

A Teaching on Sachen Kunga Nyingpo's Parting from the Four Attachments

Source: Cho Trin

On this special occasion, as we celebrate the opening of Tsechen Kunchab Ling, it is very auspicious to give this teaching known as Parting from the Four Attachments. This teaching, which is from the category of teachings known as mind training, was given directly by the Bodhisattva Manjushri to the great Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo.

How to Receive the Teachings

When receiving teachings, one must first develop the right motivation because the teachings one receives and the practices one does will eventually produce a result according to one's motivation. Therefore it is very important to generate the right motivation.

To develop the right motivation think that as space has no limits, so too is the number of sentient beings without limit. Although all of them long for happiness and wish to be free of suffering, due to ignorance, the majority of them already experience suffering, and are creating the causes of future suffering. Think that therefore our main goal is to rescue all these suffering sentient beings by attaining perfect enlightenment.

The purpose of receiving this precious teaching is to attain enlightenment, and after receiving the teaching, one will very diligently follow the path. Developing this type of right motivation is very important.

Next, one should practice the right conduct. For example, it is inappropriate to sit in a disrespectful posture, such as lying down. When receiving teachings, one should sit with the body in a physically respectful posture, with the voice in silence, and the mind single-pointedly filled with great joy.

One should feel joy because it is very rare for Buddhas to appear in this universe and also it is very rare to obtain a precious human life and even more rare to have the good fortune to receive such precious teachings. Today, all of these very rare conditions are gathered together, so one should rejoice.

It is also said that when receiving teachings, one should be free from the three faults of a container. The first fault is likened to an upside-down container. In this case, no matter what is poured in, nothing remains. Similarly, one may be sitting before the teacher, but unless one is concentrating on the teaching, the mind is like an upside-down container, as nothing is able to enter it.

The second fault occurs when the container is right-side-up, but has holes in it. In this case, whatever good things are poured in the top go in but then run right out and nothing remains. This happens when one is listening to the teaching, but not mindfully trying to remember what is said, so later, one doesn't remember anything at all.

The third fault occurs when the container is right-side-up and has no holes, but contains impurities. In this case, whatever good things are poured in mix with the impure substances and are spoiled. Similarly, receiving teachings with a mind filled with wrong motivation and negative emotions is not beneficial.

Therefore one should strive to free one's mind from wrong thoughts, wrong motivation, and negative emotions.

There are also six attitudes that are wrong to have while receiving teachings. The first is pride. For example, one may be proud of being born in a higher race. While listening to the teachings, one may think, "I am from a higher race, or I am more learned than the teacher." Listening to the teachings with a proud attitude like this is like the saying, "On the bumps of pride, no amount of water will remain." Pride is the first wrong attitude.

The second wrong attitude is to search for faults in the master and the teachings instead of feeling faith and devotion. This type of attitude is wrong because it shows extreme disrespect. The third wrong attitude is lack of real enthusiasm or interest in the teachings. Although one is listening, one may be motivated primarily by curiosity, without sincere interest. The fourth is to sit in the teachings with the mind distracted by other external and internal phenomena.

The fifth wrong attitude is to listen with the mind filled with conceptual thoughts of the past, present, and future. One variation of this is to do meditation while listening to the teachings. Students must learn in the sequence of first receiving teachings, then contemplating them, and then meditating. It is not appropriate to do meditation while receiving teachings. Meditation should be done later. It is better to fill the mind with great joy and enthusiasm for this opportunity to hear the Dharma.

The sixth wrong attitude is impatience. There are two types of impatience. One may be impatient that the sessions are too long. Or one may be impatient that one cannot understand the profound meaning of the teachings. If impatience arises, think that this is a rare and wonderful opportunity to receive the teachings and try to be patient even if the sessions are long. If one is impatient because one doesn't understand the teachings, remember that receiving the teaching several times is the best remedy for any lack of understanding. By receiving more teachings, one will become able to understand them better.

In summary, one should be free of the three faults of a container and the six wrong attitudes. One should possess the right attitude, which is to see the spiritual master as a doctor; oneself as a patient; the teaching as a very effective medicine; one's defilements as a severe illness; and practice of the teachings as the therapy. The omniscient Buddha's method is flawless, and the result will surely be effective.

The act of receiving the teachings with a mind that is free of the three faults and the six wrong attitudes, and that possesses the right attitude is in itself a great practice. The main practice of the Bodhisattva's path is the six perfections. These six perfections are included in the act of rightly receiving the teachings.

The first perfection of generosity is practiced when the disciple offers the mandala and other things to the teacher and in return the teacher gives the Dharma teaching. The second perfection of morality is to abstain from wrong action while listening to the teachings. Being physically, verbally, and mentally patient while receiving the teachings is the third perfection of patience. Generating great enthusiasm and interest is the fourth perfection of endeavor. Single-pointedly concentrating on the profound meaning of the teachings is the fifth perfection of concentration. The sixth perfection is wisdom, which is gained through receiving the teachings, contemplating and meditating on them. In this way, properly receiving the teachings is in itself an excellent practice of the six perfections.

History of the Teaching

Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, also known as Lama Sakyapa, was the first of the five great founders of the Sakya Order. He is considered the lineage-holder of four great translators, of whom Bari Lotsawa Rinchen Drakpa is one.

When the great Lama Sachen Kunga Nyingpo was twelve years old, his master, Bari Lotsawa advised him, "Since you are the son of a great master, it is important that you study the scriptures. To study, you need to acquire wisdom, and in order to acquire wisdom, you should practice Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom." Saying thus, Bari Lotsawa bestowed the initiation of saffron-colored Manjushri and the related teachings.

Soon after, the young Lama Sakyapa undertook a retreat on Manjushri under the guidance of Bari Lotsawa. In the beginning, there were certain signs of obstacles which were removed through the practice of the wrathful deity Achala. After six months of retreat, Manjushri appeared in Lama Sakyapa's pure vision in the midst of offerings and rainbows and a shower of flowers. Manjushri was seated on a jeweled throne, as if it were a chair, with two legs hanging down, attended by two Bodhisattvas. At that time, Manjushri uttered this teaching which consists of just four lines, saying:

Analyzing this teaching, the young Lama Sakyapa realized that these four lines include the entire profound practice of the sutrayana.

In reality, the great Lama Sak-yapa Kunga Nyingpo was, himself, an emanation of both Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, and therefore did not need to acquire additional wisdom. However, since he was born in a human body, he followed the general process of ordinary beings' lives by appearing to study and receive these teachings.

Lama Sakyapa gave this teaching to his sons and disciples, and they gave it to their sons and disciples, and thus it has been passed down to this day. I myself received this teaching from my main guru, Dhampa Dorje Chang of Ngor Monastery. I also received this teaching from His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche.

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.

This type of teaching is known as pith instructions. The Buddha gave innumerable teachings of many different types and levels. In general, these can be classified into two kinds: vast and general teachings like sutras and commentaries that are studied over a long period of time and eventually 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. Disciples can put these teachings straight into practice.

Preliminary Teachings

This pith instruction has three sections: preliminaries; main teaching; and conclusion. Although the preliminary section is not explicitly described in the four lines of the teaching, we always begin with the preliminaries.

The preliminary section has two parts. The first part is to change from the wrong path to the right path. Not performing any virtuous practice, or performing virtuous practice in the wrong way is considered the wrong path. By changing from the wrong path to the right path one enters the path of liberation and enlightenment.

Refuge

Taking refuge is the method of changing from the wrong to the right path. Although taking refuge in the Triple Gem is common to all the Buddhist traditions, taking refuge in the Mahayana tradition has four special characteristics.

The first special characteristic is the objects in which one takes refuge. All Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. However in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the Buddha is defined as the matchless one who possesses limitless perfect qualities and is free from all faults. Buddhas are said to possess the three kayas, or bodies: the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya.

The dharmakaya is the body of reality which possesses two purities. The first purity is the Buddha nature that is possessed by every sentient being. This Buddha nature is the true nature of mind that is never stained by obscurations. Although ordinary beings possess this basic purity, it is not realized, as it is completely covered with obscurations that prevent the real nature from being seen.

Through the accumulation of merit and wisdom, Buddhas purify all forms of obscurations. This is the second purity, and allows the original, real nature of the mind to be seen. The dharmakaya is the body of reality that possesses double purity.

The second of the three bodies of a Buddha is the sambhogakaya, the body of enjoyment. Not only through the accumulation of wisdom, but also through the accumulation of great merit, all the obscurations are purified and enormous good qualities of body, voice, and mind are attained. The physical good qualities are the sambhogakaya, the body of enjoyment.

The sambhogakaya possesses five certainties. Its holy body is beyond birth and death and is adorned with the perfect major and minor marks; it always remains in the highest Buddha realm; it gives only Mahayana teachings; its disciples are only the highest Bodhisattvas; and it constantly turns the wheel of Dharma until the end of samsara.

The third of the bodies of a Buddha is the nirmanakaya, which is the emanation body. In this body, the Buddha appears out of great compassion, wherever, whenever and in whatever form is required to help sentient beings. The historical Shakyamuni Buddha was also a nirmanakaya, because even ordinary beings could see his physical body and receive teachings. Possessing these three bodies is the characteristic of Buddhas, who are our peerless guides.

The second object in which we take refuge is the Dharma, which is the Buddha's precious teaching. The word Dharma actually has many different meanings when it is used in different contexts. Here, the holy Dharma has two aspects. The first aspect is the Mahayana scriptures such as the Tripitaka. The second aspect is the realization that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have accomplished.

The third object of refuge is the Sangha, or the holy community. In the Mahayana tradition this refers to the true Sangha, who are the Bodhisattvas who have already reached the irreversible stage and practice in accordance with right behavior and understanding.

This completes the explanation of the first of the special characteristics of Mahayana refuge, which is the special characteristics of the refuge objects, the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

The second special characteristic of Mahayana refuge is the duration of refuge. Mahayana refuge is not just for a certain period of time until a temporary goal is reached, or even just until the end of this lifetime. We take refuge from the moment that we receive the refuge vow until we reach our ultimate goal of becoming a perfectly and fully enlightened Buddha.

The third special characteristic of Mahayana refuge is the person who takes refuge. One imagines not just oneself alone, but all sentient beings as taking refuge. There are three causes of taking refuge: fear of the suffering of samsara; faith in the good qualities of the Triple Gem; and compassion for sentient beings. With compassion, we realize that although all sentient beings were our very dear ones in previous lives, we no longer recognize them in this new life. Therefore, we take refuge not only for ourselves, but for all sentient beings.

The fourth special characteristic of Mahayana refuge is the purpose of taking refuge. One takes refuge not just to save oneself alone, but to save countless sentient beings as infinite as space. If you look with compassion at the situation of beings in the universe of samsara, you can see that all of them are currently in the midst of suffering, and are creating even more causes of suffering. A feeling of great compassion and concern for their suffering arises. In order to rescue them, one needs to take refuge. Although all three causes of taking refuge: fear, faith, and compassion, may be present in one's mind, in the Mahayana tradition, the main cause is compassion.

Then recite the actual refuge prayer, keeping these things in mind. Say:

I and all other sentient beings equal to the ends of space, who have previously been my mother, from this time until the essence of enlightenment is reached, take refuge in the precious Buddha who is the Guru; take refuge in the holy Dharma, the teaching and realization; take refuge in the holy Sangha, the sons of the Victorious Ones.

Recite this refuge prayer as many times as possible, very mindfully. At the conclusion of the refuge, we recite another prayer:

May the precious Triple Gem bless my mind to proceed towards the Dharma. Bless me to traverse the path of the Dharma. Bless me to dispel errors on the path. Bless me that illusory visions may appear as primordial wisdom. Bless me that non-religious thoughts may not arise for even a moment. Bless me to attain Buddhahood quickly.

This prayer includes the teachings of Parting from the Four Attachments.

The first line of the prayer says, "May the precious Triple Gem bless my mind to proceed towards the Dharma." This parallels the first line of Parting from the Four Attachments which says, "If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person."

To practice the true Dharma, you have to give up attachment to this life. This life is temporary, without essence, very fragile and impermanent, and therefore it has no meaning. When one says, "May I proceed towards the Dharma," this means toward the real, true Dharma, not just what superficially appears to be Dharma. Dharma mixed with attachment to this life is still a worldly activity. At the beginning of our path, we pray to have our minds successfully proceed toward the Dharma.

The next line, "Bless me to traverse the path of the Dharma" means that although one may have entered the Dharma path, one is not properly upon the path unless renunciation thought arises. This is parallel to the line from Parting from the Four Attachments, "If you have attachment to the world of existence, you do not have renunciation." With this, we pray that we are not only led into the Dharma path, but that we are led with the proper renunciation.

The third line, "Bless me to dispel errors on the path" parallels the line, "If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment thought." Even though you may have entered the path with proper renunciation, seeking liberation for yourself alone is still an error. Even reaching the nirvana of self liberation does not fully develop all of one's good qualities and does not completely overcome all obscurations.

The next line, "Bless me that illusory visions may appear as primordial wisdom," is parallel to the fourth line in Parting from the Four Attachments, which says, "If grasping arises, you do not have the view." Because we lack wisdom, we are caught up in illusory visions. When wisdom arises, it transforms these illusory visions into primordial wisdom. In this way, we pray to be able to successfully accomplish shamatha and vipassana, which are also known as calm abiding and insight wisdom.

"Bless me that non-religious thoughts may not arise for even a moment," refers to all of the practices together. Because non-religious thoughts lead to lower realms and samsara, we pray that they may never arise for even a single moment.

"Bless me to attain Buddhahood quickly." The Mahayana path is the right practice, the correct practice, and the path of all the past, present, and future Buddhas. Once one enters it, one can quickly achieve Buddhahood. This concludes the first part of the preliminary section of the teaching concerning how to change from the wrong path to the right path.

Creation of Enlightenment Mind

The second part of the preliminary section of the teaching concerns how to switch from the lower path to the higher path by creating enlightenment mind.

Buddhists believe in rebirth. This can be logically understood in the following way. We all have both a physical body and a mind. We can see and touch the physical body and describe its size, color, and shape. However, the mind is very different. We cannot see or touch it or describe its color and shape. Because the body and mind are so very different, the mind cannot arise from a physical body, from elements or from ordinary matter. It must arise from a continuity similar to itself.

We can describe where our physical bodies come from, how they are maintained, and how they will eventually be disposed of. But the mind cannot be disposed of in the way that we dispose of our physical body.

The mind continues and therefore it must come from the same type of continuity as itself. We can prove that our present mind must be a continuity that reaches back before our present body or life. If we go back from this life to the previous life, to the life before that and so on, there is no end. There is no original starting point. This is what is meant by "since beginningless time." Each person's mind has continued since beginningless time.

From beginningless time until now, we have been caught up in this cycle of existence. Since we have been here throughout beginningless time, there is not a single place where our body has not been born. There is not a single being who has not at one time been our very dear mother, father, and relatives.

Due to the changes that come with taking a new life, we no longer recognize each other. We see some of these dear ones as our enemies, some as our relatives, and some as neutral beings toward whom we are indifferent. But in reality, every single sentient being at one time or another has been our very dear relative, not only once but countless times. Each time, they gave us so much love, and cared for and benefited us just as our present dear ones have done.

Therefore, it is not right to seek liberation or enlightenment only for ourselves alone, ignoring the welfare of all these very dear mother sentient beings. We must care for them. The way to do this is to rescue them from the suffering of samsara, and lead them to the path of happiness.

However, because we are ordinary people, we do not have either the freedom or the ability to rescue them. Even powerful worldly deities, and even those who have already reached the nirvana of self liberation do not have the power to save all sentient beings. Only fully enlightened Buddhas can save all sentient beings. Therefore, for the benefit of all sentient beings, we wish to attain perfect enlightenment. This thought is known as enlightenment thought or enlightenment mind.

Enlightenment mind has two aspects: wishing enlightenment mind, and entering enlightenment mind. The wish to attain perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings is known as wishing enlightenment mind. The resolve to practice the vast and profound bodhisattva path to reach that goal is known as entering enlightenment mind.

The actual recitation combines refuge and the creation of enlightenment mind with a dedication prayer. The prayer is:

In the Buddha, Dharma, and excellent Sangha, I take refuge until enlightenment is reached. Through deeds of giving and the like, may I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Giving and the like refers to the six perfections or paramitas, which are generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom. Another recitation is:

I must attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. For that purpose I will diligently accomplish virtuous deeds of body, voice and mind.

In other words, the goal of activity of body, voice, or mind, is to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Main Teaching: Non-Attachment to This Life

To practice this meditation, sit in a conducive place where there are no external disturbances. Try also to avoid internal disturbances such as conceptual thoughts. Sit cross-legged and after reciting the refuge and 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 without attachment to this life. Practicing Dharma with attachment to this life is not real Dharma; it is still a worldly activity. Just like a mirage that appears to be water but does not quench one's thirst, such activity is apparently Dharma but does not liberate one 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 your 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. This is not correct Dharma practice.

The great Indian master Vasu-bandhu said, Upon a base of sound moral conduct, hear, contemplate, and thoroughly apply oneself to meditation.

To be pure Dharma, whatever practice you do should not be mixed with attachment to this life. This is because this life is very temporary. 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 goal of the Dharma path has many different levels. One should at least practice for a purpose beyond this life; in other words, at least for the next life.

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, and the importance of diligently practicing Dharma without any delay because of impermanence.

Not only humans, but every sentient being possesses Buddha nature. The true nature of every sentient being's mind is unstained by obscurations. Any sentient being that meets with the right methods has the opportunity to become a fully enlightened Buddha. However, among the six types of sentient beings, human beings have the best chance to accomplish Buddhahood. Therefore this human life endowed with the eighteen prerequisites is very precious and difficult to find. As the great Indian master Shantideva said in the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life:

Leisure and endowment are extremely difficult to find, and accomplish the purpose of beings. If this benefit is not accomplished, how will they come about again?

First we reflect on the difficulty of attaining this precious human birth. The prerequisites of precious human birth are difficult to attain from many points of view based on cause, number, examples and nature.

Consider the difficulty of attaining precious human birth based on its cause. The cause of a precious human life endowed with the prerequisites is the practice of virtuous deeds. In particular, the practice of virtue means abandoning non-virtuous deeds and maintaining pure moral conduct. But when we look about samsara, most sentient beings are not engaged in virtuous deeds. The majority are indulging in non-virtue and many who appear to be engaged in virtuous deeds are engaged only in a superficial way.

Carefully reflect on one's own actions from the morning until night. How many negative thoughts arise? How many virtuous thoughts arise? Most people, if they examine their actions carefully and honestly, will notice that there are far more non-virtuous thoughts and deeds than virtuous ones. Thus we realize

that we only rarely accumulate pure virtue, which is the cause of obtaining a precious human birth endowed with the eighteen prerequisites. If the cause is only rarely accumulated, obviously the result of precious human rebirth will very rarely be attained.

Next, consider the difficulty of attaining precious human birth from the perspective of number. Although there are many human beings, humans are few in comparison to other types of beings. Although we talk about the population explosion, it is still possible to count the number of people in each country. However, it is impossible to count the number of insects even in a small space, such as a house. The number of humans is extremely small in proportion to all the other types of living beings. However, not every human has a precious human life endowed with all the eighteen prerequisites, which is even more rare than just human birth.

We can also consider the difficulty of attaining precious human birth based on examples. There are many different examples given in the scriptures. One example compares the process of beings going to their next birth with a handful of grain or peas thrown against a vertical wall. When the kernels hit the wall, virtually all fall down to the ground, which is like those beings who take rebirth in the lower realms. The chance of a pea sticking to the wall is as rare as attaining a precious human birth endowed with the eighteen prerequisites.

The Eighteen Prerequisites for Precious Human Birth

Next, we reflect on the difficulty of attaining precious human birth from the point of view of its own nature. The nature of a human life endowed with the eighteen prerequisites is characterized by eight freedoms and ten endowments.

The eight freedoms mean that one is free from rebirth in eight unfavorable states. Four of these are non-human states, and four are human states. The four non-human states are birth as a hell being, hungry ghost, animal or long-lived god.

Beings born in the hell realms suffer greatly and have no opportunity to hear or practice Dharma. The situation is the same in the hungry ghost realm, where there is great suffering from hunger and thirst. The minds of beings in the animal realms are characterized by ignorance with no chance of understanding the Dharma.

The fourth unfavorable state is rebirth as a long-lived god. There is a part of the form realm, or rupa-dhatu, where only long-lived gods dwell. Other than birth and death, all of their mental activities have ceased and they abide in a very high level of worldly meditation. In such a state there is no opportunity to practice Dharma. These are the four unfavorable non-human births, where it is not possible to practice the Dharma.

Within the human realm, there are four unfavorable states. The first is birth among barbarians, who have no opportunity to even hear the word "Dharma." Second is among people who hold wrong beliefs, such as those who may have heard the Dharma but do not accept its core beliefs, such as the law of karma, rebirth, and the like.

The third unfavorable human state is birth in a world or time where a Buddha has not appeared, so there is no Dharma to practice. Such a period is known as a "dark eon." A time during which a Buddha has appeared is a "light eon." There are far more dark eons than light eons.

The fourth unfavorable human state is birth as a person who is mentally or physically incapacitated so that even if one has an opportunity to receive the teachings, one is unable to perceive or comprehend them. These are the four unfavorable states of birth within the human realm.

There are ten endowments which are necessary for one's life to be considered a precious human birth. Five of these are acquired by oneself, and five are acquired from others. The five endowments acquired by oneself are: birth as a human, birth in a central realm, having sound sense organs, having not committed any heinous crimes, and having sincere faith in the Buddha's teachings.

Birth as a human is the first endowment. The second is birth in a central realm. A realm is said to be central because it is geographically central, such as India, particularly Bodhgaya, where all the past, present, and future Buddhas did and will accomplish enlightenment; or it is said to be central with respect to the Dharma because all four types of followers reside there: monks, nuns, male and female lay practitioners.

The third endowment is to be born with sound sense organs, so that one can receive Dharma teachings, analyze, and meditate on them. The fourth is not to have committed any of the five heinous crimes. Purification of the five heinous crimes is difficult through regular religious practices. The fifth endowment is sincere belief in the Buddha's teaching, particularly in the vinaya teachings on moral discipline, which are the root of the teachings. These are the five endowments that are acquired by oneself.

The five endowments that are acquired from others are: birth at a time during which a Buddha has come into this world; the Buddha has bestowed the teachings; the teachings continue to be upheld as a living tradition; the followers are practicing; and sponsors are supporting the Dharma.

Concerning the first of these endowments acquired from others, as I explained, there are far more dark eons than light eons. During the first part of a light eon, peoples' lifespans increase, and during this period, Buddhas do not appear. They appear only during the latter part of the eon during the period of decreasing lifespans. Therefore, it is very rare for a Buddha to appear in the world.

The second endowment is that having appeared, a Buddha has bestowed the teachings. Buddhas do not turn the wheel of Dharma except for beings that are worthy and can comprehend the profound teachings. Third, not only did a Buddha bestow the teachings, but the teachings continue to be upheld as a living tradition. Many Buddhas have appeared in this universe, but after a certain period of time, beings' memory of their teachings ends, and there are long gaps before another Buddha appears.

The fourth endowment is that there are followers who can demonstrate a right example of how to practice the Dharma path. The fifth is that there are generous sponsors who support the Dharma through right livelihood unmixed with impure activities.

This is a summary of the ten endowments; five gained by oneself, and five received from others. Clearly, it is extremely difficult to simultaneously attain all of these eighteen prerequisites for a precious human birth, including freedom from the eight unfavorable states and the possession of the ten endowments.

Such a precious human birth is not only very rare, it is also very precious, more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. Supplicating a wish-fulfilling jewel can bestow material needs, but it cannot bestow higher rebirth, or personal liberation, or perfect enlightenment. However, by using our precious human

life as a vehicle, we can reach higher rebirth; we can reach personal liberation; and we can even reach perfect enlightenment, Buddhahood. This is why precious human birth is said to be even more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. Realizing that it is so precious and rare, we must not remain idle. We must diligently practice the holy Dharma.

You will recall that the first line of Parting from the Four Attachments is, "If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person." As we have seen, it directly explains the right and wrong way to practice Dharma. Indirectly, it points to the difficulty of obtaining a precious human birth and the importance of diligently practicing Dharma without any delay.

Impermanence

Reflection on impermanence and death helps us realize why we must practice the Dharma without delay. Everything that arises from causes and conditions is impermanent. This is particularly true of human life.

First, contemplate the certainty of death. It is one hundred percent certain that every being that is born in this universe will die. No one doubts that there was even a single being that was born but did not already, or will not eventually die. Even noble Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who in reality are beyond birth and death, manifest passing into mahaparinirvana in the eyes of common people. Among ordinary people, whose birth is driven by karma and defilements, there is not a single person who was born but did not die.

It is said:

All compounded things disintegrate.

The end of accumulation is exhaustion.

The end of gathering is separation.

The end of ascent to the heights is descent to the depths, and

The end of birth is death.

Second, we contemplate the uncertainty of the time of death. Nobody can tell how long he will live. We never know when death will occur. Looking around us, many beings die even before they are born, in the womb. Some die when they are born. Some die in infancy, and so on. No one knows for sure when he will die.

Although there are many external and internal conditions that shorten life, there are very few conditions that prolong life. Even those methods that usually prolong life, such as food and medicine, can also become the cause of death.

No one has a definite, fixed life-span. Even supporting conditions such as youth, health, privilege, wealth, comfortable surroundings and the like do not guarantee that one will live long. We all know healthy people who pass away suddenly before the chronically ill pass away; young people who die before the aged; wealthy people with every facility and opportunity who die before the destitute. Nothing can guarantee that one will live for any certain duration of time.

Third, contemplate that only the Dharma can benefit us at the time of death. All worldly wealth, power, fame, or knowledge is of no use in eluding death. At the time of death, the holy Dharma is the only thing upon which we can rely. We must practice diligently while we are still alive and have the benefits of relative youth and health. By devoting ourselves to the path of Dharma now, even if we cannot accomplish concrete results, at least we will not feel regret at the time of death.

By practicing the Dharma, we can have confidence that at least we will be born in a higher realm. Superior Dharma practitioners pass away with full confidence, as if they are returning to their own home. Middling practitioners face their death without hesitation. Lesser practitioners at least pass away without regretting that they have wasted their opportunity to practice the Dharma. Thinking of the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time of death, we must practice the Dharma immediately without delay.

This concludes the teaching on the first line of Parting from the Four Attachments which is, "If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person."

Today's teaching focuses on the second line: "If you have attachment to the world of existence, you do not have renunciation." This means that if one is attached to the three realms (the desire, form, and formless realms), then Dharma practice does not lead one on the path 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, one's mental consciousness will not disappear; it will continue from life to life. Indulgence in non-virtue will cause one to fall into the lower realms where the suffering is immense. From fear of the suffering of the lower realms, one prays to always be reborn in the higher realms. For that to occur, one must practice virtuous deeds.

It could also be said that the first line explains what is known as the "small person's path," because 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 realm.

However, the second line explains that not only are the lower realms characterized by great suffering, even in the higher realms there is no real happiness; there is nothing worthy of attachment. Therefore, one should develop renunciation thought, which is the thought to completely renounce the entirety of samsara. To develop renunciation thought, one must understand that all of samsara is suffering. When one realizes this, real renunciation thought arises, along with the heartfelt wish to renounce the entirety of samsara and seek liberation.

Thus, today's teaching covers two main subjects: the faults of samsara which produce renunciation thought, and the law of karma, or cause and effect, which is the reason that our own actions bind us within samsara.

The Faults of Samsara

The sutras state, "The desire realm has faults; likewise the form realm has faults; also the formless realm has faults. Only nirvana is faultless." If one wonders what kinds of faults or suffering are found in

samsara, there are generally three types: the suffering of suffering; the suffering of change; and the suffering of the conditional nature of all phenomena.

The Suffering of Suffering

The first type of suffering is the suffering of suffering. This is that type of suffering that everyone normally considers to be suffering, such as physical pain and mental anxiety. Regarding this type of suffering the sutras state, "Hell beings experience the fires of hell; hungry ghosts experience hunger and thirst; animals experience being devoured by one another; humans experience short lives; and gods experience shamelessness. There is never any happiness upon the needle point of existence."

The suffering of suffering is primarily experienced in the three lower realms: the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm.

The Hell Realm: Cold Hells

There are three types of hell realms: cold hells; hot hells; and neighboring and semi-hells. Among the cold hells, there are eight types. The first cold hell is known as Blister Hell. Due to the power of their negative karma, hell beings are born miraculously, without developing in a womb, into the Blister Hell. The sky is completely dark; there is no sun, and not even the light of a single star. Surrounded by snowy mountains covered with ice, stung by cold wind blowing from every direction, the hell being has not even a patch of cloth to protect himself from the cold. As the cold is so severe, the skin of his entire body naturally blisters, so it is called Blister Hell. This suffering is not short, as the lifespan of a being in this first hell realm is measured in the following way. Imagine a container filled with 1,600 kilograms of sesame seeds, from which one seed is removed every hundred years. The lifespan of a being in Blister Hell is equal to the length of time it takes to completely empty the container, so beings must dwell there for that great length of time.

The second cold hell is called Bursting Blister Hell. The place and the nature of suffering are similar to Blister Hell, but twenty times colder. As a result, the hell beings' blisters burst and water, pus, and blood leak from their bodies. The span of life in this realm is also twenty times longer than that in the previous one. The third cold hell is called "Brrr" Hell because the cold is so severe that one cannot speak, but can only make the sound "Brrr. The fourth cold hell is colder still so that the voice does not work at all, and there is only the faint sound of exhaling air. In the fifth cold hell, the cold is so severe that the entire body is frozen. Because one's teeth clench together it is called Clenched Teeth Hell. The sixth hell is far colder. One's skin turns blue and cracks into eight parts, which causes the body to resemble an utpala flower. Therefore, it is called Cracked Like an Utpala Flower Hell. In the seventh cold hell, one's skin is blue. Strong gusts of wind cause the blue skin to crack open and the flesh underneath to crack further and turn red. Therefore, this realm is called Cracked Like a Lotus Hell. The eighth cold hell is yet even colder. One's body is completely frozen inside and out, so it becomes like a stone. Then it cracks into bits, and even the internal organs crack into pieces. As one's cracked body resembles a large lotus flower, it is known as Large Lotus Flower Hell.

Reflect on these realms, their sufferings, nature, and lifespan. Realize that there is no guarantee that one will not be born into such a place. The cause of these sufferings is performing non-virtuous deeds in general, and particularly performing actions that cause other sentient beings and members of the sangha to experience suffering from cold. As we have already committed many non-virtuous deeds,

especially deeds performed in anger, there is no guarantee that we will not be reborn into such a place. That is why we must practice the holy Dharma now that we have been born as human beings with all of the necessary conditions.

The Hell Realm: Hot Hells

In addition to the eight cold hells, there are eight hot hells. The first is called Reviving Hell. There, due to the power of karma, one is miraculously born in an infantile body on a ground made of burning iron. Due to strong ego-clinging, whatever objects one picks up turn into weapons; any being one perceives is seen as an enemy; and one's mind is filled with anger. The guardians of hell chop one's body into pieces and one collapses into unconsciousness. Then from the sky, a cool wind blows and the sound "revive" is heard. One regains consciousness, and the same process is repeated over and over. This is the first of the hot hells.

The second hot hell is called Black Line Hell. The guardians of that realm draw lines upon one's body just as carpenters mark a piece of wood, then cut it into many pieces. The third hot hell is called Crushing Hell. In this realm one is born between burning mountains shaped like the heads of the animals one has slaughtered. One suffers greatly as one's body is crushed between the burning iron mountains.

In the fourth hot hell, one is born upon burning iron ground. Chased by hell guardians, one runs into a nearby house hoping to escape. Upon entering the house, its doors close and lock so that there is no escape and it becomes a house of burning iron. As one is burned by the fire, one suffers greatly and cries out, so it is called Crying Hell.

The fifth hot hell is called Great Crying Hell. It is similar to Crying Hell, except that instead of being trapped inside a single house, one is trapped inside two houses, one inside the other. If escape from the inner house was somehow possible, still there is no escape from the outer one. Therefore, the mental anguish is doubled, which is why it is called Greatly Crying Hell. The sixth hell is known as Hot Hell. The guardians of this realm seize one and thrust a burning spear from the anus up to the crown of the head. The internal organs are completely burned by the blazing iron spear and one suffers greatly.

The seventh is Great Hot Hell. Instead of a single-pointed spear, a three-pronged trident is thrust into the anus and the prongs pierce the crown of the head and the right and left shoulders. Flames and smoke pour from the mouth and ears, and one suffers terribly. The eighth hot hell is called Unceasing Hell. There, beings burn inside an enormous iron stove, indistinguishable from the flames. Aside from their cries, there is no sign that any beings are there. The suffering in this realm is the worst in samsara; there is no suffering greater than this.

The life spans of beings in the first six hot hells are related to the life spans of the gods in the six levels of the gods realm. As described in the Abidharma Kosha, fifty human years is equivalent to one day of life in the lowest god realm, which is called Caturmaraja. Counting fifty human years as one day, those gods live for five hundred of their own years. This entire five hundred year period is just one day in Reviving Hell. Calculating thus, hell beings live for five hundred of their own years. Similarly, in the next higher god realm known as Thirty-Three, one hundred human years is equal to one day, and their life spans are one thousand of their own years long. Continuing thus, based on the spans of life in each of the six god realms, the spans of life in each of the six hell realms increase in an almost unimaginable way. In the two

lowest hells, Great Hot Hell and Unceasing Hell, life lasts for half an intermediate eon, and a full intermediate eon respectively.

The Hell Realm: Neighboring and Semi-Hells

There are four types of neighboring hells. The first is called Fire Trench Hell. It is located at the perimeter of all of the other hells. In that hell, one's limbs are burned whenever they touch the ground. When one lifts the right foot, it is healed, while the left foot is burned. Likewise, when one lifts the left foot it is healed, while the right one is burned.

The second neighboring hell is called Mud of Putrid Corpses Hell. The ground there is composed of impure things like rotting corpses and is so foul that ordinary beings would die merely from the odor. However, due to the karma of the beings born there, they do not die. Within the mud are many worms with iron lips that eat into one's limbs and bore right down to the bones.

The third neighboring hell is called Path of Blades Hell, and it is divided into many sectors. Having crossed Mud of Putrid Corpses Hell, one enters a plain of sharp, pointed knife blades. Walking there, the flesh and bones of the feet are cut into pieces, causing great suffering. Then one enters a forest of trees with sword-like branches and leaves. Having previously suffered greatly from the heat, one enters the forest seeking relief, but instead the leaves cut the body into many pieces.

Next one sees a mountain. While attempting to climb it one's body is pierced by sharp, pointed iron spears. With great difficulty one finally reaches the summit, but there many fearsome birds such as ravens and kites with iron beaks peck one's eyes and mouth and eat one's brain. Hearing the voices of relatives, one tries to go back down the mountain to meet them, but in doing so again iron spears pierce the body. Finally one reaches the base, but instead of meeting relatives, iron jackals, dogs, and wolves eat one's limbs and tear the body into many pieces. Also in this hell, if one has lied and cheated others through non-virtuous words, one's tongue is stretched out over the burning iron ground, staked down by iron spikes, and the hell guardians plow the tongue with sharp instruments. Thus one suffers greatly.

The fourth neighboring hell is called Unfordable River of Hot Ash Hell. Having suffered greatly on the burning iron ground, and crossed the plain of blades, one sees a river in the distance and struggles to go there. When one finally arrives and enters the river, the water turns into hot ashes. One's body is completely burned. When one tries to escape, the river is surrounded by hell guardians, who beat one back, and so one suffers.

In addition to the main hells and neighboring hells, there are also semi-hells with many different kinds of suffering. Because they are similar to the hell realms, they are called semi-hells. Some of these hells are actually located within the human realms. One example is animals that are boiled in hot water. There are many other types as well.

One must reflect on the suffering in these hell realms. These are not just stories; they are described in very authentic teachings given by the Buddha himself, as well as in many commentaries that describe in detail the sufferings of the hell realms, the conditions there, and the duration of lives there. One must reflect on them and make a very strong commitment to be free from such suffering through the practice of the holy Dharma.

The Hungry Ghost Realm

The second lower realm is called the Hungry Ghost Realm. Within that realm there are generally three types of hungry ghosts: those suffering from external obscurations; those suffering from internal obscurations; and those suffering from the obscuration of obscurations.

One is born in the realm of hungry ghosts due to indulging in non-virtuous deeds motivated by stinginess or avarice. It is a deserted and depressing place, and just by seeing it, one feels very sad. Lacking even a single grain of food or drop of water, one suffers greatly from hunger and thirst for a long period of time. Sometimes hungry ghosts see in the distance a mountain of rice and a river and try to run there out of great hunger. When they arrive, however, they find white rocks instead of rice and blue slate or nothing at all instead of water. As their bodies are very weak and skeletal, they endure great difficulty in running to the mirage, and when they realize that there is no food there at all, they experience even greater suffering. These are the sufferings of hungry ghosts with external obscurations.

The second type of hungry ghost is those with internal obscurations. These beings occasionally find a little bit of filthy food, such as mucus or pus. Out of great hunger they try to eat it, but it cannot fit into their mouths which are as tiny as the eye of a needle. When some filth finally enters, their mouths tear and bleed, yet still the food sticks in their throats, which are as thin as the hair of a horse's tail. Eventually passing through their throats into their huge stomachs, the bit of filth disappears, and instead of satisfying their hunger, it makes them even hungrier.

The third type of hungry ghost suffers from the obscuration of obscurations. They search everywhere for food, but instead of finding it they are chased by the overseers of the hungry ghost realm who beat them and cause them to suffer. Sometimes they may find a little bit of filth such as mucus, but it is very difficult for them to swallow it. If they manage to swallow a little bit, when it reaches their stomachs it becomes fire; instead of satisfying their hunger, it burns the inside of their bodies and they suffer. Hungry ghosts suffer in such ways and cannot escape until their negative karma is exhausted. We must reflect on this and try to resolve to practice Dharma so that we will not be born into that realm.

The Animal Realm

The third lower realm is the Animal Realm. Generally, there are two main types of animals: those that dwell within the ocean, and those that are scattered about on land.

For those animals that dwell in the ocean, life is very difficult. Wherever the ocean's waves take them, they must go. Thus, their dwelling place and companions are constantly changing. Some areas are in such complete darkness that the animals cannot even see their own bodies. Wherever they go, they are always afraid of being eaten. Sometimes many small ones eat a single large one; sometimes a single large one eats many small ones. Also, human beings catch and slaughter them. Because these animals are always afraid of being eaten, they must constantly be alert and never have a single moment of relaxation.

Among those animals that are scattered about on land, there are two types: those that belong to or depend upon human beings, and those that are undomesticated. Those that belong to human beings must pull heavy carts, plow fields, and submit to milking. They are tied with iron chains and beaten with sticks and hooks. They are forced to perform many types of hard work. At the end of their lives, when they are old, instead of being retired they are killed for their flesh and bones.

Those animals that are scattered about on land but are undomesticated must always be alert, for they are constantly hunted by human beings and other animals. Chased by hunters' dogs, they try to run away but fall down and are killed for their flesh, skin, bones, or horns.

All types of animals live with complete ignorance, just as if a huge rock was placed over their heads, and have no notion of what is right and what is wrong. In addition, animals also endure many other types of suffering.

The Suffering of Change

The second type of suffering is the suffering of change. The suffering of change includes those feelings that we normally consider to be pleasure. When compared to the suffering of the lower realms they do seem pleasurable, but in reality they are another kind of suffering. The suffering of change is mainly found in the higher realms, particularly in the gods realm.

The Gods Realm

Due to their karma, beings are born into the gods realm with beautiful bodies. They live in luxurious places with fine clothes and limitless enjoyments. But this is not permanent. Although the gods have very long lives, they are absorbed in enjoyments, so their lives go very fast. Suddenly, the signs of death appear. Their flower garlands wilt, their bodies lose their radiant beauty, and for the first time they appear dirty and their clothes are sweaty. They realize that they will soon have to face death, and through their contaminated clairvoyance they also foresee where they will be reborn. Having spent their entire lives in enjoyment, they have neglected serious Dharma practice. Therefore, they usually fall into the lower realms where there is an unimaginable amount of physical suffering. Foreseeing this, they experience enormous mental suffering—even greater than the physical suffering of the hell realms.

Gods in the higher realms such as the form realm and formless realm do not have much physical suffering. However, no matter how high a bird flies in the sky, it must eventually land on the ground. In the same way, although these gods have reached a very high level of worldly meditation, the power of their meditation is eventually exhausted, and because they did not accomplish liberation they fall down again into the lower realms. However high one goes in samsara, one cannot remain there permanently, and so one will inevitably fall down again. Therefore, in the entirety of samsara—not only in the lower realms, but also on the highest peaks of samsara there is nothing worthy of attachment.

The Human Realm

Among human beings, there is no one who is free from the four major sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In addition to these there are many other kinds of suffering, such as not being able to fulfill one's wishes, fear of being separated from one's dear ones, fear of meeting one's enemies, and so on.

The Demi-Gods Realm

The demi-gods are always competing with the gods. They engage them on the battlefield, yet due to their inferior merit, they are always defeated. All of the males are killed on the battlefield, and seeing this, all of the females suffer greatly.

The Suffering of the Conditional Nature of All Phenomena

The third type of suffering, the suffering of the conditional nature of all phenomena, is feelings usually associated with indifference; they are seemingly neither pleasurable nor painful. For example, wherever you go, with whomever you associate, whatever activities you engage in, there is no satisfaction. There is always something to complain about. This shows that our very existence in samsara is suffering.

In brief, as long as one remains within these six realms of existence, there is no freedom from suffering. Just as the nature of fire is hot whether the fire is small or large, so similarly the nature of samsara is suffering. Therefore, make a very serious resolve to practice the pure Dharma so that one will be freed not only from the suffering of the lower realms, but from the entirety of samsara.

The Law of Karma

Next one should reflect on the law of karma, or cause and effect. The reason we are caught up in samsara is that we have indulged in non-virtuous deeds. To free ourselves from suffering, we must abandon the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering is non-virtuous deeds. Therefore, we must abandon non-virtuous deeds and try to practice virtuous deeds. The next section explains non-virtuous deeds, virtuous deeds, and neutral deeds.

Non-virtuous Deeds and their Results

What are non-virtuous deeds? Any actions that are caused by negative emotions or defilements are called non-virtuous deeds. We will identify non-virtuous deeds and then we will consider the types of suffering resulting from indulging in these deeds and how to abandon them.

There are ten non-virtuous deeds. The first is killing, whether from anger, desire, or ignorance. Killing one's enemy is an example of killing out of anger. Killing animals for the sake of flesh or skin is an example of killing out of desire. Small children or adults killing animals for pleasure while hunting or in sport, is an example of killing out of ignorance. In any case, whether the main cause is desire, anger, or ignorance, killing any living being from a tiny insect up to a god or human being, through any of the various methods such as weapons or poison, or even requesting another to do the killing, is the number one non-virtuous deed.

The second is stealing. This includes stealing very insignificant things up to very precious things, whether forcefully or quietly, through cheating or by any other method. Stealing is the act of trying to gain another's possessions for oneself.

The third is sexual misconduct. This means to engage in any kind of sexual activity with someone other than one's legal partner. These first three are non-virtuous deeds committed by the body. The next four are committed by the voice.

The fourth non-virtuous deed is lying. To tell another something that is not true for the purpose of deception is lying. The fifth is calumny which means to speak words, whether they are false or true, that create disharmony between individuals or groups.

The sixth is malicious speech. This is using very sharp words, out of anger or another negative emotion, that cause the listener to feel pain just by hearing them. The seventh is idle talk or irrelevant speech. This is to talk about subjects that are not beneficial but instead increase defilements, such as desire,

anger and jealousy. These are the four non-virtues that are committed through speech. The next three are committed by the mind.

The eighth non-virtuous deed is covetousness. Covetousness occurs when upon seeing the wealth or power of another, desire arises in one's mind to obtain that property or power for oneself. The ninth is ill will or malicious thoughts. Ill will happens when due to hatred, one wishes someone else to experience suffering or die. The tenth non-virtuous deed is wrong view. This means not believing in the law of karma, rebirth or the authentic teachings due to ignorance.

Consider the temporary and ultimate results of indulging in these non-virtuous deeds. The temporary result is similar to the action that was performed. For example, one who slaughters animals or kills human beings will have a very short life. By creating pain in another's body, one will have a very unhealthy life; by stealing the wealth of others one will experience poverty; by engaging in sexual misconduct one will experience very unhappy marriages.

By engaging in any of these non-virtuous deeds, one will experience a result that is similar to the cause. In this life one will have such undesirable experiences and in the next life one will experience a result based on the amount of non-virtue that was performed, as well as the defilement that was the motivation. For example, killing someone out of anger has a very strong result, so someone who performs such an act will most likely fall into the hell realms. If one slaughters animals or other beings out of desire, such as desire for their wealth, then one will most likely fall into the hungry ghost realm. One who slaughters animals or other beings out of ignorance, such as for fun or enjoyment, will most likely fall into the animal realm.

Carefully consider how to abandon these non-virtuous deeds. By indulging in non-virtuous deeds all one achieves is suffering in this life and the cause of suffering in the lower realms in future lives. In this way, indulging in non-virtuous deeds is the greatest harm that one can inflict upon oneself, so with a very strong will, resolve to abandon them. Then having made this resolution, abstain from non-virtuous deeds.

Virtuous Deeds and their Results

Next consider virtuous deeds. What are virtuous deeds? Virtuous deeds are the opposite of the ten non-virtuous deeds. They are abstaining from killing, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct, etc. These ten acts, when performed without the influence of the defilements, are virtuous deeds.

Practicing these virtuous deeds brings about the experience of all positive temporal and ultimate results. By abstaining from killing, one will have a very long and healthy life; by abstaining from stealing one will have great wealth; by abstaining from sexual misconduct one will have happy marriages, and so on. In this way, one will experience all the opposite temporal results of performing the non-virtuous deeds.

The ultimate result depends on the amount of virtue that is performed. If it is a large, medium, or small amount, one will accomplish one of the three enlightenments, such as that of the Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, or Bodhisattvas.

Practicing these virtuous deeds accomplishes ultimate happiness and brings about the fulfillment of all wishes. Practicing even small virtuous deeds can accomplish the great result of the Sravaka or

Pratyekabuddha stage, which is completely free from all suffering. Therefore, resolve with a very strong will to practice even tiny virtuous deeds and then perform them diligently.

Neutral Deeds

Next consider neutral deeds. Neutral deeds are deeds that are not performed under the influence of defilements, and also not under the influence of positive attitudes. Activities such as walking, sleeping, and eating are examples of neutral deeds. Neutral deeds produce results that are neither positive nor negative. They are better than non-virtuous deeds because they do not produce any suffering, but because they also do not produce any positive results, they are a waste of time.

When considering any deed, its motivation is the most important factor. Transforming one's motivation can change neutral deeds into virtuous deeds. For example, eating food is normally a neutral deed, but if you eat food with the motivation to stay alive so that you can devote your life to practicing virtuous deeds, or to practicing the holy Dharma, then the neutral act of eating is transformed into a virtuous deed. Other deeds can be transformed in a similar way. Traveling is transformed into a virtuous deed by praying to meet one's spiritual master, to meet the Buddha, or to hear the Dharma. Changing one's motivation can transform all neutral deeds into virtuous deeds.

This completes the explanation of the second line of the teaching which is, "If you have attachment to the realm of existence, you do not have renunciation." It explains the faults of samsara, from the hell realms up to the god realms. Also, it explains the reason we are currently dwelling within samsara, which is shown through the explanation of the law of karma.

Today's teaching focuses on the third line which is, "If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment thought." 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 inferior and middling virtuous deeds and finally achieve the state of personal liberation, which is the realization of the Pratyekabuddhas and Sravakas, or Buddha's disciples. 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. While personal liberation is great compared to samsara because one is free from suffering, one's good qualities are not fully developed because only the obscuration of the defilements has been removed. In the state of personal liberation, one is still bound by the obscuration of knowledge which blocks one from achieving full enlightenment.

Because one's good qualities are not developed to their fullest potential, one cannot benefit other sentient beings, and thus neither one's own nor others' purposes are fulfilled. Attaining personal liberation is also the greatest obstacle to accomplishing full enlightenment because having reached that state, one remains there for a very long time. Similarly, if one builds a house, it is difficult to tear it down and rebuild it again in a different way. Personal liberation is therefore 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. Due 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 towards full enlightenment and reach the highest attainment faster than they otherwise would have."

This story shows that it is not right to seek liberation only for one's 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, does not arise from an incomplete cause, and does not arise from the wrong cause and conditions. For example, if one plants a rice seed during the winter, then although the correct seed was planted, still rice will not grow. Likewise, if one plants a wheat seed, rice will not arise. To grow rice, one needs a rice seed as well as the proper temperature, moisture, and time. All of the correct causes and conditions must be present in order 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 Mahavairocana Tantra, "The root cause of enlightenment is great compassion, and the conditions are enlightenment mind, and the performance of skillful means." By possessing the root cause, the conditions, and performing skillful means, one will accomplish full enlightenment. In order to accomplish these three, one needs to meditate on loving kindness, compassion, and enlightenment mind, and to observe the precepts of the Bodhisattva's behavior.

Loving Kindness

First one needs to develop loving kindness. In the beginning, it is difficult for most of us to develop loving kindness toward all sentient beings. For this reason, the pith instructions include four steps for developing loving kindness.

The first step is to meditate on loving kindness for one's relatives, who are objects of attachment, toward whom one can more easily develop loving kindness. The second step is to meditate on those toward whom one is indifferent, who are considered to be the objects of ignorance. The third and more difficult step is to meditate on loving kindness toward one's enemies who are the objects of anger. The fourth step is to meditate on loving kindness for all sentient beings.

To practice the first step, which is meditation on loving kindness toward one's relatives, the mother is often recommended as the object of meditation. This is because our mothers gave us life, gave us our very bodies, and taught us at a young age what is right and wrong, among many other things. Actually, one can meditate on whatever friend or relative is dearest.

The first step has three stages: first recall one's mother, then remember her kindness, and finally meditate on loving kindness toward her.

The first stage is to recall one's mother. Think that she has been one's mother not only in this life, but in many other previous lifetimes. We have been caught in samsara since beginningless time, have lived innumerable lives, and so have had countless mothers. As Nagarjuna said, "The Earth would not suffice for making pills the size of juniper seeds equal to the number of mothers that one has had."

It is also said in the sutras, "There is not enough water in the four oceans to equal the amount of milk that one's mothers have given one." Not only in this life, but in innumerable lifetimes she has given one so much milk. In addition to being one's mother, she has also been other relatives such as one's father, brother, sister, and so on.

It is said that if those who have been one's father were stacked one upon another like horses or elephants, they would tower over the world of Brahma. All of the gifts that one has received from these relatives would also tower over Brahma's realm.

The second stage is to remember one's mother's kindness. Her first act of kindness was giving one a body. After carrying one's body around in her womb for nine or ten months and enduring the strains of heaviness and fatigue, she endured the pain of giving birth, even risking her own life.

Her second kindness was giving one life. After being born, one was just like a tiny worm that does not know anything and cannot do anything. With a loving heart, she protected one from fire, water, and falls, looked upon one with loving eyes, fed one with food from her own tongue, and cleaned dirt from one's body with her own hands.

If she had not cared for one as a baby, because babies are unable to survive on their own, one would surely have died. But she did not let one die, thus her second kindness was giving one life. Children know almost nothing, but she taught one everything, including how to talk and how to act. It is said in some commentaries that actually the first guru in one's life is one's own mother.

One's mother gave all of her most precious possessions and even risked her life for the benefit of her children as they grew up. She also taught all different types of knowledge and tried to establish her children in human society on an equal footing with everyone else. Today, each of us has grown up, are able to receive the precious teachings, and have the opportunity to practice the Dharma due to our mother's kindness. Without her kindness and care we would not have such opportunities.

Thus we should remember that at the very beginning of this life our mothers gave us life, gave us our body, and even up to this very moment have given us so much else. In addition to their kindness in this life, they have similarly given so much benefit, so much love, and so much care in many past lives. In this way, remember one's mother's kindness.

The third stage is to meditate on loving kindness. What is loving kindness? Loving kindness was described by the great Indian master Acharya Chandrakirti, "Great loving kindness is said to be a way to accomplish benefit for living beings."

After recalling one's mother and remembering her kindness, we must then pay back all of the kindness, benefit and care that she has given. The way to benefit one's mother is to make her happy—physically happy, mentally happy, and to have her possess the cause of happiness.

To do this, first generate loving kindness that is linked with enlightenment mind. Think, "I must help my kind mother to be happy and to have the cause of future happiness." Then generate loving kindness that

is linked with intention by thinking, “I wish that she would be happy and have the cause of happiness.” After that, generate loving kindness that is linked with a prayer by praying, “May the Guru and Triple Gem help my mother to be happy and to have the cause of happiness.”

In this way, first practice loving kindness toward one’s mother or toward whomever one feels closest. After practicing with one’s closest relative, expand the practice to include other relatives, friends, neighbors or people with whom you have connections.

The second step is to meditate on loving kindness toward those beings for whom one is indifferent. This includes all beings with whom you do not have any connections, good or bad—the countless sentient beings that one has never seen or heard. It is important to practice loving kindness toward them because although they appear as strangers at the moment, they are also one’s own previous mothers, fathers, and relatives.

As we have discussed, we have been caught in samsara since beginningless time and have lived innumerable lives. Throughout that time, these beings toward whom we are currently indifferent have often been our mother or father. At that time, they gave us the same care and the same benefit that our present mother has given us in this life. Therefore, we must generate loving kindness toward them in the same way that we practiced it with our current mother.

The third and more difficult step is to meditate on loving kindness for one’s enemies or those who cause obstacles for us. This practice is important because the same people who today appear as our most hated enemies are in reality our own previous mothers, fathers and dear ones. Due to the change of life, we cannot recognize each other from these past lives. Seeing one another now as enemies, we bring each other great suffering.

But we should recognize that these enemies have been very kind to us in the past. In addition they also bring us great benefit in the current life, because by appearing as our enemies, they crush our pride and bring us the opportunity to develop patience. They also give us the chance to pay back all of the kindness and benefit that they showed us in previous lives. Their appearance as enemies is none other than their return to receive back the love and benefit that they gave us so often in the past.

The final step is to meditate on loving kindness toward all sentient beings without any exception or discrimination. Practice in the same way as before, focusing on all sentient beings of the six realms. First recognize them as our mothers, then remember their kindness, and finally repay them by generating loving kindness. Practice in this way until a genuine and natural feeling of loving kindness toward all sentient beings arises in one’s mind.

If while doing this practice the mind feels anger toward one’s enemies and cannot develop loving kindness, remember that anger creates much more harm for oneself than for one’s enemies. The only way to avoid that harm is to overcome anger, and the only way to overcome anger is through the practice of loving kindness. In this way, remember the consequences one will face by indulging in anger, remember all of the benefits of practicing loving kindness, and thus generate genuine loving kindness.

The sutras state, “It is far more meritorious to practice a single moment of loving kindness toward sentient beings than to make offerings vast enough to fill the entire universe.”

Compassion

Thus having trained the mind well in loving kindness, one should then practice compassion.

The reason we practice loving kindness before practicing compassion is that in order for compassion toward sentient beings to arise, we must first see them as lovable, for example by seeing them as our mothers. If we cannot first see them as lovable, compassion will not arise. When we become able to see all of them as our mothers or dear ones, then we become able to wish them to be happy and to have the cause of happiness. After generating this wish, if we then examine the nature of samsara, we see that sentient beings actually lack happiness. The majority of beings are experiencing great suffering, and out of ignorance they are also creating the causes of even more future suffering. When we can see that all mother sentient beings suffer, then compassion arises. Thus loving kindness serves as the path to compassion, and compassion arises based on suffering.

One may wonder, “What is compassion?” Chandrakirti stated, “Completely saving living beings who are endowed with suffering is great compassion.” As Chandrakirti explained, having seen unbearable suffering, the mind that wishes beings to be freed from it is called compassion.

Compassion is developed by practicing step by step. The steps to practicing compassion are similar to the four stages in the practice of loving kindness. The first stage is to meditate on compassion for one’s relatives, then for those beings toward whom one is indifferent, then for enemies, and finally for all sentient beings.

In practicing compassion toward one’s relatives, start as before by recollecting one’s mother and remembering her kindness. Visualize one’s mother, whether she is alive or deceased, in front of oneself, and think, “Because my very kind mother is suffering and without happiness, I must have compassion for her.”

Although she desires to be free from suffering and the cause of suffering, one can see that her present condition is suffering and is creating the cause of future suffering. Then think, “I must free my mother from such suffering and its cause.” After meditating on this, link that thought with enlightenment mind, then with intention, and finally with prayer to the Guru and Triple Gem that one’s mother may be free from suffering and its cause. One may focus on whichever of these three methods is most effective for one’s own mind.

After performing this meditation on compassion for one’s mother, again expand the focus to include other relatives, friends and neighbors; beings toward whom one is indifferent; enemies; and finally all sentient beings. Practice in this way until a genuine inner feeling of compassion arises—not artificial compassion, but natural compassion for all sentient beings without exception. The cultivation of compassion by this method will in turn help enlightenment mind to arise.

Enlightenment Mind

Even though one may sincerely wish that all sentient beings be happy and free of suffering, in reality the opposite is true; every sentient being is suffering. Due to loving kindness and compassion, having seen this, one cannot remain idle. It is necessary to make efforts to rescue sentient beings from the suffering of samsara, but at the moment, we lack the knowledge, the skill, and the power to do so. We are

completely bound by our own karma and defilements, and are blown about helplessly by the winds of karma.

Just as a crippled mother is powerless to save her child, in the same way we are unable to rescue sentient beings from samsara. This is true not only for us, but also for very powerful worldly deities such as Brahma and Indra, and even for the Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas who have already reached nirvana. None of them are able to save sentient beings.

Who is it that can save sentient beings? Only fully enlightened Buddhas are able to do so. Just a single ray of light shining from the Buddha's body can save countless sentient beings in a single moment.

Understanding this, a real inner urge arises within oneself to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. This sincere wish is known as wishing enlightenment mind. Having made that wish, all of the efforts one exerts in fulfilling it are known as entering enlightenment mind.

From beginningless time up until this moment, we have cared solely for ourselves and worked solely for our own benefit. Every exertion we performed was for our own benefit alone. But by acting in this way, all we have actually accomplished is more and more suffering. So this time, instead of caring for ourselves, we must care for others.

As Shantideva said, "All the sufferings that beings experience in this universe arise from caring for oneself, and all the happiness that beings experience in this world arise from caring for others." If we had already practiced caring for others in our previous lives, we would not still be in samsara—we would have already attained liberation and enlightenment. The cause of our not having cared for others is the natural tendency to care for ourselves. This is a very gross mistake. The way to correct it is to ignore oneself and to totally devote one's energy and efforts to benefiting other sentient beings.

When developing enlightenment mind, it is important to proceed step-by-step, as before. We have spent so many lifetimes caring for ourselves alone that regardless of how much we like or love other beings, there is still a sense of difference between ourselves and others—our number one concern is still ourselves.

The first step, therefore, is to train in viewing others as equal to oneself. Think that just as oneself wishes to be free from suffering, so too, all other sentient beings have the same feeling, the same wish. Because other sentient beings have the same wish, just seeking happiness for oneself alone is not right. In this way, view other sentient beings as equal in importance to oneself.

When one has become accomplished in this, proceed with the meditation of exchange. This meditation is called *tong len* in the Tibetan language. *Tong* means to give and *len* means to take. In this practice, instead of caring for oneself, one cares for others. Take all of the physical pains and mental sufferings of sentient beings as vast as space onto oneself. In return, give one's own body, wealth, and virtuous deeds of the past, present and future, without any attachment or clinging to all other beings. While performing the exchange, one should recite the words that accompany the meditation.

Performing this practice crushes self-cherishing and self-clinging. Taking all of the suffering of sentient beings onto oneself and sincerely wishing for their benefit accumulates great merit. In this way, the most immediate benefit of this practice is actually received by oneself. This exchange meditation is one of the main practices of a Bodhisattva.

The Bodhisattvas' Conduct

Another of the main practices of a Bodhisattva is to preserve the precepts. In a general sense, the practice or behavior of a Bodhisattva is to abandon harming others and to benefit them as much as possible.

In particular, Bodhisattvas' main practice is the six perfections: generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom. Practice of these perfections cultivates the good qualities of mind. The first five are included in the method aspect of the path, while the sixth is the wisdom aspect. Of the six perfections, wisdom is the most important.

If the other perfections are performed without being linked to wisdom, the actions are just ordinary virtuous deeds. However, when they are linked with wisdom, they become perfections.

In order to link the other perfections with wisdom, abandon clinging to what is known as the three cycles. In the example of generosity, the three cycles are the recipient, such as a beggar; the giver, such as oneself; and that which is given, such as food or clothing. As long as there is clinging to these three cycles as separate and real, even though an action may be generous, one is not performing the perfection of generosity.

We should understand that at the relative level, the three cycles exist, although on the ultimate level they do not. In reality there is no recipient, no giver, and nothing that is given. All are like an illusion or a dream. In dreams we see an object, a subject, and other things, but when we awaken, all of these are gone without a trace.

Similarly, the three cycles appear like an illusion but in reality they cannot be found. Wisdom that is without clinging to the three cycles is known as the perfection of wisdom. When the other perfections, generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, and meditation are linked with this wisdom, they become perfections, which are the actual cause of attaining full enlightenment.

Put another way, when the other perfections are devoid of wisdom, they are like a blind person; the perfection of wisdom is like a person with sight. When a person with sight leads a blind person, both of them progress toward full enlightenment.

The practice of these six perfections brings to maturation the good qualities of one's mind. In addition, there are other practices such as the four means of gathering adherents, which are giving, speaking pleasantly, encouraging others to practice, and practicing very diligently oneself, which serve to bring others' minds to maturation. Detailed explanations of these may be found in many great commentaries, such as the Akashagarbha Sutra, Sikshasamuccaya, Bodhisattva Caryavatara and Ratnavali, among others.

This completes the explanation of the third line of Parting from the Four Attachments, which explains the entire Bodhisattva's path. On this path, one seeks full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is therefore known as the great person's path.

This teaching focuses on the fourth line, which states, "If grasping arises, you do not have the view." This means that although one has developed relative enlightenment mind based on the practice of the third line, one may still cling to phenomena as real. As a result, one falls into either the extreme of eternalism or the extreme of nihilism. As long as one remains in these extremes, enlightenment cannot be

accomplished. In order to overcome this grasping at substantiality and characteristics, one must meditate on concentration meditation and insight wisdom.

The actual method of eliminating the afflictions is through the practice of insight wisdom. Before practicing insight wisdom, however, one must first develop a base of concentration meditation, also known as calm-abiding meditation. Altogether, 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.

Meditation on Calm Abiding

The first stage is calm-abiding meditation. To do this, find a place that is free of what are called the thorns of meditation, namely a place free of external and internal disturbances which 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 thought, just as we do in all meditation sessions. Then sit in the full vajra position (also known as the the full lotus position), with the feet crossed, two hands in meditation posture, the tip of the tongue lightly touching the palate, the spine straight, and the eyes half-closed. This is the proper position for meditation.

There are many different ways of practicing calm-abiding meditation, including many types of concentrations on outer objects or inner objects. For beginners, it is easier and more appropriate to focus on outer objects. Among the many outer objects of focus, the best is an image or statue of the Buddha. Focusing on an image of the Buddha not only develops concentration, it also accumulates great merit. If one chooses to meditate on a mental, rather than physical image of the Buddha, then visualize Shakyamuni Buddha seated on a jeweled throne upon a lotus and moon disc, golden colored, with one face and two hands. His right hand is in the earth-touching gesture and his left hand is in the meditation gesture. He is wearing three-piece Dharma robes and sitting in the full vajra position.

Either looking at the statue, or visualizing very clearly, focus on the body in general and particularly on the space between the eyebrows where there is a white round hair. Instead of looking at the various colors and shapes of the statue or of one's visualization, try to bring one's mind, eyes, and breathing together and to maintain the focus on that one spot without any distractions. It is necessary to do this type of calm-abiding meditation before attempting to practice insight wisdom, because in its current state, the mind is very busy with various streams of thoughts. With this busy mind, it is not possible to meditate properly on insight wisdom.

In trying to develop calm-abiding meditation, it is said that there are five faults that hinder practice. To counter these five faults there are eight antidotes. Finally, there are nine methods to aid meditation. Of the five faults, the main one is laziness or unwillingness to do meditation. The antidote to laziness is recollecting the benefits of calm-abiding meditation. Try to develop sincere faith that through the meditation one will accomplish the temporal benefits of physical and mental comfort as well as the ultimate attainment of enlightenment.

By meditating with a steady body, a steady object of meditation, without blinking, and without bending one's body, the first experience that is gained is the perception that even more streams of thoughts are arising in the mind than one experienced previously. Actually, these streams of thoughts have always been present in the mind, 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, gradually the number of thoughts in the mind will be reduced. Eventually one will become able to remain single-pointedly in complete tranquility without any disturbances or thoughts.

Meditation on Insight Wisdom

Calm-abiding meditation alone is not enough. It is the basis for the practice of insight wisdom, which is the second stage. Without insight wisdom, one cannot destroy the defilements at their root. The main practice is actually insight wisdom, which means the wisdom of discrimination. Using very sharp logical reasoning, one examines the nature of reality or the ultimate reality of all external and internal phenomena. Through this, the ultimate reality of all phenomena is seen to be away from the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, and devoid of all extreme views, such as existence, non-existence, permanence, nothingness, and so forth. Attaining such a state is the accomplishment of insight wisdom. This understanding should be combined with calm-abiding meditation, so that one dwells single-pointedly in the insight wisdom that is realized.

Insight wisdom, or vipassana, itself consists of three steps. The first is to establish all outer objects or outer appearances as the mind and as created by the mind. The second is to establish all mental objects as illusory. The third is to establish all illusions as devoid of inherent nature.

Step One: Outer Appearances Are One's Own Mind

The first step is to establish all outer appearances as one's own mind. This means that all the objects that we see and all the appearances or visions that we encounter every day, such as the elements, sentient beings, particles etc., all appear not without a cause, nor are they created by an outside force, nor are they inherently existent. In reality, they are all mentally projected. From beginningless time until now, the seeds or propensities to view phenomena in this way has left impressions on our mind. As a result, when the conditions come together, appearances of phenomena are projected outwardly. In fact, there is no creator of these objects apart from one's own mind.

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, and other dreams of all kinds. These dreams can cause joy, sadness, fear, etc. Even so, there is no outside object. Dreams are all one's own mind. But during the dream, the experiences are 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 oneself; this life is also experienced by oneself. 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 outer appearances are actually not separate from one's own mind. If the outer world was separate from the mind, then its characteristics would always be the same for everyone. This is not the case, however, because for one person a certain place can be a very happy place, yet for another person it can seem to be a very unhappy place. Furthermore, a single person can see it to be a very happy place at one time, and a very unhappy place at a later time. In this way, it is easy to see that all the things we encounter are actually projections of one's own mind.

Step Two: Mental Objects Are Illusory

Having established that all outer appearances are one's own mind, the second step is to establish all mental objects as illusory. As it is said in the sutras, "Just as the appearances of the 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 a magical show. When a magician combines certain special ingredients with the power of mantra, it is possible that we can 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. 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 in any way. Put another way, as long as a thing depends on causes and conditions, it is shown to be devoid of inherent existence. If it inherently existed, it would not depend on other causes and conditions. As long as something exists based upon causes and conditions, when 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 antennae, 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. The image appears when all of the causes and conditions are gathered together. Although the image appears, it is still not real.

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

Step Three: Illusions Are Devoid of Inherent Nature

The third step is to establish that all illusions are devoid of inherent nature. On the relative level, all these objects which arise based on the gathering of causes and conditions, appear to be unceasing. If we try to examine them, however, we cannot find anything that inherently exists. Put another way, on the relative level, due to interdependent origination, 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. The actual reality is beyond descriptions of existence, non-existence, neither, or both. Reality is both unceasing clarity and emptiness, and these two do not contradict. As long as appearances and emptiness do not contradict, they become the non-duality of appearance and emptiness, the non-duality of sound and emptiness, and the non-duality of awareness and emptiness. This is actual insight wisdom.

Union of Calm-Abiding and Insight Wisdom

Having developed calm-abiding meditation 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 all illusory visions as devoid of inherent nature. Then the analytical mind which realizes this emptiness beyond all description is merged with the actual or objective reality, which has from the very beginning been away 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, candlelight glows very clearly; it is very steady and tranquil. Meditate in such a state.

By practicing in this way, one will gradually become more familiar with this state. The closer one is to actual reality, the more compassion arises for those sentient beings who do not realize this truth and hence experience much suffering. Through the combination of compassion and the wisdom that realizes emptiness, all illusory visions are transformed into wisdom. Eventually, one will accomplish full enlightenment which is endowed with the three kayas and unceasing great activities.

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

Dedication of Merit

The third and final part of the teaching is the dedication of merit. At the conclusion of every practice session, it is important to dedicate the merit. Without dedication, the merit accomplished by the virtuous deeds can be destroyed by a strong opposing factor, such as anger or hatred. However if the merit is dedicated through skillful means, it is not only unaffected by opposing factors, it also increases continuously until one reaches the ultimate goal.

To dedicate the merit, first think that all the merit one has gained through this very profound meditation is combined with the merit of all the virtuous deeds one has accumulated in the past, is accumulating now, and will accumulate in the future. Because all reality is mind, it is possible to dedicate merit that one has not yet accumulated. Then with all of 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 magical show. By making the aspiration to dedicate one's merit just as the great Bodhisattvas dedicated theirs, one is following in their great footsteps.

This completes the teaching of Parting from the Four Attachments by the great master Sachen Kunga Nyingpo.