



# SHENPEN ÖSEL

*The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings*

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2

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Photo by Ryszard K. Frackiewicz

**THE VERY VENERABLE KHENCHEN THRANGU RINPOCHE**

*If there were a practical utility in following after agitating thoughts, if they actually made us function more effectively, that would be one thing. But, in fact, the kleshas that we generate and the agitation they bring up are unnecessary and do not make us function more effectively at all. Therefore, they are, from any point of view, unnecessary and inappropriate.*

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## Contents (click on number)

- 3**    **Establishing a Place That Will Be of Immense Benefit to the World**
- 7**    **Proper Motivation, Posture, and Mental Technique for the Practice of Meditation**  
*By Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche*
- 15**   **Transforming Samsaric Consciousness Into the Five Wisdoms**  
*By Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche*
- 24**   **Taking Refuge**  
*By Kabje Kalu Rinpoche*
- 34**   **A Note on the Use of Honorifics**
- 35**   **On Tilopa's Six Essential Points of Meditation**  
*By Lama Tashi Namgyal*
- 37**   **On the Virtues of Tranquility Meditation**  
*By Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche*
- 38**   **And How Does One Abandon Desire?**  
*By Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche*



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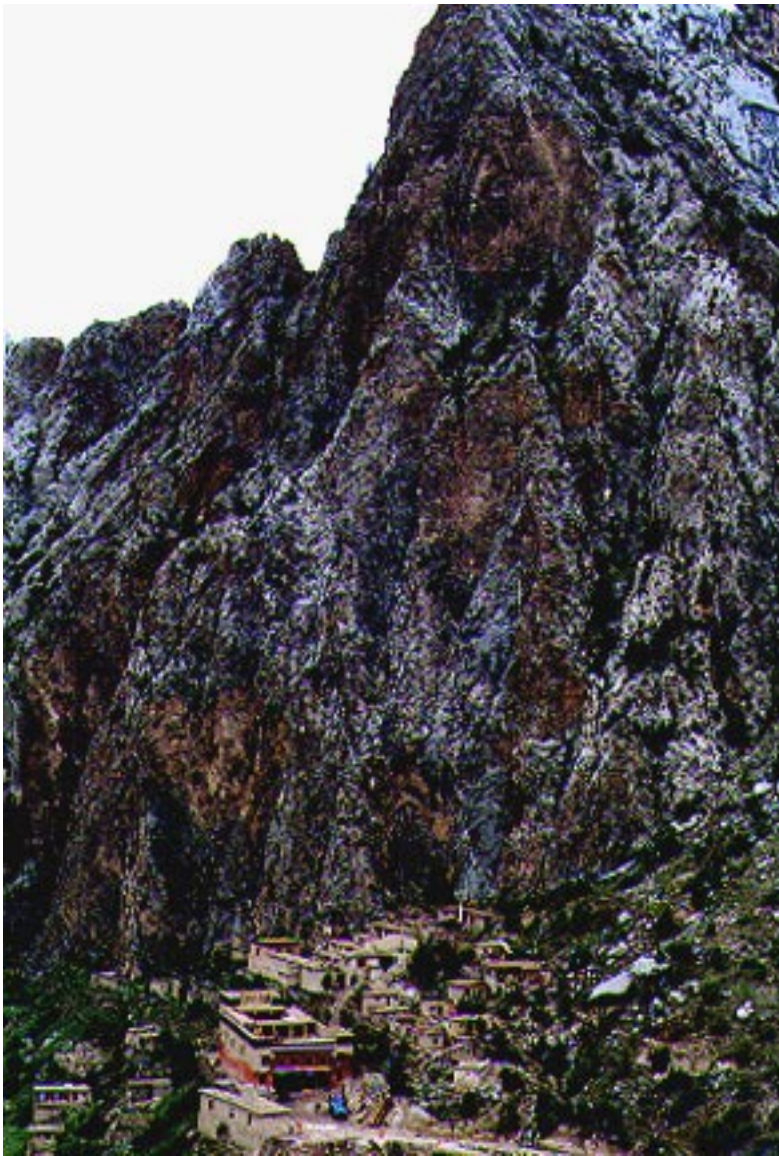
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Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Shangpa Kagyu and the Karma Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscription and support are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.



**Aerial view of the Kala Rongo Monastery for Women**



Photos courtesy of Kagyu Thubten Chöling

**Lama Norlha**

## Establishing a Place That Will Be of Immense Benefit to the World

**T**he Chinese invasion of Tibet and the ensuing exodus in 1959 brought scores of remarkable Tibetan lamas first to India and then to the West and other parts of the world. Among these was Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche. Among Kalu Rinpoche's many gifted disciples is Lama Norlha, whom Kalu Rinpoche established in 1976 as the director and resident lama of his New York City dharma center, Kagyu Dzamling Kunchap. He subsequently established himself as the director of all of his dharma activity on the East Coast.

In the ensuing years, at Kalu Rinpoche's request, Lama Norlha established a monastery and three-year retreat center on the Hudson River in upstate New York, as well as some ten to fifteen satellite dharma centers in the eastern United States. At

the same time he continued to engage in activity to help assure the survival and expansion of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in India.

Lama Norlha was born in the Nangchen region of eastern Tibet, and at the age of five entered Korche Monastery, where he later completed two three-year retreats. Sometime between the original Chinese invasion of Tibet and the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, Korche Monastery, which housed about 500 monks, was completely destroyed, the monastic community dispersed, and the monks all made to return to work and to secular life. The practice of Buddhism was banned at that time.

In the early 1980s the Chinese relaxed their suppression of Buddhism somewhat, and in 1982, Lama Norlha and his students began sending money to Nangchen to rebuild Korche Monastery. In 1984, Lama Norlha was permitted by the Chinese government to visit his home country for the first time since 1959. By that time, Lama Norlha found that the three-year retreat facility had been rebuilt, a few houses had been rebuilt and reconstruction of the main shrine building had begun.

During this visit, Lama Norlha taught extensively in the three-year retreat, and gave novice nun's ordination to 100 women. He was also able to bring Jamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche to Korche, who gave many teachings and empowerments, and officially recognized two reincarnate lamas of great importance to Korche, who were subsequently enthroned. Shortly thereafter, Thrangu Rinpoche went to Korche and gave full ordination to 125 monks and 150 nuns.

Since that time, Lama Norlha and his students have sent funds to continue the rebuilding and refurbishing of Korche Monastery, to establish a monastic college for monks who have finished three-year retreat, and to establish an organization called Lama Gyupa, through which Westerners can contribute to the support of monks who have completed three-year retreat, allowing them to chant, study, meditate, care for the monastery, and serve the religious needs of the surrounding villages.

Lama Norlha and his students have also agreed to send help to the colleges of three other nearby

monasteries, Depa Damkar, and Samge. They are also assisting Chapa Gon Monastery and Convent, and hope soon to be able to assist Chobra and Sherpa monasteries as well. Lama Norlha predicts that, if these programs become strong and successful, they will not only bring benefit to the monasteries in question but to the entire country of Tibet and to all the sponsors and sponsoring organizations as well.

As these activities were developing at Korche and the surrounding monasteries, and especially after the ordination of 150 nuns, the need for separate but parallel facilities and opportunities for the nuns became apparent. At that time Lama Norlha started looking to an isolated valley to the south of Korche Monastery.

This valley is the home of the Dzachu River, one of the headwaters of the Mekong River. The valley's northern extreme, called Kala Rongo, is a very sacred place. Guru Rinpoche (Guru Padmasambhava) practiced there for many years, and the region is also home to such holy beings as the five Tseringma sisters (goddesses who were disciples of Milarepa), Karak Khyungmo Tsunma, and Genyen Shiwa Dorje. Chogyur Lingpa, the last of the 108 great tertons prophesied by Guru Rinpoche, also retrieved the terma (treasure texts) known as Tukdrup Barchay Kunsel at Kala Rongo.

On three separate occasions—in 1976, 1979, and 1980—the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpay Dorje, asked Lama Norlha to establish a dharma center there, prophesying that immense benefit to the world would result. There had been no religious facility there for many hundreds of years.

In 1984, Lama Norlha traveled to Kala Rongo with a group of lamas to perform blessing ceremonies, during which time many auspicious signs occurred. In 1990, he traveled there again with Sangjay Tenzin Rinpoche and 300 monks and nuns. Together they did the practice discovered as terma there by Chogyur Lingpa, called Tukdrup Barchay Kunsel, for eleven days and nights without interruption in order to consecrate land for a monastery for nuns.

The nuns then began construction of a six-mile

road to the building site. Lama Norlha commissioned statues of Guru Rinpoche, the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, and Situ Rinpoche to be offered to the monastery. Finally, in 1991, with funds donated by members of Kagyu Thubten Chöling, the nuns built retreat facilities, a communal kitchen, and outbuildings, and began construction of the main shrine hall.

In 1992, Lama Norlha again returned to Kala Rongo to inaugurate the first three-year retreat for fifty nuns. After the retreat began, he bought a truck for the monastery, and forty more nuns living in shacks they had built on the hillside continued construction of the main building, assisted by about 250 nuns who resided in the surrounding valleys and villages. Abo, a former administrator of Korche Monastery, assumed directorship of the work in 1994, and now oversees the training of nuns preparing for retreat as well as the day-to-day operations of the community. The first three-year retreat at Kala Rongo was completed in 1995, and fifty more nuns are now training in the second retreat.

While visiting Kala Rongo in 1996, Lama Norlha gave empowerments from the Shangpa and Karma Kamsang lineages to the nuns in retreat and also to the public in the now-completed main

shrine hall. With the nuns, he performed special practices of Green Tara, the Heart Sutra and the Offering of Four Hundred to avert obstacles. Tashi Dawa, one of Lama Norlha's American dharma students, spent twenty-eight days in solitary retreat at the Guru Rinpoche cave in the cliffs 1,000 feet above Kala Rongo.

The nuns who have graduated from retreat live in their own small houses on the mountainside near their monastery, and assemble morning and evening to chant and practice in the main shrine hall. They also chant many special services at the request of patrons in nearby villages, who attend the services and make offerings to the nuns and the monastery. For the first time, the nuns now have ample supplies of milk and butter, since Lama Norlha arranged for 105 yak cows offered to him during his stay at Korche Monastery to be brought to Kala Rongo.

American dharma students have sponsored 1,300,000 recitations of the Green Tara practice at \$200 per 100,000 recitations, and have offered \$2,500 toward 1,000 Nyungnes (the fasting practice of 1,000-armed Chenrezig). These practices help pacify difficulties and are often requested on behalf of specific people; they also bring benefit to the monastery's region and to the benefactors who



**Lunch break at Kala Rongo**

sponsor them.

Currently, the interior of the monastery's shrine hall is being painted and decorated. A protector shrine is under construction on the top story, and on-site artists are making statues of the protectors Chakdrupa, Bernagchen, Palden Lhamo, and Dorje Lekpa. Rooms are being prepared for Situ Rinpoche and the Gyalwang Karmapa.

Thankas of the lineage and the sixteen arhats are displayed on the upper level of the shrine hall, and recently completed murals on the lower level portray the Buddha, lamas, *siddhas*, *vidams*, and protectors.

Next year Lama Norlha hopes to establish a monastic college for the nuns, comparable to the one at Korche Monastery. He would also like to build a retreat facility at Kala Rongo dedicated to the practices of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage which transmit the profound teachings of the two female *mahasiddhas*, Niguma and Sukkha Siddhi, to complement the already existing and operating retreat center dedicated to the practice of the Karma Kagyu lineage, the lineage of Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, and the Karmapas.

Lama Norlha has expressed great satisfaction with the Kala Rongo Monastery, its excellent building, which was finished in a remarkably short time, and the nuns' practice, diligence, accomplishment of learning, and joyful frame of mind. As the number of women who have completed the three-year retreat at Kala Rongo increases through the years, there is no doubt that dharma practice will flourish there and that the prediction of the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa will be fulfilled. ❸



If you would like to make a donation to Lama Norlha's efforts at rebuilding the monastic community in Tibet, please fill in the following form and mail to:

**Kagyu Thubten Chöling**  
**127 Sheafe Road**  
**Wappingers Falls, NY 12590**

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- For one or more nuns at Kala Rongo Monastery for Women for one year in the amount of \$150 US per nun (the total amount needed to provide one year's sustenance for one nun in Tibet)
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- For one or more monks at Korche Monastery for one year in the amount of \$150 US per monk (the total amount needed to provide one year's sustenance for one monk in Tibet)

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Photo by Ryszard K. Frackiewicz

**The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche**

# Proper Motivation, Posture, and Mental Technique for the Practice of Meditation

**By The V. V. Thrangu Rinpoche**

*In May of 1996, The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave a series of teachings on the practice of meditation. The first teaching from that series ran in our last issue. The following is the transcript of Rinpoche's teachings the morning of May 25. The teachings were orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso.*

I would like to thank all of you for coming here out of your interest in dharma in general and meditation and vajrayana dharma in particular. Pursuing this practice of meditation and the study of vajrayana is extremely beneficial and useful, because, in general, all of the goodness of the human life and all of the ability within the context of the human life to actually benefit others and affect others in a positive way comes from a cultivation of dharma in general and in particular from the practice of meditation.

Next, in accordance with the custom of our tradition, the Karma Kagyu, I would like to chant the lineage supplication. Now, the particular lineage supplication which

we use is used in all the Tibetan and overseas practice centers of our tradition, and in fact, it's used by individual practitioners as well. The reason is that this particular liturgy was composed by Penkar Jampal Zangpo, who was a disciple of the Sixth Gyalwa Karmapa, Tongwa Donden, and the root guru of the Seventh Gyalwa Karmapa, Chötrag Gyamtso. Penkar Jampal Zangpo lived for eighteen years on an island of which he was the only inhabitant. He lived in a cave on that island. And the island is in the middle of a lake in the north of Tibet called Sky Lake or Namtso. And, for the eighteen years of his living there, he devoted himself entirely to meditating upon mahamudra, of which he generated a decisive realization. At the end of these eighteen years of retreat, he composed this lineage supplication, and, therefore, we regard it as embodying the result of all of his experience. And we consider it to have great blessing. So, now we'll recite it. Please do so with a recollection of its significance and with confidence. (Chants.)

**W**hether we are practicing the dharma of the vajrayana or listening to dharma or teaching it, we need to possess a pure motivation for doing so. Pure motivation here refers to bodhichitta. Now, we have all entered the gate of the genuine dharma, so therefore, in general, of course, we don't have a negative motivation, and we're very fortunate to have the motivation we do have, to practice dharma. But, at the same time, because we are ordinary people, at times our motivation may become somewhat impure. It's necessary, therefore, to turn inward, and to actually look at your motivation, and see what it really is. If your motivation is a good and genuine one, then you should delight in that and cause it to expand. But if you find that your motivation is a negative one, is based on a fixation on a self and so on, then simply let go of it and generate a pure motivation. Now, when you consciously generate a pure motivation, initially it may seem as though you're faking something, but in the long term you

are not really faking anything, because by intentionally cultivating, gradually it will become real and very much part of you. And here, by pure motivation, we mean the attitude that you are doing the practice or study in order to benefit all beings.

Because we possess the beginningless habit of fixation on the self, then it is natural for us, as far as our motivation goes, to desire our own happiness and our own benefit as our primary wish or goal. This is not particularly a bad motivation; it's just a small-minded or petty motivation. The small scope of this—the wish to benefit only yourself, which is characteristic, at best, of a lesser vehicle—is not wide enough,

not big enough, to serve as the proper motivation for the bodhisattva training of the mahayana. Now, if you recognize that this is your motivation, again, let go of the self-obsessive quality of it, and generate the intention that what you're doing be of benefit to all beings who fill space.

This motivation of wishing to practice and study in order to benefit all beings without exception is a type of bodhichitta or awakened mind. And this type of bodhichitta is said to require two characteristics. The first is that it

be compassion directed at all beings, which is to say that your intention be to benefit all beings who fill space. The second characteristic is that it have intelligence or wisdom; and in this case, that means that the benefit you are attempting to accomplish for all beings is not merely a temporary benefit but their ultimate liberation, their ultimate freedom. So please listen to the teachings with the motivation of bodhichitta that possesses both this impartial compassion and this intelligence or wisdom.

Because this motivation of bodhichitta is so important for the practice of vajrayana, we possess a number of methods for increasing it and intensifying it. In general, these include, of course, meditations upon love and compassion, and in particular the practice of taking and sending, or the taking of suffering and the sending of happiness. Taking and sending, or *tonglen*, is a practice in which you

... by pure motivation, we mean the attitude that you are doing the practice or study in order to benefit all beings



imagine taking into yourself all of the suffering and causes of suffering which afflict others, and imagine giving to all others all of the happiness and causes of happiness which are within you.

Normally this practice is coordinated with the breathing, which is to say that, as you breathe in, you think that you breathe in all of the sufferings of all other beings, freeing them from these sufferings, and that as you breathe out, you send out with your breath all of your own happiness and virtue and so on, and that other beings thereby receive these and enjoy these things. Now, the meditation is *imagining* something, and yet it actually generates, over time, the intention in practitioners to be able to actually take on to themselves the sufferings of others and actually benefit others and relieve the sufferings of others.

The practice of taking and sending, or *tonglen*, is coordinated with the breathing, and so therefore it is one of a variety of meditation practices which uses the breath. But, in addition, it uses visualization, and specifically the visualization of light or rays of light. When you do the practice, normally you consider that in front of you are all the countless sentient beings that exist. And, as you breathe out, you think that rays of brilliant, white, very, very luminous, brilliant light come out of you and strike and engulf all of those beings, causing all of the happiness and causes of happiness—virtue, and so on—that have up to now been within you, to transfer to those beings, causing them to actually experience this happiness, to possess this happiness, as well as the cause of future happiness. And as you breathe in, you think that you take from all of these beings all of their misery, all of their suffering, and all of their pain, as well as the causes of their pain, in the form of murky, smoky, grim—call it light, but it's hard to call it light. It's sort of smoky, grim light. And, that you inhale this, and that they are thereafter free of all of this suffering and the causes of future suffering.

Now, according to the meditation, you are actually taking onto yourself or into yourself the suffering and causes of suffering which would otherwise afflict others. But there is no actual danger that

you will, through doing this practice, come to experience the conditions of suffering through doing it, the conditions of suffering which afflict others. Because in the practice you're cultivating a virtuous state of mind, a positive state of mind, which cannot become a cause for suffering, such as experiencing the sufferings of others and so on. Nevertheless, because that is what you are imagining, and because what you're cultivating is the readiness to actually undertake the suffering of others, it's natural that, when beginners start to practice, they experience some fear. Now, if you find that there is fear that inhibits your ability to do the

practice, then it's appropriate to imagine in the center of your heart either a white HRI syllable, also very, very luminous and brilliant, like the rays you breathe out, or, if you wish, simply a mass of brilliant light. And when you breathe in all the smoky, murky, grim stuff, then you think that, rather than its filling your entire body, it all dissolves into and subsides into the HRI.

As well, there exists the uncommon vajrayana method of enhancing compassion, which is meditation upon the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Chenrezig. This is a technique for removing the suffering of others and especially for enhancing your own love and compassion. Chenrezig is the embodiment of the compassion of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, and, as such, is regarded as a wisdom deity and not as an external deity. Therefore, we tend primarily to relate to Chenrezig as the embodiment of our own fundamental nature. Because of this, while it is the case that, in certain practices and at certain phases of the practice, we visualize Chenrezig above our heads—we externalize him—nevertheless, because we are fundamentally viewing him as the embodiment of the compassion of all buddhas and the wisdom of all buddhas, and because the wisdom of all buddhas is our own essential nature, or buddha nature, and because we wish to reveal this nature by removing the secondary stains or obscurations which obscure it, and by revealing it to enhance our own compassion and so on, therefore, the

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principal practice related to Chenrezig is to visualize ourselves as Chenrezig, to think of our body as his body, our speech as his speech, and our mind as his mind. And that is the basic format or basic technique of the Chenrezig meditation practice.

Now, the actual form the deity takes can vary. There are forms with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes, and there is the four-armed form, and so on; and any of these forms will basically lead to the same result. The fundamental characteristic which they all have in common is that Chenrezig embodies the tremendous peace of complete compassion.

The key point is that, when you imagine yourself to be Chenrezig or visualize yourself as Chenrezig, you are not merely thinking of your body as a different type of body. You are relating to the body, speech, and mind of the figure all at once. Now, in order specifically to relate to the mind of Chenrezig, then you visualize, in the center of your body, at the level of the heart, a six-petalled lotus, and in the center of that lotus, you visualize the compassion, the great compassion of all buddhas, in the form of a brilliant white HRI syllable. Now, surrounding that, you visualize the six-syllable mantra OM MANI PEME HUNG. And, then, rays of light go out from the mantra and purify the afflictions of beings.

Now, in general, Buddhists view the types of existences there are, the types of realms there are, as six different types of realms. These are held to be caused by the preponderance of one or another of the six fundamental mental afflictions or *kleshas*, which produce, subsequently, those corresponding types of experience. So, in order to purify these, then you correlate each of the syllables of the mantra with one of these *kleshas* and their results. So, for example, you think that from the syllable OM, the first syllable of the mantra, rays of light shoot out and purify all of the arrogance of all beings. Arrogance is the cause of rebirth as a god. Then, from the second syllable, MA, rays of light shoot out and purify and remove all of the competitiveness or jealousy which afflicts any and

all beings. And jealousy is the cause of rebirth as an asura, who are very powerful and quarrelsome beings. Then, from the third syllable, NI, rays of light shoot out, and these purify passion, which is the root or the cause of rebirth as a human being and the experience of the human sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. From the fourth syllable, PE or PAD, rays of light shoot out and purify all of the mental dullness of all beings, which is the cause of rebirth as an animal, which rebirth is characterized by suffering due to bewilderment.

Then from the fifth syllable, ME, rays of light shoot out and purify and remove all of the greed which afflicts all beings.

Greed is the cause of rebirth as a *preta* or hungry ghost, which experience is marked by tremendous hunger and thirst. And, finally, the last syllable, HUM, radiates lots of light that purifies the affliction of anger, which is the cause of rebirth in the hells and the experience of intense heat and cold.

So, you're visualizing that these rays of light are removing all of the sufferings and causes of suffering that afflict all beings, and that, as a result, all beings become both happy and free. So this is an effective method of enhancing or developing your love and compassion for all beings. But it also gradually reveals the inherent or innate great compassion which is within you and which is the essence of the wisdom of all buddhas and allows this to reveal or express itself. It is, therefore, a very effective technique.

So, whether you are studying or listening to or practicing dharma, you need this motivation of love and compassion, and therefore we have specific practices to enhance it and develop it: in general, meditations on love and compassion; in particular, the precise instructions of taking and sending, and especially the extraordinary vajrayana techniques such as the Chenrezig meditation and so on.

**N**ow, our main concern as practitioners is the recognition of the true nature of things or dharmata. And in order to achieve this recognition, we need to let go of or relinquish those afflictions

**Our main concern as practitioners is the recognition of the true nature of things or dharmata**

which obscure our capacity to recognize it. And we need to enhance or expand, or allow to be revealed, the wisdom which can recognize it. Now, the process of removing what obscures this nature and thereby revealing what recognizes it, as well as the nature itself, has to begin with the accomplishment of what is called tranquility or *shinay*. Now, in fact, *shinay* as a practice and as a result has two aspects: it has the aspect of peace or tranquility, which means the pacification of the disturbance of thought, and it has the aspect of stillness, which is the capacity to rest the mind. And these are the two qualities attained through *shinay* or tranquility practice.

Now, in order to accomplish these, the actual technique, the actual practice, as well, has two aspects. The first of these is the physical technique or physical posture, and the second is the mental technique.

Of course, the main thing in meditation is the mind and not the body, because it is the mind that actually performs the meditation. But at the same time, our minds inhabit or rely upon our bodies, so, therefore, physical posture is extremely important.

Now, the physical posture which was practiced by all of the founders and lineage holders of the Kagyu tradition is called the seven dharmas of Vairochana. Now, Vairochana is the name of, a particular buddha and it also literally means “the illuminator.” Now, there are two reasons why this posture is called that. One reason is the literal meaning of Vairochana. The posture is called the seven dharmas of the illuminator, of illumination, because, if you take this posture, your mind’s natural clarity is enhanced or brought out, and therefore the recognition of your mind’s nature is greatly facilitated through the posture itself. The other reason why this posture is called that is that the buddhas or victors of the five families, of whom Vairochana is one, are correlated with the five aggregates—which is to say that our five aggre-

gates or *skandhas* are held in their true nature to be these five buddhas. Now, Vairochana is the pure nature or essence of the aggregate or *skandha* of form. And, therefore, since it is through physical posture that the experience of form as an aggregate is transformed into the experience of its pure nature as the Buddha Vairochana, and, on the basis of that, that the other aggregates can be worked with and gradually transformed, then for that reason as well this posture is called the seven dharmas or seven points, you could say, of Vairochana.

The first of the seven points which make up this posture is the placement of the legs. The traditional explanation of this is that the legs should be crossed in what is called vajra *asana* or vajra posture, which is where the legs are fully crossed with the feet placed on the opposite thighs. Now, if you can cross your legs in this manner, this is the best posture, but if you cannot, it does not mean that you cannot meditate. The specific quality of the fully crossed or vajra posture is that it’s extremely stable. So the point of this posture in general, and this first point in particular, is that your sitting posture be as stable as possible. Now, the reason for this is that, if you meditate standing up or walking about, which, of course, are acceptable postures and actions in post-medita-

tion, your mind will be scattered. So, rather than standing or walking, we meditate sitting down. You could also meditate lying down, and specific practices, such as the dream and luminosity practices, can be conducted in that way. But lying down is not the best posture for ordinary meditation because, just as standing up or walking makes your mind scattered, lying down makes your mind torpid. Sitting is the halfway point in between the two, so your mind is neither too dull nor too excited. If you can sit on the ground on a cushion, with your legs crossed, that’s excellent, but if you can’t, it’s also acceptable to sit on a chair.

The second point of posture is the placement of the hands. This is said to be the placement of the

## The physical posture which was practiced by all of the founders and lineage holders of the Kagyu tradition is called the seven dharmas of Vairochana

hands in the gesture of evenness or even placement. Now, quite often, this is taken to mean the actual *mudra* of even placement, which is found in iconographical paintings and statues, in which the left hand is placed palm up in your lap and the right hand is placed palm up in or on the left hand, as in, for example, the position of the Buddha Amitabha, and so on. And this is acceptable as a meditation posture. The meaning of the words “even placement,” however, has a wider connotation. It simply means that the hands should be placed at the same level, should be placed evenly, as opposed to, for example, holding one hand aloft in space and placing the other one down on the ground. So it’s also acceptable to place the hands palms down on the thighs behind the knees. Either one of these interpretations of this second point of posture is fine.

The third point of posture is that the spine be straight, which means that you sit up straight. The reason why it’s necessary to sit up straight when you’re meditating is that your body and your mind are very connected. Specifically, your mind rides on, or is founded in, the winds or energies, which depend upon the channels which are present within your body. So if your posture is bent or crooked, if you’re leaning to the left or to the right or you’re leaning forward, then the channels will be bent as well, and if the channels are bent, then the winds won’t flow smoothly and your mind will be in a state of agitation or unrest. If you sit up straight and your channels are straight, then the winds flow smoothly and properly, and your mind will be naturally at rest.

The fourth point is that the upper arms be spread like the wings of a vulture. Now, what actual form this takes depends upon which of the two positions of the hands you are using. If you are using the position where the hands are placed palm up in the lap, then it means that, rather than allowing your elbows to be stuck to your sides, you bring them outward somewhat, like spread wings.

If you’re using the posture where your hands are palms down on the backs of the thighs just behind the knees, then, instead of allowing your elbows to sink and be extremely bent, you straighten them somewhat. In either case, the function of this aspect of the posture is to make your entire posture somewhat more erect, and the function of that is to promote the clarity within your mind. So, by doing this to your upper arms and elbows, then you somewhat prevent the occurrence of mental dullness in meditation.

The fifth point of posture is that the neck be slightly bent, which is to say that you’re not sticking your chin out. The reason for this is that by bending the neck slightly, bringing the chin in, then you naturally enhance your mindfulness and alertness.

And the sixth aspect of posture is that the tongue touch the palate. And the reason for this is that this will cause less saliva to be present in your mouth and cause you to have to swallow saliva less often. Now, this sounds extremely unimportant, but when you’re actually practicing meditation, if you constantly have to swallow saliva, it’s very distracting.

The seventh point of posture is the gaze. Now, if your eyes are closed when you meditate, this tends to make your mind dull. But, on the other hand, if your eyes are wide open and you’re staring at what you see, then this will distract you. So, the gaze for meditation here is to look straight, is that you look naturally straight forward. Now, when you’re practicing tranquility or *shinay*, you would tend to look straight forward as far as left and right is concerned, but slightly downward as far as up and down is concerned. And when you’re practicing *lhaktong*, or insight, you would still look straight forward as far as left and right is concerned, but slightly upward as far as up and down is concerned. In any case, you don’t direct your attention to what you see. You don’t try not to focus the eyes, but you don’t send your mind after your vision. So, whether you see things or not,

**If you sit up straight and your channels are straight, then the winds flow smoothly and properly, and your mind will be naturally at rest**

whether your eyes are focusing clearly or not, you simply don't follow it, you don't run after it. And, instead, you look at your mind. In other words, you perform the meditation.

Well, those are the seven points of posture, which are called the seven dharmas of Vairochana. At the same time, when you implement this, your body needs to be comfortable, which is to say that the posture should be neither tense nor rigid, and should not be uncomfortable. This means that if any particular point of the posture is painful or uncomfortable for you—if it causes pain in your arms or pain in your legs or pain in your spine or back—then you should not force yourself to take this posture. There's no rule that all seven points of this posture have to be present in order to meditate. The point of the posture is to allow your channels, and therefore your winds, to come comfortably to rest through taking a certain physical posture. But if taking this posture defeats its own purpose by generating too much tension and pain, then you should not force yourself to do it, and you should not think that all points of this posture are absolutely essential for the practice of meditation.

In Tibet, there arose eight principal traditions of meditation practice. The initial progenitors of these eight traditions are called the eight chariots of the practice lineages. Now, one of these eight traditions is called severance, or *chöd*, and the source of the teachings of *chöd* was a Tibetan woman, [a *mahasiddha*] named Machig Labdrön, and she is therefore considered one of these eight great teachers who founded the practice lineages. Now, in her teachings on meditation, she said that the physical posture is relaxation of the four limbs. Now, what that means is that one of the most essential points of physical posture is that you relax your muscles, your joints, and your sinews, that you not attempt to maintain the physical posture with physical exertion or muscular exertion. Now, this means, when you're practicing, if you discover tension, physical tension, in a specific part of your body or part of

your posture, then you should consciously relax that part and let go of that tension. She further said the mental posture or the mental technique is to destroy fixated perception. Now, here, "destroy fixated perception" means to neither follow nor expel thoughts, just simply let go of them as they arise, neither to attempt to follow their content nor to attempt to get rid of them or chase them out. And the posture of speech, or the technique of speech, is to sing melodiously of experience. Now, this means that the actual use of melody and so on in liturgy—for example, in supplications and so forth—can actually enhance meditation practice and experience. In any case, the physical posture, as she said, needs to be one where your muscles are relaxed.

So that is the physical posture.

Now, the mental technique that has been presented by most teachers of our tradition is to follow the breath. And, indeed, this was taught by the Buddha, who said, "When thoughts are intense, follow the breath." And because it is a technique of tranquility meditation or *shinay* practice that is appropriate for anyone, it's always okay to use this technique. Sometimes, however, it's also helpful to let your mind simply rest, without a specific object to focus on other than itself. So sometimes just let your mind rest without following the breath, provided you're not distracted. But what I'm going to talk about now is not a specific technique you use, but how you relate to the meditation of tranquility in general.

Normally, we have a lot of thoughts running through our minds, and many of these are based on recollections of or thinking about the past. Others are thoughts that beckon the future—speculation about what may happen or what we want to happen. Now, when a thought arises that is concerned with the past, then simply let it go. And when a thought arises that is speculation about the future, also, simply let it go.

Now, thoughts about the future can present

Thoughts about the future can present themselves as having some special status, being very important

themselves as having some special status, being very important. You may think, “I have to think about this.” When that thought arises, then simply remind yourself that there are twenty-four hours in a day, and, at this moment, you have designated this time as meditation time, not as thinking-about-the-future time. And you can simply say to yourself, “I will think about this later.”

Now, rather than thinking about the past or thinking about the future, what is recommended in meditation is simply to maintain a direct awareness of your present experience, the present moment. And this means that, while thoughts will continue to arise—and they may be extremely intense, they may have a strong emotional tinge or content to them—simply don’t follow them, don’t get involved with the content of thought. Now, this does not inhibit in any way the clarity of your mind. Not following a thought does not make you less aware. It makes you less conceptual. So, if you allow your mind to simply rest in direct experience of the present moment and are not drawn by the contents of the thoughts that arise in your mind, then your mind will come to abide in a state of natural peace, which is extremely helpful.

Now, when you rest in awareness of the present moment and do not think about the past or the future, then for a short time not much thinking will happen; not many thoughts will appear. And this resting in the present moment is not the same thing as trying to get rid of thoughts. It’s not like the thought, “I must get rid of all my thoughts,” which is a thought, or, “I must cultivate a state of non-conceptuality.” It’s not a recollection or reflection upon your intention and motivation in meditation. It’s a state that is, in itself, free of thoughts of hope and fear. Now, we are not free of hope and fear. We hope to attain buddhahood. We hope to attain


freedom, and so on. But, while those are your motivations, in the context of the meditation, you do not entertain them. In other words, the thoughts, “I would like this to go well; I would like this meditation to work out; I’m afraid it might not; I’m afraid I’m thinking too much,” have no special status. These are thoughts just like any other thoughts. So what you are cultivating here is simply allowing your mind to rest naturally in present experience, and no thought that could possibly arise in that state is an

exception. And, therefore, any thought is just simply let go of naturally.

Now, initially, you can only do this for a very brief period of time. And the faculty which you are applying at that point—and it’s also a term for the experience or stage of experience—is called “placement.” And placement here is simply being able to rest your mind for a very brief period of time without thinking about the past or the future. Now, as you continue to practice, then these very, very brief periods of placement will start to somewhat lengthen—which is to say, the period of time during which you can rest in present awareness without becoming distracted by a thought, without losing awareness to a thought, will lengthen. And when these periods get somewhat lengthened, then that stage and that faculty is called “continual placement.”

Continual doesn’t mean unbroken or continuous; it just means slightly longer. And then there is the further development of being able to return

from distraction, and this is called “returning placement,” or “returning to placement.” And this is being able, through the use of mindfulness and alertness, to recognize that you’ve become distracted and to return to this placement, this state of direct or simple awareness.

Well, these are the various points of the mental technique. So, we could stop here for this morning, and conclude with the dedication. If you have any questions about any of this, there will be time to ask them this afternoon. 

**If you allow your mind to simply rest in direct experience of the present moment and are not drawn by the contents of the thoughts that arise in your mind, then your mind will come to abide in a state of natural peace, which is extremely helpful**



Photo by Ryszard K. Frackiewicz

# Transforming Samsaric Consciousness Into the Five Wisdoms

By The V. V. Thrangu Rinpoche

Rinpoche's Seattle teachings on the practice of meditation continue with this transcript from the afternoon of May 25, 1996. Lama Yeshe Gyamtso was the translator.

## The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche

**T**he technique of meditation that we looked at this morning was one in which you have no particular object on which you focus, but rather in which you allow your mind to come to rest naturally. Now, the ability to allow your mind to remain at rest without a particular object on which you focus depends upon the presence of the faculties of mindfulness and alertness. Essentially, mindfulness is the actual recollection or memory of your intention, which is the recollection that you are attempting to remain without being distracted. By being distracted, we mean following thoughts, getting involved in the content of thoughts. And mindfulness is therefore the faculty of recollecting that you are engaged in the act of meditation and are not going to follow your thoughts. Mindfulness is a *samskara*, a mental formation, and as long as it is present in the act of meditation, as long as this mindfulness is present, then your mind can remain at rest. And the mindfulness also will bring out the natural clarity or lucidity of your mind and will produce a state of mental stability. As long as this mindfulness is present, then you will also possess alertness as well.

In order to practice meditation, you need to understand something about the characteristics and workings of your mind. This is studied throughout the Buddhist tradition and, in particular, in the vajrayana tradition. The first thing that needs to be understood is that we can make a distinction between the mind and mental

arisings or mental formations. And the way we look at or classify the mind varies a little bit between different traditions.

In the context of the shravakayana, or the vehicle of the hearers, then it is said that mind consists of six types of consciousnesses. These are six types of consciousnesses that we experience clearly, that manifest clearly in our experience. In the mahayana traditions we generally talk about eight types of consciousnesses, which are those six types of consciousnesses which are experienced clearly plus another two which are constantly present and are never particularly clearly manifest.

With regard to the six consciousnesses, the first five of these are what are called the consciousnesses of the five gates, the five gates referring to the five senses. The first of these is the eye consciousness. The eye consciousness is that which experiences as its object visual form, various shapes and colors and so on, on the basis of or relying upon the organic support of the physical eye. And that is the eye consciousness. The second is the ear consciousness, which in much the same way experiences its objects, which are the various sounds, pleasant and unpleasant and neutral and so on, through the medium of relying upon its organic support, which is the ear. The third consciousness is called the nose consciousness, and it experiences various smells as objects, through the organic support, or relying upon the organic support, of the nose. The fourth is the tongue consciousness, which experiences various tastes—sweet, bitter, sour, salty, and so on—relying upon the organic support of the tongue. The fifth consciousness is called the body consciousness or tactile consciousness, and the objects of this consciousness are all forms of tactile sensation. Whereas the other four organic supports were specific sense organs, which primarily perform their specific functions, here the organic support is the entire body, all of which can detect or feel a tactile

sensation. So the fifth consciousness is called either the body consciousness or the tactile consciousness.

The sixth consciousness is the mental consciousness, and it's always enumerated by the learned as the sixth because in the case of any of the first five consciousnesses, it will ensue after them or follow upon them. In general, the object of the sixth consciousness is all things, anything that can be thought of, because it is this consciousness that thinks about the past, thinks about the future, thinks about the present. But also this consciousness experiences all of the objects of the five senses: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. However, it does not experience them in the direct and clear manner of the five sense consciousnesses themselves. What happens is that

**This mental replica is not a direct experience, but a vague approximation, which forms the basis for the subsequent conceptuality of recognizing it as such and such, or good and bad**

following the generation of one of the sense consciousnesses, a mental replica or image of that particular sense consciousness is generated, which is called a mental consciousness. This mental replica is not a direct experience, but has been called a vague approximation. And this vague approximation forms the basis for the subsequent conceptuality of recognizing it as such and such, or good and bad and so on, which ensues. Therefore, while it does base some of its content upon the five sense consciousnesses, the sixth consciousness itself does not rely upon a particular organic support like a sense organ. It's generated following any of the five

and can also arise under other circumstances. It relies essentially upon cognition, or cognitive capacity itself, as its support.

Now, the five sense consciousnesses are nonconceptual, which means that they can only perform their specific function of mere experience. So the eye consciousness sees forms and the ear consciousness hears sounds and so on. Therefore, they can only experience the present, and only directly. Now, the present and the past and the future are important concepts which are discussed



a great deal in the study of Buddhism. The present, of course, ceases immediately, and by ceasing, it becomes the past. The future, which does not yet exist while it is the future, occurs, at which point, once it has occurred, it is not the future any more but is the present. So the present, this term “the present,” or “now,” really refers to an instant in between the past and the future. And this is all the five sense consciousnesses can experience. Your eyes, for example, can only see the present. Your eyes cannot see what is past nor can they see what is the future. And not only that, but your eyes cannot estimate or evaluate the present. Your eye consciousness only sees shapes and colors. It does not, in itself, recognize these various shapes and colors as some “thing” or another, does not conceptualize about them. Now, all of the five sense consciousnesses are, in the same way, nonconceptual. The sixth consciousness, however, is conceptual, because it recognizes things, it brings concepts to bear upon experience and thereby confuses the experiences with the concepts about those experiences, including the confusion of a present experience with a past experience of something similar or apparently the same. So the sixth consciousness, which is conceptual, not only experiences the present but brings the concepts of the past and the future to bear upon this present experience.

Those six consciousnesses are called unstable or fluctuating, which means that they are suddenly generated by the presence of various causes and conditions, and then they cease when those causes and conditions are no longer present.

The other two consciousnesses in the list of eight, which are the consciousness which is the mental afflictions and the all-basis consciousness, are by contrast referred to as constant consciousnesses, which means that they are not suddenly generated and then suddenly ceasing; they are always present. However, while they are always there, they are not clear or manifest or obvious, like the first six. They are always there, but they are very hard to detect. The first of these

two, the seventh consciousness or the consciousness which is the mental afflictions, or *klesha* consciousness, is the innate fixation on a self that we all possess or that afflicts all of us. It’s this innate assumption of “I.” Now, this is present whether we recollect it or not, whether we think of it or not, whether we’re conscious or not, whether we’re walking or sitting. No matter what we’re doing, this persists. Now, sometimes, when we think “I,” we generate a literally conscious fixation on a self. That is not the seventh consciousness. That is the sixth consciousness’s version of fixation on a self, because that is sometimes there and sometimes not. The seventh consciousness, this fundamental fixation on a self, is always there, and in fact it will be there until you attain the eighth level of bodhisattva realization.

**This fundamental fixation on a self . . . will be there until you attain the eighth level of bodhisattva realization**

The eighth consciousness is called the all-basis consciousness, and it is the mere cognitive lucidity which is the fundamental basis for the rest of the functionings of mind. And because it is the basis for all of the rest of the mental functionings or activities, it’s called the all-basis. Now, it is on this basis that all of the habits of samsara are piled: habits of karma, of *kleshas*, and so on. And through variations in one’s

habituation—the habits that you accumulate—then various results arise. Through various types of habituation, then you tend to cultivate more virtuous and fewer unvirtuous states of mind, or the other way around; and through all of these variations and habituation which produce habits that are laid onto or piled onto the all-basis, then you experience the world in your own particular way. Various appearances arise, and you experience the fluctuations; and to the extent you experience fluctuations in the degree of mental affliction, you experience fluctuations in your intelligence and your compassion, and so on.

Now, the all-basis, together with the other seven—all of these—are what are called the eight consciousnesses. And through the practice of meditation in particular and the practice of dharma in general, gradually these are transformed into what

are called the five wisdoms, which means that their basic nature is revealed. And the full revelation of these, the full transformation of the manifestation of these from the samsaric manifestation of the eight consciousnesses into the pure manifestation, is the five wisdoms. The full and final extent of this is buddhahood.

Ultimately, of course, the eight consciousnesses have to be completely transformed into the five wisdoms. But when we're beginning to practice meditation, and in particular tranquility and insight meditation, which of these eight consciousnesses are we actually using? The five sense consciousnesses are outward directed, which is to say, they can only perform their specific, nonconceptual functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and experiencing tactile sensations, respectively. Therefore, they cannot be used in an intentional act of meditation. The two constant consciousnesses, the consciousness which is the mental afflictions and the all-basis consciousness, are, of course, ultimately things we want to get rid of. But we don't need to try to get rid of them now, principally because we cannot get rid of them now; we can't even detect them directly. So they, also, cannot be used in the process of meditation.

The only consciousness among the eight which fulfills the necessary criteria for being a tool we can use in meditation, and also needs to be applied in this way or it will continue to get more and more confused—will continue to get worse—is the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness. The sixth consciousness is conceptual and, therefore, can support an intentional act of meditation. The sixth consciousness also is that which generates and experiences thoughts and all the various sorts of *kleshas* which are the contents of thoughts. It can be refined. While it is very coarse in its usual manifestation, the sixth consciousness can be softened; it can be refined.

So it is the sixth consciousness that actually meditates.

Now, the way the sixth consciousness arises is

as a central mind surrounded, so to speak, by mental arisings. And the mind, the central mind, is the cognitive clarity itself. And the mental arisings are the various things that appear in the mind. And there are various lists of these. For example, there are those that are always present in any intentional or volitional action, such as sensation, intelligence, intention, resolution, and so on. Then there are those that are specifically virtuous, such as faith and compassion, and those that are specifically negative, such as spitefulness.

All of these arise, under various circumstances, together with the sixth consciousness. And whichever of them arise depends upon the habituation of that particular individual.

Some of these can be either virtuous or unvirtuous; for example, sleep is one that can be virtuous sometimes and unvirtuous other times.

Now, among these mental arisings, the ones that we employ in the practice of meditation are ones such as *samadhi*, or mental absorption, which is the faculty of the mind's remaining stable, without moving or changing; and then mindfulness or recollection, which was presented earlier, and is the faculty of not forgetting, or the faculty of recollecting what you are trying to do and what you are trying not to do; and then alertness, which comes along with mindfulness, as well as intention and, we would have to say, resolution or will, which is a further development of intention.

Now, the way that you employ these in meditation is not to attempt to overpower or control rigidly the sixth consciousness, but to allow your mind to simply relax naturally. And the relaxation of the mind in this way is the beginning of tranquility or *shinay*.

When you are meditating, you need to relax into a state of stillness, which is to say where your mind is at rest, without impeding the mind's clarity or lucidity. And, while you're practicing, there will arise a variety of experiences. Some of them are lucid, some of them are not lucid. Among the experiences which will arise, there are some that indicate defects in the meditation. One of these is torpor, which has two varieties. There's what we

**So it is the sixth  
consciousness  
that actually  
meditates**

could call torpor itself, and there's obscurity, which is a further development of that. Torpor is the absence of clarity, the absence of any cognitive lucidity in the meditation, and obscurity is even beyond that, where there's a thick dullness. Now, the problem with torpor and obscurity is that obviously they bring about the disappearance of mindfulness and, therefore, of alertness as well.

Another problem that can arise in meditation is called excitement. Excitement is when the lucidity of the mind becomes too intense and becomes conceptual. And, therefore, the mind generates lots of thoughts—past, present, and future, and so on—that are so many and so intense that you can't stop them or let go of them. Now, this can be either a pleasant or an unpleasant excitement. It could be excessive excitement in being too happy or too enthusiastic. Or it could be a feeling of deep unhappiness or discontentment. In either case, the result is the thoughts which distract you.

Now, there are, obviously, a lot of things that can go wrong with meditation, but basically all of them are included within these two types of defects, torpor and excitement.

There are three things you can do in general to get rid of either of these defects. And the three things are what we could call external changes, visualization, and using motivation.

If we look at torpor, first of all, using motivation to get rid of torpor can be effective, because the nature of torpor is a mental dullness which is, to some extent, a lack of motivation. So, therefore, recollecting the qualities of the dharma and of the Buddha and recollecting the benefits of meditation can sometimes promote the clarity that will cut through the torpor.

And then, secondly, using external changes would be, for example, making sure that the place in which you are meditating is sufficiently illuminated—possibly turning up the lights—and making sure that you're not too hot, that you're not over-

dressed, and that your body is cool enough.

Then with regard to visualization, when you are experiencing torpor, you can visualize in your heart, which is to say in your body at the level of the heart, a white, four-petalled lotus, which is very, very bright and brilliant; and in the center of this lotus is a tiny white sphere of light. And then, having visualized that, you think that the sphere of light comes up through the center of your body and shoots out the top of your head. That visualization is very helpful for dispelling torpor.

Then there are three corresponding ways to work with excitement.

Generally speaking, excitement can come from either pleasant or unpleasant mental states. You could be excited or agitated by guilt, for example, or you could be agitated or excited by something that makes you very happy, that you can't stop thinking about. In either case, the basic problem is that the thoughts keep coming back again and again and again, and you can't get rid of them. Generally speaking, the way to work with motivation here is to cultivate a little bit of sadness. Sadness is very helpful for dealing with excitement. So you could contemplate the defects of samsara, the

sufferings of the lower realms, impermanence, and so on. Generally speaking, anything that lessens clinging, fixation, and attachment will help with the problem of excitement.

Now, the second way to work with it is using external changes in the environment. And, whereas, when you were working with the problem of torpor, you wanted everything bright and cool, and you wanted your physical posture as erect as possible, here you can actually slump a little bit, and it may help calm you down. And, especially, the room in which you meditate should be not too bright, if you're suffering from excitement, and you should make sure you're warm enough. You should be at least warm enough when this problem occurs.

And, then, thirdly, as for visualization, in this case, you visualize that this four-petalled lotus in

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your heart is jet black in color, and the little sphere of light in its center is also black. And this time, instead of going up, you think that it, the little sphere of light, drops down from the lotus, goes straight down the middle of your body, out of the bottom, and keeps on going down, into the ground; and that will help very much to calm you down.

So that was a little bit about meditation, and if you have any questions, now's the time.

**Question:** You mentioned about the sixth consciousness. Its support is non-organic. It doesn't have any fixation the way the previous five senses do. In what way does it fixate on cognition, and what role does the brain have to play with mind?

**Rinpoche:** Well, all of the consciousnesses rely, to some degree, upon the brain as an organic support in how they operate. But the sixth does not particularly do so more than the others. The reason that the sixth is not said to have a specific organic support is that the sixth consciousness arises to investigate and label the immediately preceding consciousness. Now, the immediately preceding consciousness could be one of the five sense consciousnesses or it could be another sixth consciousness. For example, suppose you have an eye consciousness of various shapes and colors. Then that ceases. Immediately upon its cessation, a sixth consciousness will arise that will attempt to distinguish and recognize and then label and have opinions about what the eye consciousness saw. In the same way, after an ear consciousness occurs, in which maybe you heard someone say something, then immediately after that ear consciousness ceases, a mental consciousness will arise which will attempt to recognize the words, if they were words, and then to do such things as decide, well, "Were they true, or were they false," and so on. The same thing happens when you smell something, when you taste something, when you have a tactile sensation; immediately after the cessation of the sense consciousness, the mental consciousness

arises and starts to investigate. Now, this can occur also with and subsequent to a mental consciousness. In other words, when a mental consciousness ceases, then subsequently, immediately afterwards, another mental consciousness will arise that will

**The variations among children, like the variations among adults, depend upon the previous habits which those children came into this life with**

have opinions about that previous mental consciousness. That's how a thought is generated on the basis of a previous thought, for example. It's for this reason that in abidharma, the mental consciousness is said to rely upon the cessation of a previous consciousness as its support. So its support is not organic the way it is for the sense consciousnesses. It's not that it's totally uninvolved with the sense consciousnesses; it's that the support for its specific function is the cessation of the

previous consciousness which makes up its subject matter or object.

**Question:** . . . We tend to develop our habits . . . a small child on a playground takes the toy away from the other one, and then as we grow, our habits become more sophisticated, and we learn more politeness, and so as we advance toward adulthood, our structure of habits begins to lie one on top of the other, like layers of an onion. But I've noticed that when I'm under tremendous pressure, my sophisticated adult habits will very often revert back to more childish responses, and I'm curious how, as we advance on the path of meditation, we dispel all of that. Do we take the onion layers back away one by one and move towards childhood, or is it some other mechanism?

**Rinpoche:** It's true that there is a directness and simplicity about the behavior of children in general, but the simplicity is foolish. Children are not simple and straightforward and direct because they are more virtuous but because they don't know any other way to be. They don't understand tact or

politeness. However, this can vary a great deal among children. Some children are very clever indeed, from early on. Some children are very selfish; some children think only of others. And the variations among children, like the variations among adults, depend upon the previous habits which those children came into this life with. Now, while it's true that, in certain types of crisis, we can forget some of the habits we've accrued in our socialization as adults and revert to our behavior as children, but this is not what happens when you practice meditation. Because what meditation uncovers or reveals is not your habits from early life but the inherent lucidity that is what your mind is, fundamentally. And this lucidity is your basic intelligence. And as it is revealed, and as it intensifies, your wisdom, in a practical sense, increases. You become more sensitive to what needs to be done. Of course, you become less deceptive, and so on, but your truthfulness is not based on self-interest; it would be based on a lack of competitiveness, of arrogance, and so on. All of the inherent goodness in your mind starts to reveal itself, and your spitefulness and so on diminish.

In general, our thoughts serve to obscure and suppress our innate wisdom and our innate qualities. And, as you let go of the confusion of thought, this innate wisdom starts to reveal itself, it starts to rise up to the surface. And as it reveals itself, your understanding of things grows accordingly.

**Question:** Sometimes, when I'm working, I'm very focused and very alert and very aware and very mindful. Not always, but sometimes. And my question is, can that be, or is that a form of meditation, or can it be made a form of meditation, and do you have ways to enhance that, or recommendations on how to enhance work as meditation?

**Rinpoche:** Well, this is not meditation in the sense

of even placement, in the sense of actual meditation practice, but it is mindfulness and it is helpful. First of all, and most obviously, the more mindful and alert you are when you're working, the better your work will be. But the way to use this in meditation practice is that, if you actually practice meditation, which is to say allowing the mind to rest evenly, as was explained, and in that context, intentionally apply mindfulness and alertness, and cultivate non-distraction, then in post-meditation, by maintaining this type of natural mindfulness that arises when you're working or in other post-meditation activities, you'll very much support the practice of meditation. But meditation does have to be actually practiced.

**Question:** I'm wondering, how does creating a new mental formation, such as visualization, remove other mental formations such as *samskaras*, and is it a process of suppression, weakening, or can it completely eradicate those *samskaras*?

**Rinpoche:** Well, first of all, there isn't really such a thing as a new mental arising, in the sense of a new type. According to the common lists, the usual number of fifty-one types of mental arisings includes all the various types of things that can arise within the mind. And these are all of the various sorts of things which are brought together, or, say, brought around, introduced, by the fourth aggregate, of formation, which in this case refers to mental formations or mental arisings. Now, these can be both virtuous and unvirtuous, and they can be neutral, and so on. So in a sense, this aggregate is that which performs a lot of the functions of samsara. But the nature of the aggregate itself is not inherently samsaric, so therefore it can be transformed; and the transformation of this fourth aggregate of *samskara* or formation consists of the increasing of the useful mental formations, the ones that are necessary and/or useful, and the letting go of the useless or counterproductive ones. And, as this process goes

**What meditation uncovers or reveals is not your habits from early life but the inherent lucidity that is what your mind is, fundamentally**

on, then gradually this aggregate is transformed into what is called the wisdom of accomplishment. And, when this is completed, this is the transformation of all forms of attachment and aversion and deception and so on. All of this stuff is transformed into a tremendous capacity to accomplish anything, to get anything done in a very practical way.

Now, in general, the meditation upon deities, of course, is connected with this and all kinds of transformation, but not in particular with working with mental formations alone.

**Question:** Rinpoche, this morning, you talked about *tonglen*, taking and sending. And, as far as I can remember, you said that, when we practice *tonglen*, we didn't necessarily take part in or were involved in the conditions of suffering that we were taking in—the suffering of other people that we were taking in. If we're not involved in the conditions, which I think is like cause and effect, then how can we become involved, or how can we participate? How can we become non-dual, if we have nothing to do with those conditions? Could you say a little more about that?

**Translator:** I suspect this is something in the way I translated it. It sounds like doublespeak on my part, if it's what I remember. I'll check. I think it's me, not him, but let's find out.

Let me say what I remember Rinpoche saying. What I think he may have said that for was that, although, when you're practicing taking and sending, you actually generate the intention to take on the sufferings of others, you will not actually experience those "sufferings." And I said "conditions"—I remember saying that, but I don't remember his saying that. But I can ask him.

**Translator:** Well he said he did say conditions, but I think he's just covering up for me.

**Rinpoche:** The point is that the distinction that

was being made, in any case, was between the intention to take on the sufferings of others and actually experiencing the sufferings of others. When you're doing the meditation, you actually think, "May I actually take on the sufferings of others; may they not have to experience them; may only I have to experience them." And you generate that intention as vividly and as genuinely as you can. But it is impossible. You cannot experience the sufferings of others. Because experience is entirely individual. And experiences may be similar, but they cannot be shared or transferred. An individual's experience of suffering or any other kind of experience comes from that individual's accumulated karma and habits. And, if you have not accumulated the karma and habits to have a certain experience, you cannot experience it on the basis of somebody else's accumulation of karma and habits. So, in fact, you cannot actually take the

In fact, you cannot actually take the experiences of others away from them and experience them yourself

experiences of others away from them and experience them yourself. However, it is meaningful to generate the intention to do so, because by generating the intention to experience the suffering of others and to give them all of your happiness, then you are cultivating an attitude which sees others as much more important than yourself, which is a very powerful and direct contravention of our most dangerous and negative habit. And, because you're cultivating the intention to take on the sufferings of others, while you cannot literally do

that, the generation of that intention will cause you to help them a great deal. So it does benefit others. But you can't literally experience their suffering.

**Question:** Rinpoche, first of all, thank you for coming to Seattle. My question is also about *tonglen*. Do you think that there should be any prerequisite experience before practicing *tonglen*, such as meditating for some length of time or some experience with *shinay*, or taking the refuge vow or taking the bodhisattva vow?

**Rinpoche:** Of course, it's good that people have

some preparation, such as meditation experience and the vow of refuge and so on, before they practice *tonglen*. But there's no necessity that they have any such prior experience or commitment. If someone who has not taken the vow of refuge practices *tonglen* with pure intention, then they will still increase their love and compassion. They'll still be able to cultivate the desire and intention to benefit others. With regard to the need, in particular, for a prior experience of *shinay*, then, if someone who has very good *shinay* practices *tonglen*, then, of course, it will be very effective. But even if someone who doesn't have very good *shinay*—someone who hasn't practiced *shinay* very much—practices *tonglen*, it will still benefit them. So, because there's still benefit, it's not appropriate to say there is such and such requirement.

**Question:** Rinpoche, getting back to the previous question, about *tonglen*, I have two questions that arose from that. One is that it's sort of—I've never heard it in teachings per se, but it's commonly talked about that a lama takes on the karma of his disciples; that's why he's sick or whatever. So is actually taking on the sickness—is that mostly for enlightened beings only? And, secondly, when we want to benefit a particular sentient being—maybe it might not be in

the teachings; you're supposed to pray for all beings—but it's natural, when our lama is sick or our mother is sick or whatever, we want to benefit that person, so we're doing practice just for that person, not with our meditation in mind whatsoever. So would we do Tara practice? Is that more appropriate at that point?

**Rinpoche:** The answer to your first question is that it's not possible to really take on the karma of another being, and that when lamas or gurus appear to do so, of course, they have the intention to do so, the wish to do so. They wish they could, you know. And because they wish they could, then they may sometimes appear to do so, largely because of the attitude of people around them. But, in fact, they are not really literally taking on and experiencing what would otherwise be the suffering of others. Not literally.

The second question: It's acceptable to do *tonglen* as a practice in order to benefit another specific person or specific set of persons, provided that your intention is really to benefit them—provided that you're not just doing it, and cultivating it as sort of an attachment. But if you're actually doing it to benefit those people, of course, it's fine.


So we're going to stop, and we'll conclude with the dedication. 



Photo by Ryszard K. Frackiewicz

Rinpoche with the group that attended the Seattle teachings

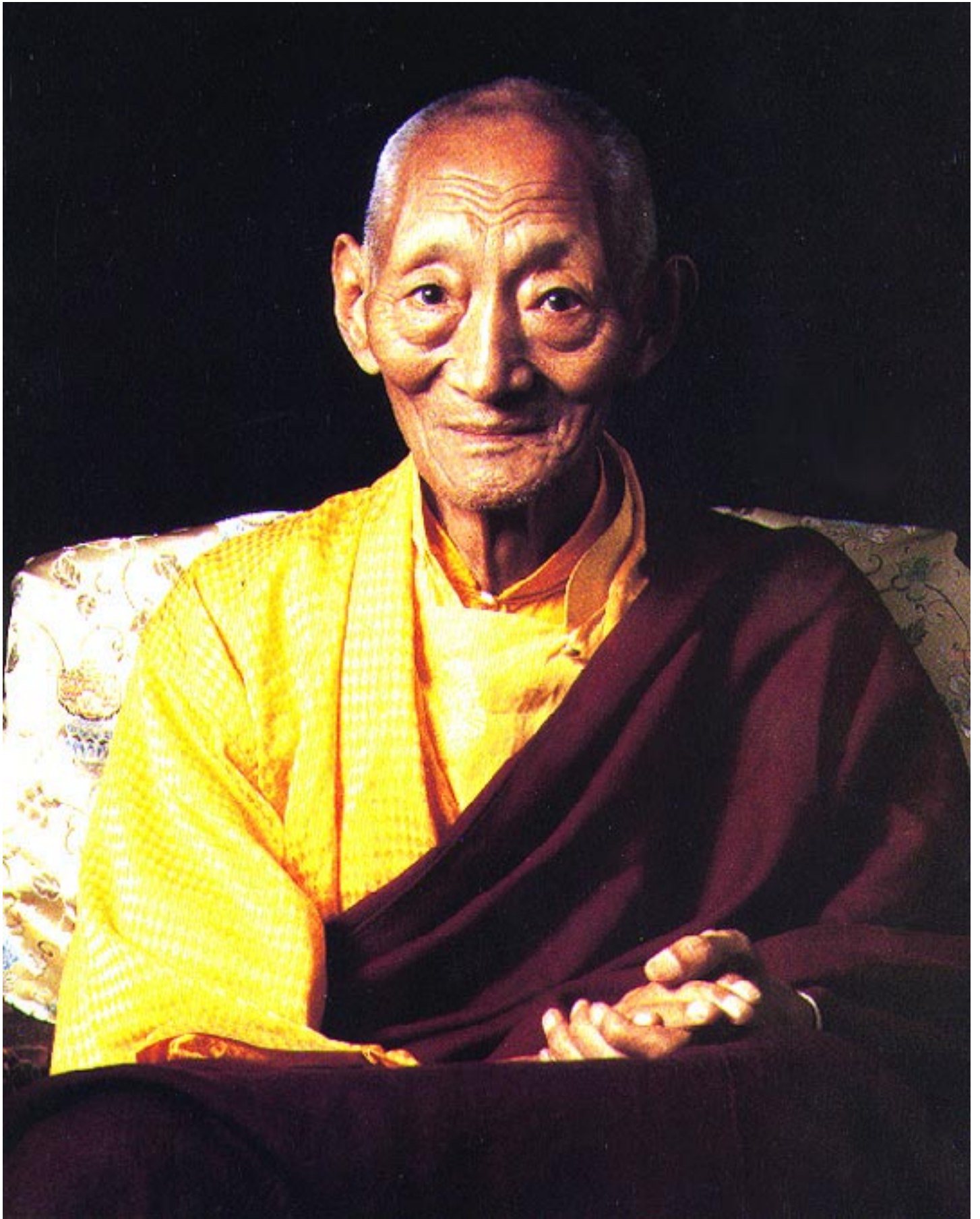


Photo by Don Farber

His Holiness The Very Venerable Lord of Refuge Kalu Rinpoche

24 SHENPEN ÖSEL



# Taking Refuge

By His Holiness The Lord of Refuge Kalu Rinpoche

**A**t this time we are exceedingly fortunate in that not only have we all obtained a precious human body, a precious human birth, but based upon this, we have actually entered the door of the dharma, have given rise to faith in the teachings, and have actually practiced them.

The entrance into the door of the teachings of buddha-dharma is the taking of refuge in the three jewels [Buddha, dharma, sangha]. If one does not go for refuge with faith to the three jewels, but rather goes for refuge to worldly deities [i.e., unenlightened deities], and is unaware of the qualities of the three jewels, then one is not a practitioner of buddha-dharma.

Therefore, it is said that the root of the Buddha's teaching is faith in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. Because without faith in these, one will have no conviction about the validity of the teachings, and, lacking this conviction, as well as lacking conviction about the qualities of the sangha, one will be unwilling or unable to study the teachings. Even if one does study them to some extent, it will be like the games of children.

The word in Tibetan for the three jewels, *könchok*, literally means "rare and supreme." The first syllable, *kön*, means "rare." It points to the fact that the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha are like the rarest of diamonds in that only someone with the [necessary] karmic connection and the necessary merit will even hear their names, let alone be able to develop faith in them and receive teachings from them. The second syllable, *chok*, means "supreme" or "best," and again, like the diamond in the example, the three jewels are supreme in that only by relying upon them, can all of one's needs and wishes as well as ultimate freedom be accomplished.

The essence of the mind is emptiness; the nature of the mind is actually the indivisible union of emptiness, clarity, and awareness. The name

that is given to the actual true nature of mind is *yeshe* or wisdom [sometimes rendered as primordial awareness], something that all beings possess. However, sentient beings do not recognize the actual nature of their mind to be what it is. This lack of recognition is like throwing mud or sand into pure water; it becomes sullied or defiled. When the lack of recognition is present, one no longer speaks of *yeshe* or wisdom, one speaks of *namshé* or consciousness. But the distinction between these two states of mind is nothing other than the presence of lack of recognition by the mind of the mind's own nature.

The failure of the mind to recognize its own true nature is what is meant by the term *marikpa*, or ignorance, the first level of obscuration or defilement in the mind. As a result of this ignorance, there arises in the mind the imputation of an "I" and an "other," [the other being something that is conceived as] something that is other than the mind. This dualistic clinging, something that we have had throughout beginningless time and that never stops [until enlightenment], is the second level of obscuration, the obscuration of habits [habitual tendency].

Based upon this dualistic clinging arise the three root mental afflictions: mental darkness [variously rendered by translators as ignorance, bewilderment, confusion, etc.], desire, and aggression. Based upon these three afflictions there arise some 84,000 various mental afflictions enumerated by the Buddha, all of which together comprise the third level of obscuration, called the obscuration of mental afflictions [variously rendered as *klesha*, emotional affliction, conflicting emotions, etc.]. Under the influence of these, we perform actions that are obscured in their nature, which result in the fourth level of obscuration, called the obscuration of actions or karma.

These four levels or types of obscurations are the cause for all sentient beings to wander in samsara. If these are removed or purified, then the inherent qualities of the mind's true nature, which

we refer to as wisdom or *yeshe*, will naturally manifest and spread like the rays of the sun. The word in Tibetan for the removal of these obscurations, *sang*, means "cleansing," and the word for the spreading of the inherent qualities of the mind that occurs as a result of that cleansing is *gye*, or "increasing." *Sangye*, these two words together, is the Tibetan word for a buddha. Therefore, what is meant by buddhahood is the recognition and realization of the complete purity of the mind.

When the nature of the mind becomes fully manifest, it possesses what are usually enumerated as twenty-seven extraordinary qualities, such as complete unchanging emptiness and great bliss.

In order to benefit those to be trained, the mind of a buddha exhibits what are usually enumerated as thirty-two qualities, which are outlined as the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, and the eighteen qualities of unmistakenness. A buddha, for instance, knows the nature and situation of all of samsara and all of nirvana. He or she knows the past, present, and future of every sentient being.

Arising from these qualities of the mind of a buddha are qualities of speech, traditionally sixty qualities, possessed only by a buddha and not by any ordinary human or god. One such quality is that if a buddha gives one teaching at one time to 1,000 people, each of whom speaks a different language and is from a different place, each single person will understand what the buddha is saying. Beyond that, a buddha has the capacity to teach in such a way that each single person receives the particular kind of teaching, at the same time, that the individual needs to receive. So, with one teaching of dharma, a buddha can give the remedy to each person for his or her particular strongest mental affliction.

The qualities of the body of a buddha are experienced at various levels. Particularly the samboghakaya, or body of complete enjoyment of a buddha, is experienced only by bodhisattvas residing upon the eighth, ninth, and tenth levels of realization. It is a bodhisattva residing upon one of those

## What is meant by buddhahood is the recognition and realization of the complete purity of the mind

levels who sees the forms of the sambhogakaya, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, Avalokiteshvara, and so forth. The sambhogakaya is actually experienced as possessing the appearance with which we are familiar, the glorious silk garments, jewel ornaments, the pure form, and so forth. The actual appearance of the sambhogakaya is an expression of the complete possession by a buddha of all qualities of the world and beyond the world.

In order to train ordinary beings, the buddhas manifest as nirmanakaya, as in the case of the Buddha Shakyamuni. Such a nirmanakaya possesses what are called the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of full buddhahood. These include the *ushnisa* on the top of the head, the thousand-spoked dharma wheels on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and so forth. These qualities only arise on the body of a buddha and not upon the body of any human or worldly god. They arise in such a way that anyone who sees the form of a buddha immediately delights in it and finds it beautiful to see. In this way, the qualities of the body, speech, and mind of a buddha are superior to anything and anyone else.

The actual excellence or superiority of a buddha consists in the fact that a buddha has the wisdom, compassion, and ability to give beings exactly what each needs in order to become free from the sufferings of samsara. So, in order to benefit beings, the Buddha teaches the dharma, the second of the three rare and supreme ones, the three jewels. And as sentient beings possess 84,000 different mental afflictions (*kleshas*), the Buddha taught 84,000 teachings of the dharma.

There are two aspects to the jewel of the dharma. The first of these is the actual words by which the dharma is transmitted, the words of the Buddha, and the words and texts which record them. The transmission of these is called the dharma of transmission. But the meaning of these

words, the realization of this meaning—whether it be the meaning of emptiness, the meaning of compassion or, from the tantric point of view, the meaning of the development and fulfillment stages—is called the dharma of realization. So the dharma of transmission and the dharma of realization are the two aspects of the jewel of the dharma.

Those who listen to the teachings of the dharma, study them, and put them into practice to an extent to which they can guide others are the sangha. Among the sangha, those who through the practice of dharma have reached the first level of bodhisattva realization and reside in the first up to the tenth level of realization are called the “exalted ones.” Those who, having listened to the teachings, studied them, and put them into practice, and reside on the two paths that are preliminary to the ten levels of bodhisattva realization and application are called the “sangha of ordinary individuals.”

Therefore, one must begin by becoming aware of and understanding exactly what the qualities of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha are. By doing so, one will give rise to faith in them. One will be able to feel one’s faith and go for refuge to them. It is necessary that this occur as a basis for practice. Beyond that, the going for refuge must be something that is continually practiced and renewed in one’s daily practice; this is extremely important.

**T**he reason why the taking of refuge is so important is that at present we are immersed in samsara, which is an experience of suffering, an experience of impermanence, and an experience of constant change. If we wish to free ourselves from this, we cannot do so simply by ourselves. However, we can travel the path to liberation by relying upon the compassion of the three jewels. That is why it is necessary to go for refuge to them.

As ordinary beings, we do not know or understand the methods that we must engage in to obtain buddhahood. For that reason we need a

**One must begin by becoming aware of the qualities of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, and by understanding exactly what they are**

guide or a companion on the path to buddhahood. That is something that can be explained by an example that is easily understood by Westerners. If one wanted to get from here to New York City and one tried to walk, one would either not get there at all or it would take a very long time.

However, if one were to stand by the side of the road and put out one's thumb, then eventually some good-minded individual would stop their car; one could get in, and one would reach the city. It's the same way if we want to reach the city of enlightenment. We have to hitchhike or take refuge in the three jewels.

The Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha are beings or things that are separate from us, distinct from us. We are individuals and we are quite a distance from them. One might ask how it is possible to establish a connection with them.

First of all, all phenomena arise through interdependence, through the actions of causes and conditions. In the case of the path, what must occur is the coming together of the conditions of one's own faith, and the compassion and blessing of the three jewels. If these two come together, then the connection is established and one can travel the path.

The presence of the faith on one's own part and the compassion and qualities on the part of the three jewels is sufficient to create the connection. It does not depend on distance, like a television station that is sending out a television program. If one has the box and the set, one can see the program. If the television station isn't sending it out, then even if one has the TV set one can't see it. If the television station is sending it out but one does not have the TV set, then one also can't see it. But in either case, if these two things are present, then regardless of the distance that separates the two, although there is no direct physical connection that one can see, the television program still arrives somehow. In the same way, the actual blessing and compassion of the three jewels can be received, and can enter one through one's faith.

Another example is that the compassion, bless-

ing, and power of the three jewels are like a hook, and one's faith is like a ring. If these two are present and connect one with another, then the hook will lead the ring, and oneself, held by the ring, from happiness to happiness and finally to liberation.

This is the reason why all the lamas of the Golden Rosary of the Kagyu have always given and continue to give refuge as the basis for the transmission of teachings, why at any time when one receives teachings of buddhadharma, one begins by reciting the refuge, and also why, when one practices the preliminaries, *ngöndro*, the first of these is the 100,000 recitations of the refuge accompanied by prostrations.

The root or basic form of going for refuge is going for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma and the

sangha—the three jewels. This could be called external refuge. Beyond this, from the point of view of the vajrayana, one goes for refuge to the guru as the root of all blessing, the *yidam* as the root of all attainment, and the *dakinis* and dharma protectors as the root of all activity. This is the internal form of going for refuge.

Beyond that, to go for refuge to one's root guru alone—recognizing that he or she is the embodiment of the Buddha, dharma, sangha, and the gurus, *yidams*, and *dakinis* and dharma protectors, the embodiment of all these in one form, possessing all of their qualities—is the secret form of going for refuge.

The form of going for refuge that we use in the Kagyu lineage is called the six-fold refuge because it has six lines to it, three of which are devoted to the three jewels, and three of which are devoted to the three roots. The first two and the last of the six lines are devoted to the three roots and read:

**Line 1:** *I go for refuge to the glorious sacred gurus.*

**Line 2:** *I go for refuge to the assembly of deities in the mandalas of the yidams.*

**Line 6:** *I go for refuge to the dakas, dakinis,*

## What must occur is the coming together of the conditions of one's own faith, and the compassion and blessing of the three jewels

*and dharma protectors who possess the eye of wisdom.*

There is also an abbreviated form of refuge:

*I go for refuge to the guru.*

*I go for refuge to the Buddha.*

*I go for refuge to the dharma.*

*I go for refuge to the sangha.*

The first line, “I go for refuge to the guru,” expresses one’s conviction that the guru or lama is the embodiment of the three roots because his or her actual form, his/her body, is the guru; his/her speech is the activity of the *dakinis* and dharma protectors; and his or her mind is the nature of the *vidams*. Following that, one goes for refuge externally to the Buddha, the dharma, and sangha. Therefore this shorter form of taking refuge also contains both the three jewels and the three roots.

Then there is the special form of taking refuge of the *mahasiddha* Tang Tong Gyalpo:

*I and all sentient beings, my mothers, who are equal in number to the extent and limits of space, go for refuge to the guru, who is the precious Buddha.*

This is the secret form of taking refuge. One takes refuge in the guru as the embodiment of the three jewels and the three roots.

Then following this, in Tang Tong Gyalpo’s refuge vow, one says,

*I go for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha,*

which is the outer form of taking refuge. Following that, one says,

*I go for refuge to the gurus, yidams, and dakinis and dharma protectors,*

the inner form of taking refuge. Following that, one says,

*I go for refuge to mind itself, which is clarity and emptiness, the dharmakaya.*

This is actually a fourth level of, or fourth approach to taking refuge, which is called the

refuge of suchness or the very secret form of going for refuge.

The refuge of suchness, or the very secret refuge of suchness, is based upon the realization and recognition of one’s own mind as mahamudra, and, therefore, it is the real or ultimate meaning of taking refuge. However, not having this realization, it is difficult for us to actually take refuge in this way. So the external and internal

forms of taking refuge are emphasized. But one should still understand that it is possible to attain full buddhahood simply through the genuine taking of refuge.

It should be understood that the taking of refuge is not a process whereby the Buddha takes those who appear to have devotion to him and leads them to his side. Through taking refuge, one begins a process oneself which, going through various stages, will lead to one’s own realization of the same state, the same experience as the Buddha.

In the sadhana of the *Hundred Families of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones*, it says, in the taking of refuge section,

*I go for refuge to essence, nature, and compassion,* which is to say, the essential emptiness, the natural clarity, and the unimpeded compassionate awareness of the mind;

*I go for refuge to bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality,*

which are the three qualities of meditation experience; and finally

*I go for refuge to the fruit; I go for refuge to the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya.*

Therefore, if someone practices and completes the 100,000 recitations of the refuge vow and the accompanying 100,000 prostrations, this is exceedingly wonderful, and extraordinarily, incalculably beneficial. But even failing that, to recite the refuge prayer every day, at least seven times, is also extraordinarily beneficial. The result of this seemingly quite simple practice is to cause oneself to gradually actually

## It is possible to attain full buddhahood simply through the genuine taking of refuge

attain complete buddhahood, to bring oneself gradually to freedom from the sufferings of samsara, and, beyond that, to be protected in all of one's lifetimes from fear, danger, and suffering.

If the practice and meaning of going for refuge actually become joined to or instilled in one's stream of experience, then faith in the three jewels and the three roots will arise naturally or automatically, and, as a result of that faith, practices which lead to the accumulation of merit will be very easy, will come naturally. For example, not only anything with which one would make offerings—such as flowers, incense, lights, and so forth—but anything that one experiences with the senses that is pleasing, one will immediately see as an offering to the three jewels and the three roots. Anything that is beautiful to the sight, that smells good, that sounds beautiful, and so forth, one will use as offering. And by means of this process and this attitude one will gather a vast accumulation of merit.

If one develops this kind of attitude, then the accumulation of merit becomes extremely easy. Almost any situation can be used in this way. For example, if one is walking along a road and one sees beautiful flowers or fine houses, anything that is pleasing along one's path, then one will immediately think of them as an offering, and mentally offer them to the three jewels and the three roots.

Therefore, all the Kagyupas of the past began their practice with the taking of refuge. By relying upon this as a foundation and basis of all practice they came to realize the ultimate refuge, which is the taking of refuge in one's own ultimate attainment of the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, and by means of this they attained siddhi [realization of buddhahood].

In our present situation as humans, we feel that we are extremely intelligent, that we are free, and that we have control over or power over our own situation, that we can do whatever we wish. But if

we examine the situation we will see that we neither have freedom of body nor freedom of mind, because the actual power in our situation is in the hands of our karma, our mental afflictions, and our habits [principally, our habitual cognition of and clinging to the split between self and other].

If we were free, then we would always have been and would always be happy. We would never become depressed, and nothing unpleasant would ever arise in our minds. If we were free, then we would always remain the same. We would have

always been young, be young, and would always remain that way. But we don't. We have absolutely no control over it; every second of our lives we are growing older and eventually we are going to die.

If we have intense faith, and are able to entrust ourselves to our lamas, to our gurus, and to the three jewels, and supplicate them with complete sincerity, then it is possible to eliminate, or at least lessen, these obscurations, because of the power and compassion of the three jewels.

**T**hat is the meaning of taking refuge, and the engendering of bodhicitta, the attitude of awakening, must go along with that. The

attitude which one engenders when one speaks of bodhicitta is an attitude that is with reference to all sentient beings. And the actual essence of one's consideration of all beings is compassion. This has to be developed in a certain sequence. One must begin by understanding the actual situation of all beings. Then by meditating on this one will develop the attitude of compassion and will become accustomed to it or trained in it.

The situation that must be understood is that wherever there is space, this is filled with sentient beings. There are so many sentient beings that one could say that they are numberless. And each sentient being has been one of one's parents so many times that it would be uncountable. The number of times that any given sentient being has

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our minds**

been one of one's parents is a number beyond reckoning. And this was said by the Buddha. As well, there is not any single being that has not been one's parent. And at the time when beings were one's parents they were of the same kindness towards one as one's parents in this life, which means that, for example, if one was a human being in a lifetime, one's mother in that life carried one in her womb, continually worrying about one's state, whether one would be born alive, whether one would be healthy, and undergoing incredible suffering and sacrifice in order to keep one alive. And after one was born, one's parents looked after one and sacrificed everything for one's own benefit and welfare. And every single sentient being has done this for one countless times.

An example of the way that these rebirths can occur comes from the time of the Buddha, when a disciple of the Buddha, who was an *arhat* named Kateyana, went begging one day. He came across a woman sitting by the side of the road with a small child in her lap whom she was caressing very fondly. The woman was eating some fish, some of which she was feeding to the child, and there was a big dog trying to get the bones of the fish from the woman. She was scolding the dog, kicking it away, and trying to avoid giving it any. With his extraordinary cognition, Kateyana examined the lifetime previous to the present lives of these beings. He saw that the fish had been the woman's father in her previous lifetime. The dog that she was beating had been her mother, and the child that she was cuddling in her lap had been her worst enemy, someone who had continually reviled her, caused scandal about her, someone she had on her own part fought viciously as well.

All sentient beings, who, having been one's parents countless times, have countless times been as kind to one as one's parents in this life, are going through an unending and intolerable experience of suffering through wandering around and around in the three realms of samsara [desire realm, form

realm, and formless realm]. This is actually an ocean of suffering, because what beings experience in any form of birth is only suffering. In the hells there is the agony of heat and cold; as hungry ghosts, the agonies of hunger and thirst; as animals, the suffering of killing and being killed for food and for survival; as humans, the four great sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death, but, beyond, the eight or sixteen lesser sufferings as well; as asuras, the sufferings of jealousy and constant fighting; and as gods, the sufferings of death and fall to a lower birth.

If one actually understands the fact that these beings who have been so kind to one are undergoing an endless experience of intolerable suffering, then one will give rise to the attitude, "What can I do, what must be done to establish all these beings in happiness and freedom from suffering?" This is the beginning of loving kindness and compassion. And that is why we recite, "May all sentient beings

have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering." The cause of happiness is the practice of virtuous action. The cause of suffering is the practice of unvirtuous action. So the attitude, understanding this, that is automatically necessarily given rise to at this point is the aspiration that all sentient beings right now experience happiness and be free from suffering, and also that they accumulate the causes of their future happiness and be free from the accumulation of causes of future suffering. This is the development of loving kindness and compassion.

Further, the mind of every sentient being is empty, unborn. But not recognizing this, sentient beings grasp their minds as an "I," as an ego. And, beyond that, they do not recognize that the nature of the confused appearances of samsara which arise in and to the mind is impermanence and change. And not recognizing this, they undergo endless and continual suffering. If one understands this as well, then it is impossible that one not give

**All sentient beings, who have been one's parents countless times, . . . are going through an unending and intolerable experience of suffering**

rise to compassion automatically.

The mind of any one of us, or of every one of us, has no form. The mind has no color and no shape. Therefore, it is empty. But the mind is not simply empty, in that the mind experiences, can experience the various objects which arise—sights, sounds, and so forth. So the mind has a quality of clarity. That which actually experiences these is the awareness, which is as well a quality of the mind. So the mind is actually the inseparability of emptiness, clarity, and awareness. However, as the clarity and awareness do not themselves possess form, color, size, shape, and so forth, they do not pass beyond the essential emptiness of the mind.

Since the essence of the mind is emptiness, there is nothing in the mind which can die or be destroyed, which means that we have always had this mind, and until we attain buddhahood we will continue to experience this mind and will continue to take rebirth and undergo the sufferings of samsara.

This can be shown by an example. The mind is empty in the sense that space is empty. And it is impossible to kill or destroy space.

This can further be illustrated by examining the situation of the mind at various stages of life. When we are conceived, the parents do not see a mind come floating into the womb. There is no material form to the mind of the being which enters the womb. There is nothing to be seen. When someone dies, one does not see a mind go floating out of the body to somewhere else. There is no materiality or form or physical existence to the mind as such that can be perceived. And even during our lifetime we can't find, pinpoint, or describe the mind with reference to any kind of physical, material, or real characteristics. Therefore, it can be established that the mind is emptiness.

And in both the hinayana and mahayana it is accepted that the direct realization of the emptiness of the mind is the realization of the egolessness of the individual.

**We have always  
had this mind,  
and until  
we attain  
buddhahood  
we will continue  
to experience the  
mind and will  
continue to take  
rebirth**

Although the mind of every sentient being is empty in this way, every sentient being conceives of this empty mind as an “I,” as an ego, and, going beyond that, thinks, “I am, and I have a mind, and I am my mind.” At the same time, the confused appearances which we experience arise as the radiance or projection of this empty mind and in this empty aspect of the mind. For example, as

human beings, we experience the confused appearances or hallucinations that are characteristic of a human life. The nature of these is like a magical illusion, like a dream, like the reflection of the moon in water, like a rainbow, or so forth. We could say that it is very much like film or television. In the case of television, there is this small box, and the images that we see don't particularly exist as such anywhere, and they certainly aren't what they appear to be. And it's hard to say where they are coming from, but they certainly do arise in this small box. And that is very much like the nature of the hallucinations or

confused appearances of samsaric existence.

The illusory nature of what we experience can be seen most clearly by examining the dream state. One can see very clearly by examining the process of dreams that everything that we experience is actually nothing other than the mind. What happens when we go to sleep is that our mind becomes dull and stupid, and as a result we undergo a variety of hallucinations. And at the time these appear to be of the same nature or quality as what we experience when we are awake, except that when we wake up we can't find them anymore. They've disappeared. For example, when we are dreaming, we might see places, people, and events, objects. But when we wake up they are not in the room we were sleeping in. They are not around us. They are not even inside our body. These things are nowhere. They were simply the projections of the mind. And everything we experience is like that.

The nature of these experiences is something that arises or appears while being nonexistent. The



actual manner in which we experience things is through what is called the three bodies. The physical body, in which we experience the waking state, is the body of complete maturation, complete ripening. The body that we seem to experience in the dream state is called the habitual body or the body of habit. And the body that we seem to experience in the interval after death and before the following rebirth is called the mental body.

In this way, all sentient beings, all sentient beings who have been our parents, take that which is impermanent to be permanent, that which is untrue to be true, that which is unreal to be real, and because of this, wander through the three realms of samsara undergoing suffering. Understanding this will cause one to think very strongly that one must bring all of these beings to buddhahood and freedom from this. However at the same time one will understand that the only way that one can bring other beings to buddhahood is by attaining it oneself first. So at this point the intense motivation must develop to attain buddhahood and to engage in the methods that will lead to it.

Therefore, when one arises in the morning, one should first of all take refuge, and then give rise to the enlightened attitude, the attitude of awakening, bodhicitta. Giving rise to the attitude at that point that everything that I do today for the rest of the day will be done for the benefit of sentient beings in order to bring all beings to buddhahood will cause all of one's virtuous actions during the day to increase in power dramatically. And beyond that, even ordinary actions done during the day within that frame of reference, that attitude, will become causes of buddhahood, will become virtuous. Therefore, it is said that the engendering of bodhicitta and the carrying of it through one's activities is like the magical elixir that turns whatever it is painted on, whatever metal it is painted on, into gold.

It is said that if the attitude is good, then the

progression through the paths and stages on the way to enlightenment will be good. And if the attitude is poor, then the progression through the paths and stages will be poor. For that reason, it is said that there is no one instruction more profound or necessary for the attainment of buddhahood than this one instruction upon the arising and maintaining of the attitude of awakening.

All the previous holders of the Kagyu lineage by relying upon refuge and by practicing the outer, inner, and secret refuges attained buddhahood. In doing so they performed vast activities for the

benefit of sentient beings vast as space both while on the path and after they had attained fruition. Not only have they performed this service in the past but they will continue to do so until samsara is empty of sentient beings.

Therefore, as it is said that the distinction between a practitioner of buddha-dharma and someone who is not is the taking of refuge, the distinction between a practitioner of the hinayana and a practitioner of the mahayana is the arising and development of the attitude of awakening. Therefore, let us dedicate the virtue of the teaching and listening to the dharma this morning to the buddhahood of all sentient beings. 57

**There is no one instruction more profound or necessary for the attainment of buddhahood than this one instruction upon the arising and maintaining of the attitude of awakening**

*These teachings were originally translated orally by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso.*



## A Note on the Use of Honorifics

Readers of *Shenpen Ösel* will notice that we have adopted the practice of referring to Kalu Rinpoche as His Holiness The Very Venerable Lord of Refuge Kalu Rinpoche.

The expression, “Lord of Refuge” is a direct translation of the Tibetan, *kyabje*, a title which is placed before the names of very great lamas by Tibetans, signifying that the lama in question possesses all of the qualities of wisdom and compassion necessary to lead practitioners from the very beginning of the path all the way through its many stages to the state of buddhahood.

By the testimony of many of the greatest lamas of Tibetan Buddhism, including His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, the supreme head of the Kagyu lineage, Kalu Rinpoche was just such a lama. Although Kalu Rinpoche never used the term *kyabje* in reference to himself, he did confess, at the conclusion of his six-month transmission of the Rinchen Terdzo to the four regents and the assembly of reincarnate lamas of the Kagyu lineage, that he possessed such qualities. At the conclusion of the over 1,000 empowerments of the Rinchen Terdzo, there is one empowerment that authorizes whomever receives it in turn to transmit the entire cycle of transmission to others. When conferring this empowerment on the very select and small group of reincarnate lamas who received it, Kalu Rinpoche said, “This empowerment takes a very special lama to give. I have arrived in the kingdom of the dharmakaya; it is with this power that I empower you.”

By saying, “I have arrived in the kingdom of the dharmakaya,” Kalu Rinpoche was stating unequivocally that he had attained buddhahood. A buddha, is by definition, a “lord of refuge,” so it is appropriate that this expression be used in connection with Kalu Rinpoche.

A number of editors and publishers of Kalu Rinpoche’s extensive teachings have begun using the title *Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche*, but the full significance of *kyabje* is lost to those unfamiliar with Tibetan, so we are now adopting the practice of rendering this title in English, despite our American squeamishness towards florid literary

expression, because it is so accurate. It is, indeed, truth in advertising.

For the title, “His Holiness,” there is not an equivalent term in Tibetan. Before the great lamas of Tibet began arriving in India in 1959, the title, “His Holiness,” seems to have been used only in connection with the Pope, and it seems to have been adopted by Tibetans to indicate that their religious leaders should be viewed with the same reverence.

In the early days, “His Holiness” was used only in reference to the Dalai Lama and the heads of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In recent years, however, the practice has developed of referring to the heads of all smaller and less prominent lineages of Tibet Buddhism as “His Holiness” as well. There is no ruling or governing body of Tibetan Buddhism that bestows this title; it is, in fact, a step taken by the students of each lama in question and gradually adopted by others. Thus, there are now perhaps a score of Tibetan Buddhist lamas addressed as “His Holiness.”

According to Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, “holy” means “exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness.” As a buddha is by definition “perfect in goodness and righteousness,” and, thus, totally “worthy of complete devotion,” it is linguistically eminently appropriate to refer to Kalu Rinpoche as “His Holiness.” To do so is, once again, undeniable truth in advertising.

In addition, as far as the mere convention of referring to all lineage holders as “His Holiness,” Kalu Rinpoche was not only the supreme head of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, but the Shangpa Kagyu lineage itself is one of the eight major transmissions of dharma from India, of which all the various lineages are derivative and receive their transmissions.

It is for all of these reasons, therefore, and so as not to mislead any potential students of Kalu Rinpoche by downplaying his true qualities, that we are now adopting the practice of referring to him for purposes of introduction as, “His Holiness, The Very Venerable Lord of Refuge Kalu Rinpoche.”

May there be virtue and auspiciousness! 51



# On Tilopa's Six Essential Points of Meditation

By Lama Tashi Namgyal

**Lama Tashi Namgyal**

Photo by Jobe Benjamin

All forms of meditation can be subsumed under the two categories of tranquility (Sanskrit: *shamatha*; Tibetan: *shinay*) and insight (Sanskrit: *vipashyana*; Tibetan: *lhaktong*). By practicing *shamatha* meditation one can pacify emotional afflictions, tame and sharpen the mind, and give rise to highly developed states of concentration.

But *shamatha* alone cannot lead to a permanent state of peace and happiness, nor to the supreme wisdom of buddhahood. The problem with practicing *shamatha* alone is that it only temporarily pacifies the emotional disturbances that give rise to negative karma and suffering.

Nonetheless, the practice of *shamatha* is essential because it serves as the foundation for developing insight into or clear seeing of the patterns of confused mind and its relationship to its world. As this experience develops, it leads to the deeper insight of nonduality which completely cuts the root

of the *kleshas* (emotional afflictions, conflicting emotions). With this experience, one begins seeing the transparency of experiences, and stops solidifying them. The “big deal” quality of our confused experience of self-clinging disappears. Then, in the words of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche's *doha*,

*Whoever knows this life to be like the reflection  
of the moon in water,  
Whenever happiness arises will not be attached,  
Whenever suffering arises will not be depressed,  
And will attain true inner peace.*

In the teaching of *vipashyana* or insight meditation there are two approaches. One is “analytical meditation,” which teaches the student to analyze his or her experience in such a way as to realize the lack of inherent existence of a self, of phenomena, and of consciousness. This experience of emptiness leads to supreme awakening.

The other approach to *vipashyana* is called “placement meditation.” Here a qualified teacher

places the student's mind in a state of meditation, which, if pursued with sufficient diligence, will automatically lead to the same state of insight and the same experience. In this form of meditation no analysis is needed; in fact it is scrupulously avoided.

The *mahasiddha* Tilopa's six essential points of meditation contain the basic principles of placement meditation. The first point is not to be distracted by, dwell upon, get involved in, get lost in, nourish, encourage, or follow thoughts about the past. Anything that arises concerning anything that occurred or one thought prior to the current moment, one should simply let go of, and the sooner the better. Ultimately, one should develop the discipline or the automatic habit of letting go of such thoughts instantly, on the spot, and one should learn to remain in such a state of "permanent let-go."

The second point is not to be distracted by, dwell upon, get involved in, get lost in, nourish, encourage, get fixated on, or follow thoughts about the present. In particular, one should not fixate on either outer or inner phenomena.

The third point is not to be distracted by, dwell upon, get involved in, get lost in, nourish, encourage, or speculate about the future or thoughts of the future, but to let go of them instantly as well.

The fourth point is not to meditate. One should resist, or let go of the temptation, which at some point always arises in the experience of beginning meditators, to improve or make better one's meditation by meditating on tranquility, or on the experience of emptiness, or on clarity, or on bliss, or by fabricating or contriving any other strategy to improve one's meditation. All such attempts to improve one's meditation by "meditating" are cul-de-sacs, and, as such, obstacles to meditation.

The fifth point is not to analyze. Although there are other forms of meditation that teach one to analyze one's experience, the ultimate goal of such analysis is to transcend analytical and conceptual impositions on one's experience altogether so that one will finally experience directly the true nature

of mind, the true nature of experience, the true nature of reality. So in this approach, according to the fifth point, one should not analyze; one should not engage in the asking of such questions as, "What color is it? Where is it? How is it? Why is it? Does it have any shape or color or location or any other characteristics?" One should let go of all tendencies to analyze one's experience.

So, then, if one is not to be distracted by thoughts of past, present, or future; and if one is not to meditate and not to analyze, then what should one be doing? What is one's mind to hang on to? The answer is "nothing." Tilopa's sixth point is just to "leave it to itself." Whatever arises in the mind, one should neither welcome nor reject, neither encourage nor suppress—nor should one get lost in thoughts. In the words of Bokar Rinpoche there is "nothing to do;"

nothing to do beyond resting in the awareness of the freshness of whatever arises.

The style of breathing meditation that many of us in the Kagyu and Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism begin with combines *shamatha* with the placement meditation style of *vipashyana*. When we are going out with the breath—which involves the sense of mixing mind and breath, and mind and breath with space—we are practicing *shamatha*. When we abandon this discipline at the end of the outbreath and simply rest in the gap between the end of the outbreath and the beginning of the next outbreath, without any particular attention to the inbreath, we are practicing placement meditation.

If, in our practice of this discipline, we find that our experience during the "gap" has the quality of Tilopa's six points of meditation, then it is no longer necessary to make a point of following the breath. It can drop away just as a leaf drops off a tree.

However, if any form of mental dullness that is not dissolving co-emergently arises, or if one becomes distracted by or lost in thoughts, one should return to one's *shamatha* discipline of following the breath. ㊦

**Whatever arises  
in the mind, one  
should neither  
welcome nor  
reject, neither  
encourage nor  
suppress**

When we have not practiced meditation, our thought processes are entirely beyond our control, and, therefore, we are victimized by the arising of all manner of thoughts. Most of these thoughts are unpleasant. Of course, we have both virtuous and negative thoughts. Virtuous thoughts are thoughts of love and compassion and altruism and so on. And yet proportionately the greater number of our thoughts are negative ones—which is a problem.

We can look at our thoughts in another way. Some of our thoughts are pleasant—in other words, are thoughts that make us happy or make us feel good; and some of them are unpleasant, are thoughts that make us unhappy, make us worry unnecessarily, make us mentally and, in the end, physically agitated. But if we compare these two [types of thoughts], then we'll see that the thoughts that actually make us happy arise comparatively rarely, and the thoughts that make us miserable, make us worried and agitated, seem to arise constantly. And when we are under the sway of such negative thoughts, then, initially, we become unhappy, and, eventually, we become unhealthy. If we can arrest this process and gain control over it, then we become happy, and this will prevent our becoming physically agitated and unhealthy as well.

Now, if there were a need, a practical utility, in following after or entertaining these agitating thoughts, if they actually made us function more effectively, that would be one thing. But, in fact, they do not. The *kleshas* we generate—attachment and aversion and so on—and the agitation they bring up are unnecessary and do not make us function more effectively at all. And therefore, since they do not improve our functioning and since they make us unhappy, they are, from any point of view, unnecessary and inappropriate.

Therefore, in the short run, if one can arrest this process of victimization by thought and allow one's mind to rest naturally and evenly, there is an obvious and great benefit.

With regard to the long-term or ultimate benefit, the basic quality of this process of victimization by thought is that thoughts are beyond our control. We have no freedom of mind. It's as though we're wafted about on the surface of a body of water by fierce or ferocious waves, and the waves are our thoughts. Now, when one starts to practice meditation, this process is not arrested immediately, because we have a very strong and very deeply entrenched habit of being controlled by our thoughts. But as one practices, gradually one gains freedom from this victimization by thought, and this freedom consists fundamentally of the emergence of a space in one's experience, or of spaciousness, that allows one's innate wisdom to manifest over and beyond the control of thoughts. And that really is the ultimate benefit of tranquility meditation. ॐ

## On the Virtues of Tranquility Meditation



**The Very Venerable  
Thrangu Rinpoche**

Photo by Ryszard  
K. Frackiewicz

## And How Does One Abandon Desire?

Photo by Ryszard K. Frackiewicz



**The Very Venerable  
Khenpo Tsultrim  
Gyamtso Rinpoche**


What are the means by which desire is abandoned? When we understand that samsara—the cycle of existence—is something real, something very serious, and when we understand that samsara is of the nature of suffering, and when we understand how everything in cyclic existence is impermanent, that everything is changing, that nothing will stay the same for very long, then we give up our desire for things in samsara. Instead we replace that desire with the desire to become free from samsara altogether.

If we think about the different places or the different types of situations we could be in in conditioned existence, then we could divide them into different categories and think about them. We could be either rich or poor, but when we examine closely we see all the different kinds of suffering that arise from being rich, and all the different kinds of suffering that arise from being poor. Those who are rich have the suffering that comes from having things, and those who are poor have the suffering that comes from not having things. So that's one way of looking at it.

Another way of looking at it is in terms of the mighty and the strong, like the kings and the great leaders of the world, and then those beings who have no power whatsoever. And again, it's the same thing. Having a lot of power does not lead to happiness or peace; quite the contrary, it leads to all different kinds of suffering. And then not having power also leads to various kinds of suffering.

Great countries have the suffering of decline and decay; poor countries have the suffering of not being able to improve. And so both powerful and weak countries have suffering. When we think about things in this way, then we realize that there is no point in desiring things in cyclic existence; it is, in fact, more reasonable to desire liberation from it.

In cyclic existence, there are people whom we like, whom we don't like, and also our own bodies. In dependence upon coming into contact with people whom we don't like we have various kinds of suffering. And in dependence upon those whom we like we have also various kinds of suffering that come from our attachment and getting entangled in different ways. Both lead to suffering. Both attachment to some people and aversion to other people lead to suffering.

Then, in dependence upon our own bodies, we have various kinds of sicknesses and ailments, and that leads to suffering. So, if we think about things in this way, then we think, How can we get out of here? How can we get out of samsara altogether?—not how to get more into it, not how to get more things and more status within it. 

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF SHENPEN ÖSEL

### The Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche on Tantric Meditation

- ❖ Generation stage and *yidam* (deity) meditation
  - Yidam* as the radiance of the buddha's wisdom
  - Yidam* as revealing qualities of buddhahood
  - Basic principles of deity meditation
  - Short term benefits of *yidam* meditation
- ❖ Completion stage—tranquility and insight
  - Devotion, supplication, mind and reality
  - Analytical insight meditation techniques
  - The nature of mind
  - Yogic direct valid cognition

### The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso on Madyamika (the Middle Way)

### His Eminence The Very Venerable Jamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche—Commentary on the *Prayer of Mahamudra* by Rangjung Dorje, the Third Gyalwang Karmapa

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## ERRATA

*Due to difficulties in transcription, there were errors in the text of last issue's article, The Six Aspects of Bardo, by H.E. Tai Situ Rinpoche (pp. 13-21).*

*Within the classification of the six bardos, the last two—fifth and sixth—correspond to the period during death and after death until conception into the next body. Rather than differentiating between the fifth and sixth bardos, Rinpoche divides them together into three additional bardos, which he comments upon directly.*

*As we understand it, the sentences beginning on lines 22 and 34 in the second column of page 16 should read respectively:*

*"They're described as first bardo, second bardo, third bardo; and you shouldn't get these three mixed up with the [first] three bardos of the six bardos."*

*"All of which is part of the elaboration of the fifth and sixth bardos, in the six bardos."*

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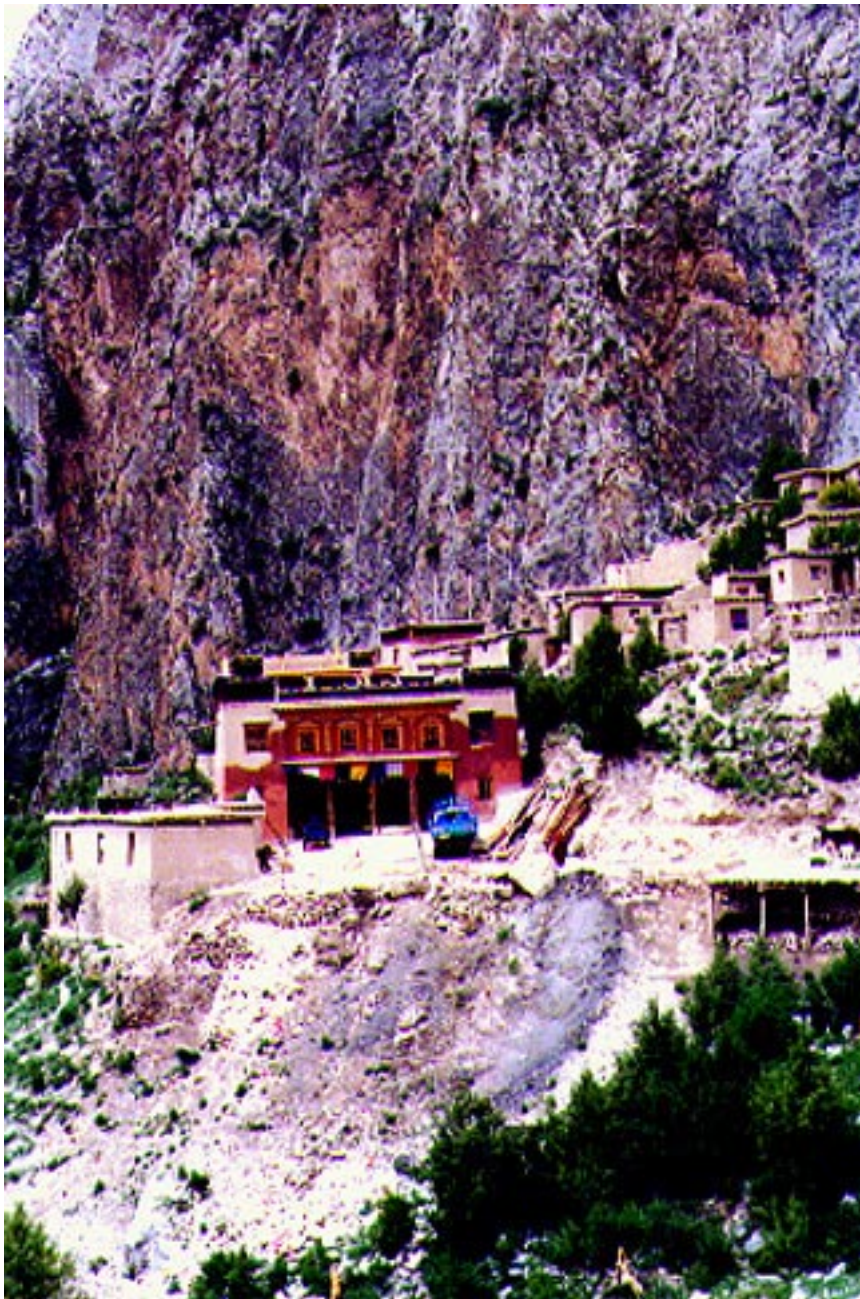
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