, keep placing the mind on the concentration object. Even if the distraction persists, pacify the mind and contin-

- ue to place it on the meditation object.
- 7) Eliminate thoughts. If thoughts like desire or hatred arise during meditation, place the mind back on the meditation object and eliminate those negative thoughts.
 - 8) Remain single-pointed. If the mind remains agitated despite applying the antidotes, continue to eliminate the emotions and bring the concentration back to the meditation object.
 - 9) Be persistent. When we first practice this meditation, lots of difficulties arise. But by continuing this practice every day, it will become easier. Eventually you will be able to place the mind on an object and remain in meditation without much effort. You will experience many concrete benefits, such as tranquility, calmness, peace of mind, and great physical and mental comfort.

Stages of Experience in Concentration Meditation

We have explained how to do concentration, or *samatha* meditation by knowing the five faults, applying the eight antidotes to those faults and also applying the nine methods. The first experience that arises when practicing concentration meditation is the surfacing of many thoughts, one after another. Do not be discouraged at this stage. Normally, we do not notice how many thoughts are constantly arising within our minds. Meditation allows us to realize how busy our minds are. Therefore, this stage is actually the first level of experience that your meditation is effective. It is known as the “experience of recognizing thoughts.” It spurs us to continue medita-

tion practice.

As we continue to practice, thoughts still arise but there are some gaps in between. This is the second stage of experience, which is called the “experience of thoughts resting.” In the third stage, although thoughts do arise, there will be calmness and clarity between the thoughts, and while experiencing that calmness and clarity, again thoughts will arise. In the fourth stage there is more calmness and clarity in the mind, and the intervals without any thoughts grow longer and longer, like a normally calm ocean with only an occasional wave arising. Still we continue with the practice. Finally, in the fifth stage, all thoughts in the mind cease and the mind resides single-pointedly, experiencing calm and peace, like an ocean without waves.

But resting in calm abiding is not the same as experiencing clarity. The next aim is to remain in the tranquility of single-pointed concentration while at the same time experiencing clarity, like the light of a candle unstirred by wind, completely steady and clear. When this experience is achieved, the practice is repeated without an outer object, concentrating on the clarity of awareness itself. If obstacles like scattering and sinking still arise, then continue the practice through the application of method.

If we do concentration practice in this way, gradually single-pointed concentration will be attained.

Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā*)

After one has attained the ability to dwell in total calmness

and clarity, then begin to practice insight meditation. Without insight meditation, the practice of method such as loving kindness, compassion, and morality, only suppresses but does not eradicate the faults.

In order to completely eradicate the source of the faults, which is self clinging, and to completely awake from illusion, it is necessary to cultivate wisdom. Through the combination of method (also known as skillful means) and wisdom, enlightenment can be attained. In order to fly in the sky, we need two wings. In order to cross the road, we need both eyes to see and feet to walk. Similarly, in order to attain enlightenment, we need both method and wisdom.

The main fault that traps us in the realm of existence is self clinging. At the moment, without authentic logical reasons, we cling to our present form and consciousness as our “self.” But if we carefully and logically examine this belief, we cannot find a self anywhere.

If there were self, it would have to be the name, the body, or the mind. Of course, our name is not our self because it could be given to anybody.

The body is also not the self because “the body” refers to the aggregation of many different parts such as skin, bones, muscles, organs, and so on. The mind is also not the self because it is changing moment by moment; to call the mind the self is like thinking that a colorful rope is a snake. Until we realize the colorful rope is not a snake, we feel anxiety and fear. Likewise, until we realize the self has no true existence we unavoidably cling to this realm of existence. In order to be completely free from all these illusions, we need to cut the root of saṃsāra, which is self clinging. To do this, we need

wisdom that is completely beyond ordinary thought, and wisdom that realizes selflessness.

All outer and inner things have no self. All outer objects are not real. Many teachings explain that all the phenomena we experience are an illusion. Moreover, logically, if all outer objects existed independently, then they should appear the same to everyone. Yet this is not the case. For example, for some people a certain place is a happy place, whereas for others, the same place is unhappy for them. Different people have different experiences depending on the level of their minds. This observation is too profound and deep for us to meditate on straightaway, but we can build this understanding gradually.

Ultimate reality is away from all extremes and descriptions because, as Nāgārjuna explained, everything is interdependent. Because of interdependence, everything is emptiness. Because of emptiness, everything is interdependent.

Every activity in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is possible because everything is emptiness. This view is known in the *Lam Dre* teaching as “the non-differentiation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.” This means that any object the conventional mind perceives, if it is seen analytically free from delusion, can be perceived as ultimate reality. Our ordinary minds perceive sounds, flavors, and sights merely as sounds we hear, food we taste, and things we see. However, great bodhisattvas, beings who have already achieved realization and are free from delusion, will perceive those same objects as ultimate reality.

For example, we see a cup simply as a cup, but after going through careful logical examination, contemplation, meditation, and realization, a great bodhisattva will see the same cup

as ultimate reality. Great bodhisattvas who have already attained realization see ultimate reality, whereas we of ordinary defiled mind see it as a cup or ordinary object. In actuality there are not two separate realities; it is the same cup.

We of ordinary mind have impure vision, but the great beings view the same object as ultimate reality or nirvāṇa. We of ordinary mind view the world we are experiencing as saṃsāra, while with wisdom, which is free from illusion, the same world is viewed as ultimate reality, nirvāṇa. That is the reason that there is no difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa at the ultimate level. In this way one can say that what the ordinary mind sees is conventional, or relative, truth. Relative truth is all things as we see and feel them now. And this same relative truth we see now will become ultimate truth when we have attained realization through meditation.

This ultimate reality is the vision of clarity. It is different from emptiness as viewed by the ordinary, relative mind. Appearances are something we see, while emptiness means there is nothing to see. These two appear contradictory but in reality they do not contradict. Clarity is not separate from emptiness and emptiness is not separate from clarity. Ultimate reality is within every sentient being, but we do not recognize it. Those who do not recognize it cling to the idea of a self and get caught up in the illusory vision, which is known as saṃsāra. Those who realize this ordinary world as an illusion and are awakened from it experience the pure vision which is known as nirvāṇa. The difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa lies in whether we have achieved realization or not; from the point of view of the object itself, there is neither saṃsāra to abandon nor nirvāṇa to achieve.

To realize this is to realize the non-differentiation of samsāra and nirvāṇa. But we ordinary people cannot practice this immediately, as we have a very strong propensity to cling to this world as real. For example, even on a mundane level, even though we know our bad habits will eventually yield serious consequences, they are difficult to give up. Since we have this subtle yet very strong propensity to cling to the world, it is very difficult for us to meditate straight away on emptiness, ultimate reality, or absolute bodhicitta. Instead, we have to do it gradually.

All Appearances Are Our Own Mind

The first step in training the mind to perceive ultimate reality is to establish all appearances as our own mind. There are eight examples to illustrate this point.

The first example of how all appearances are our own mind is dreams. Let us compare recent dreams, which we can clearly remember, to the ordinary life we go through. We find that there is no difference between the two. In dreams, we experience happiness and suffering, and we talk and remember what we did very clearly. But when we awaken, there is no sign of what we saw in the dream. Similarly, in this ordinary life, when all the strong propensities habituated in the consciousness ripen, combined with causes and conditions, we see things. But in reality, there is no difference between dreams and our present life.

The second example is the effect of substances. After taking certain hallucinogenic substances, we experience com-

pletely different visions than the life we normally live in. Due to the effect of the substances, we have feelings and experiences as strong as in ordinary life. The third example is illness. When we have a high fever we may see different things. The fourth example is the effect of spirits. The person under the influence of certain spirits will behave, experience, and say different things as though what he is experiencing is real. The fifth example is the effect of pressing the corner of your eyes. For some people, even without doing this, if they look in a certain way or have certain vision problems such as double vision, they also see things differently.

The sixth example is cataracts, in which people see hairs before their eyes, resulting in having a different vision of the world. If that vision were real, then everyone would see it, but since only certain people see it, then it is not real. In reality the life we are going through is the same as a dream or being under the influence of hallucinogenic substances. But due to our strong propensities, our ordinary mind sees a vast difference between the experiences.

The seventh example is the fiery ring that appears when we twirl a torch in a circle. In reality, there is really no continuous ring, but due to the visual residue, a ring appears to our eyes. If we logically analyze the ring, when the torch is in one place, it is not in the other places in the ring. But it appears everywhere at once. This shows that seeing something is not logical proof that it exists. Even in the relative level we see things that do not exist.

The eighth example is that if you turn around in circles very fast and then stop, the world also seems to turn. Remember these examples, reflect on them and then meditate to es-

establish that all appearances are visions of our own mind. Even on the mundane level, it is quite clear that the mind is the most important factor in what we see.

Mind Has No Inherent Nature

The second step is to establish all mental appearances as a magical show. This view has many different supporting examples. One example is how, by using certain substances, movements, or methods, a magician or hypnotist can make things like animals and houses appear. Although we understand these to be illusory magical shows, we experience them as reality, as real as our present life. In fact, on the ultimate level, all our mental visions are like an unreal magical show and are not real. When all the causes and conditions come together, a magical show appears. If any of the causes or conditions is missing, then it will not appear.

All appearances are a magical show that is devoid of self nature. All inner mental experience and all outer objects, everything is like a magical show, which is the non-duality of appearance and emptiness. Appearance and emptiness, although very different on the relative level, ultimately do not contradict one another. Appearance is emptiness, and emptiness is appearance. The two are not separate.

All Phenomena are Devoid of Self Nature

The third step is to establish that all phenomena are devoid of

self nature. This process has two parts.

The first step in establishing all phenomena as devoid of self nature is to establish all phenomena as interdependently originated. A result depends on its cause and a cause depends on its result. This has many examples. For instance, if you plant a tree on fertile ground with the right moisture, right temperature, and good seed, then it starts growing. But if the seed is in a dry place without the necessary temperature and soil, then it will not grow. This is a very good example of interdependent origination, because a fruit appears neither without its seed, nor from the wrong seed, nor from an incomplete seed. In order for a result to arise, you need each and every cause and condition. You need both the right causes and the complete causes.

In the same way, in the past we committed many virtuous and non-virtuous actions. These caused habituated propensities, which are like seeds planted in the fertile ground of our minds. The ripening of these seeds gave rise to the life we are going through. Until all the right causes and conditions meet together, these experiences will not arise. In other words, at this time we have the karma, the causes, and the propensities, to see the world as a human being. But when we die, this vision will cease and another completely different vision will appear. In reality, none of these experiences that we go through truly exist. But at the same time, this vision continues until we realize the reality of emptiness. All things are interdependent. Because of interdependence, all things are emptiness.

All Interdependently Originated Phenomena are Inexpressible

The next step after establishing all phenomena as devoid of self nature is to establish all interdependently originated phenomena as inexpressible. As I explained in the beginning, ultimate reality is away from all descriptions and extremes. After careful logical examination, various philosophical schools have come to different conclusions or views. One of these is the view that objects do not exist; only the mind exists, which is the Mind Only School's position. But the highest Mādhyamaka (or Middle Way) view is that the ultimate is beyond all description as either existent, non-existent, both or neither.

We experience all outer objects as mental appearances and all mental appearances as magical shows which are interdependent. You cannot describe your experiences, just as babies cannot explain why they smile. Similarly, ultimate reality can be experienced but not described.

Ordinary people see things in duality, separating the subject and object, but this is not ultimate reality. Ultimate reality is beyond this curtain of duality. After tearing away the curtain of dualistic vision, all phenomena are seen as ultimate reality, which is itself away from any description. This ultimate reality, or absolute truth, is everywhere and is the true nature of all phenomena.

Ultimate reality is also the true nature of the mind. This is also called "buddha nature" and everyone possesses it. But until we meet the right conditions we cannot realize this, and instead, we cling to a "self" and continue to suffer in this realm of existence.

Many higher tantric teachings call ultimate reality “simultaneously born primordial wisdom.” The word “simultaneous” is used here to mean that the result and the cause arise simultaneously and the result is not elsewhere than the cause. In this sense, the result is not something we seek outside ourselves, but is actually within ourselves. Because the cause and the result are simultaneously born, buddha nature is within every human being. If we make efforts, we can all attain full enlightenment.

In the relative sense, we go through different phases along the path to enlightenment. However, we must understand that there is a continuity between our ordinary cause mind and the ultimate enlightenment mind. We might consider the example of a copper container which is used to hold excrement. Used in such a way, we consider the copper dirty. But if the same copper were melted down and made into ornaments which people wear proudly and others admire, we would consider the copper beautiful. If again the ornaments were melted down and made into the image of a deity, then the same copper would become a precious object of worship and respect. The point is that the actual nature of the copper never changes. The same copper has been used as a container for filth, as an ornament, and as the statue of a deity. Similarly, the true nature of our mind is buddha nature. The true state of all phenomena is that same ultimate reality. Through practice and the application of method and wisdom, obscurations can be eliminated and realization achieved.

The common vision of experience is the result of the practice of common yogas, whereas the uncommon vision of experience arises through uncommon yoga meditation, par-

ticularly tantric practices, which require proper transmission and blessings. We ordinary sentient beings, after practice, can each become a yogi endowed with the vision of experience. After the vision of experience, when all obscurations have been gradually eliminated and inner wisdom fully dawns, then the third vision—the pure vision—is experienced: this is the ultimate attainment of enlightenment.

The buddhas have abandoned every possible fault or obscuration and through great realizations achieved the pure vision. Just as a man who has awakened from sleep no longer experiences his dreams, similarly, beings who are completely awakened from illusion no longer see the impure vision. It is the same world we reside in now, but perceived through completely pure vision, it becomes pure primordial wisdom.

This completes a brief outline of the basic teachings of the Sakya Tradition.



Questions and Advice

Question: You speak from your own culture and heritage. You speak so confidently about the loving kindness of your mother, our mothers, our family, and our friends. But in this culture there are so many who come from dysfunctional, disharmonious, and unloving family relationships. This makes it very difficult for us to hear you mention loving and nurturing people, especially in the family. Can you comment on this?

His Holiness: The teachings are given to people to eliminate suffering and obtain liberation. It is true that it is difficult to practice loving kindness and compassion, especially in this age. The pith instructions and teachings have been passed down from one guru to the next for many generations. Receiving them, even if you cannot practice all of them, can be very helpful. The Buddha's teachings are like the ocean, very

deep and wide. Whatever you can take from them, even a single spoonful, will be of great benefit. Moreover, we all need loving kindness; it is basic to our human nature. Therefore, we must try to cultivate it through following the teachings and carrying our efforts into every aspect of our lives.

Question: How can we effectively eliminate or deal with fear in our daily life?

His Holiness: The great Indian master Sāntīdeva said, “If what we fear is something we can change, then there is no need to worry about or fear it. But if it is something beyond our control that we cannot change, then there is no point in worrying about or fearing it.”

Question: How can we counteract the pride that arises in a situation where you know you are doing a good job or are good in a particular area?

His Holiness: As it is said, “On the basis of pride, no good qualities remain.” So if you wish to have good qualities, you must eliminate pride by contemplating examples of great beings who humbly serve and effectively help other beings.

Question: Can a buddha see the impure vision in addition to the pure vision?

His Holiness: There are different explanations. But according to our tradition, a buddha does not see the impure vision. As I mentioned before, a buddha is like a man who has awakened

from sleep and therefore does not see his dreams.

Question: *Your Holiness, could you please say a little about the ngakpa tradition of the Sakya School?*

His Holiness: “Ngakpa” actually means “mantradara” or “mantra practitioner.” All Tibetan Buddhists are mantradaras; all Tibetan Buddhists are ngakpas. But in the Tibetan social system, ngakpa lay practitioners are mostly hereditary lineage holders such as myself: lay practitioners from a hereditary lineage are called “mantradaras” or “ngakpas.”

Question: *Your Holiness, how do we go about finding a teacher to guide us through all these points that you talked about today and how can we know who our guru is?*

His Holiness: Finding a spiritual master is very important, for the source of all good qualities is the spiritual master. Spiritual masters should have many qualifications. But the minimum qualification should be someone who has compassion, knowledge, and wisdom: the compassion to teach disciples, the knowledge of what to teach, and the wisdom to see the nature of reality.

Question: *Are there factors that determine at what time during this or future lifetimes the fruit of a person’s virtuous actions will manifest? What are the factors?*

His Holiness: It depends on the action itself. There are certain actions whose fruit will ripen in this life. When the object

toward whom it is practiced is strong, the action is strong, and the intention is strong, then the result ripens in this very lifetime. Certain actions ripen in this life, after this lifetime, or even several lifetimes later. The law of cause and effect is such a subtle thing that no ordinary person can fully explain it.

Question: Sakya Pandita was very critical of the use of the term “mahāmudrā” in connection with the highest completion practices. Would you comment on this in connection with the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism?

His Holiness: In fact, Sakya Pandita did not say that we could not use the term “mahāmudrā.” As with any practice, not just mahāmudrā, if we do not do it correctly, we cannot achieve the result. If we do it correctly, with the right teacher, the right path, and the right method, we can achieve the result. What he said was that in order to attain enlightenment, we must follow the right practices that balance method and wisdom. Mahāmudrā is the primordial wisdom that we experience through meditation.

Question: Please explain the concept of karma and its relationship to cause and effect and merit.

His Holiness: The word karma actually means “action” or “activities”—the work that we undertake. Our life and all of the experiences we go through now are the product of our own past actions. No one else can make us suffer. No one else can make us happy. Only through the main cause, which is our own actions, will we be happy or suffer. The actions that we

have taken create the effect and the result.

Question: What is the difference between ultimate reality, or emptiness, and nothingness? And where does spontaneous primordial wisdom come from?

His Holiness: Nothingness and ultimate reality are vastly different. Nothingness is void. Ordinary people see everything as existing, and consider this life as existing. But if you say it does not exist at all, then that is the opposite extreme. Ultimate reality is away from both existing and non-existing. On the relative level, there are logical extremes of existing, non-existing, both, or neither. But ultimate reality is beyond our present relative perception, beyond any description of this and that. We can experience this but we cannot express it in words.

Question: How do you reconcile the Buddha's teachings that everyone should question what they hear and validate each point themselves with the emphasis on the importance of faith?

His Holiness: The Buddha himself said that you should examine the teachings that he gave, just as you would examine gold you consider buying to make sure it is genuine. Only when you are convinced it is genuine gold will you buy it. Similarly, the teachings of the Buddha should not be accepted through faith, but through reason. The faith created through reason is of course much more authentic. So you should examine the Buddha's teachings in relation to your own life.

Question: *Can a person born without the conditions for spiritual development decide to seek the path and create the spiritual conditions for spiritual development?*

His Holiness: The general Mahāyāna teachings describe requirements which entail certain conditions. But in the higher Vajrayāna, even those who lack the general condition can proceed. Since every sentient being possesses buddha nature, every sentient being has the potential to develop full enlightenment. Therefore, even those who lack the right conditions, with the help of spiritual masters, can at least enroll in the path.

Question: *Let us consider a person who lives in an area where there is war and consequently suffers from the war. Is it due to their karma that they were born in an area where there is war? For example, how do you explain the karma of those who suffered in World War II?*

His Holiness: Yes. The Buddha's teachings state that all lives that we go through are due to our karma. There is both individual karma and collective karma. Karma has three types of results. The first type of result is, for example, if you do a negative deed, the result is to fall down into a lower realm and experience great suffering. The second type of result is that even if you are free from the lower realms, you still suffer. This is called, "result similar to the cause." For example, by killing animals or by shortening an animal's life, you will also experience short life and sickness. The third kind of result has to do with habits. In the past, if you performed repetitive neg-

ative deeds, they become a habit. For example, if in a past life they repeatedly took life, in this life they enjoy hunting.

Question: *Is the buddhahood of a deity different from the buddhas?*

His Holiness: As I mentioned before, deities are actually the ultimate Buddha or primordial wisdom that are taking different forms in order to help beings. For example, there are peaceful deities and wrathful deities. And there are some very simple deities and some very elaborate deities, depending on the level of the practitioners' mind. There are deities to suit every level. The deities also have very special symbolic meanings.

Question: *If you concentrate on an image, what size should it be?*

His Holiness: There is no specific size, but it should be something you can easily encompass within your field of vision. If something is very huge, then you cannot see it as a whole. So it is good to use a size that is adequate for your eyes to see.

Question: *How do we practice compassion every day in an urban setting? What do we do for the homeless and beggars on the train?*

His Holiness: We must have compassion that is within our limits. We cannot do everything. We cannot help everybody. Some things are not within our power, but as much as our in-

dividual power allows, we should try to help.

Question: *Your Holiness, what is your view of freedom for spiritual practice for women?*

His Holiness: In Buddhist doctrine, there is no difference between men and women. In the vinaya as well as the bodhisattva practices, or in tantra, women can receive the highest ordination and can give the highest teachings or initiations. It is just due to social conditions that there are few women teachers. But in Tibetan history there have been many women who were very great and famous teachers. We also give the same teachings to women as to men. For example, I greatly admire my own sister. We received the same training and teachings, and did the same retreats. Today, she is also giving the same teachings. I told her she should give more as many people are happy to see women teachers.

Question: *If one considers everyday experience like a dream or illusion, how does one avoid nihilism?*

His Holiness: Nihilism as I understand it just means absence, the complete opposite extreme from existence. But what we try to achieve is a realization of ultimate reality, which is above and away from all extremes, such as existing and non-existing. To do this, first we need to establish all outer appearance as mental objects. Then we should regard all mental phenomena as a magical show. In this way, step by step, we go through the mind training.

Question: *Would you please bless us with the transmission of*

the essence of the Sakya lineage?

His Holiness: I think the best blessing is to bestow the teachings themselves, which I have just done. I have explained how to start from the basic ground, then proceed through the path up to the result, in a clear outline. So right now the best thing is to meditate together for a few moments on the teachings. That is the best way to get the transmission or blessing.

I would like to conclude this teaching by wishing you all long life, good health and especially complete success in your spiritual path. May the blessings of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha be with you now and always. Thank you.

