

Lama Yeshe

# BECOMING THE COMPASSION TANTRIC MAHAMUDRA FOR EVERYDAY LIFE BUDDHA



EDITED BY ROBINA COURTIN

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*Becoming the Compassion Buddha*

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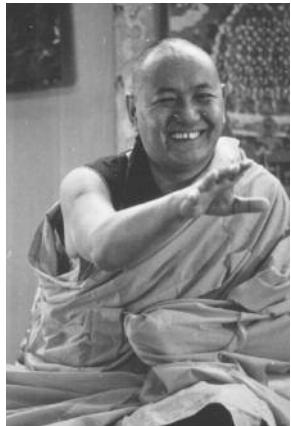
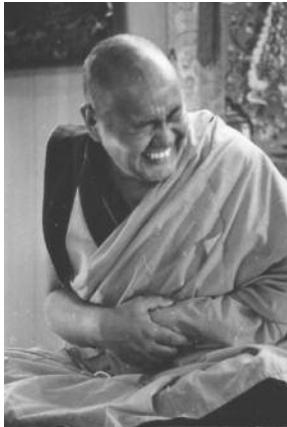
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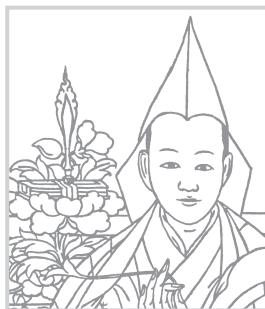
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# BECOMING THE COMPASSION BUDDHA

## TANTRIC MAHAMUDRA FOR EVERYDAY LIFE



A COMMENTARY ON THE GURU YOGA PRACTICE CALLED  
The Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Avalokiteshvara:  
A Source of All Powerful Attainments,

*Written by His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Age of Nineteen*

Lama Thubten Yeshe  
*Foreword by Geshe Lhundub Sopa*  
*Edited by Robina Courtin*



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## *Foreword*

**I**N THIS BOOK, Lama Yeshe gives a commentary on a practice composed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama called *The Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Avalokiteshvara: A Source of All Powerful Attainments*. This commentary provides a detailed explanation of a special type of guru yoga practice, in which the deity is visualized not in the usual form of the deity or *yidam*, but in the form of one's actual guru.

We Tibetans consider His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. Therefore, it is much easier to see the guru, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as inseparable from the *yidam*, Avalokiteshvara, and to envision Avalokiteshvara in the form of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This commentary will be of great benefit to whoever engages in the Avalokiteshvara guru yoga practice written by His Holiness himself.

Lama Yeshe was one of my students, who studied all the philosophical topics and who later became tutor and guru of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Lama Yeshe established Buddhist centers almost everywhere in the world, successfully, and those centers continue to develop and to train students who are great followers of the Dharma.

This book is a valuable contribution, and will be greatly beneficial to those who practice according to its instructions.

Geshe Lhundub Sopa  
Deer Park Buddhist Center  
Oregon, Wisconsin

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## *Editor's Preface*

LAMA THUBTEN YESHE gave these teachings at Chenrezig Institute in tropical Queensland, Australia, July 5–16, 1976, during his third visit to Australia. Set in 160 acres of hills inland from the Sunshine Coast, 100 kilometers north of the city of Brisbane, Chenrezig Institute was the first Dharma center of Lama Yeshe's in the West. The land was offered by some of his students at the end of the first course given by Lama in Australia, in September 1974, and the center was built during the following year.

Seventy people listened to the teachings and participated in the retreat that encompassed them and continued afterward. These teachings were preceded by a month-long course on the path to enlightenment (*lamrim*), taught by Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche; such lamrim teachings are classically a prerequisite for hearing tantric teachings.

These teachings are a commentary on a short practice called *The Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Avalokiteshvara: A Source of All Powerful Attainments*. Avalokiteshvara, Chenrezig in Tibetan, is the buddha of compassion. This practice was written by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama when he was nineteen years old (at the repeated requests of a disciple). It is a guru yoga practice in which the buddha to be visualized is in the aspect of the guru (in Tibetan, *lama*) in his usual form, in this case His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This practice belongs to the first of the four levels of tantric practice called *kriya*, or action, tantra.

As practiced in tantra, the most advanced teachings of Lord Buddha, guru yoga is crucial to the development of our innate potential for perfection, enlightenment, and its essential meaning is expressed perfectly by the title of His Holiness's text: that the guru and the Buddha are to be seen as one. Pabongkha Rinpoche says in his *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*: “If the guru is not the Buddha, then who is?” And Lama Yeshe says in chapter 3, “By practicing guru yoga, you learn to understand that in reality, the guru is inseparable from the compassion and wisdom of Avalokiteshvara. Then you start to see the inseparability of these qualities and yourself.”

Traditionally, before giving an empowerment into any tantric practice, the lama granting the empowerment, or initiation, gives teachings on the lamrim. The “Editor’s Introduction” provides an overview of these teachings. In the “Prologue,” Lama Yeshe introduces the concept of *mahamudra*, the essential teaching of the following commentary on the guru yoga of Avalokiteshvara, Chenrezig.

In “Part One: Lord Buddha’s Teachings,” Lama Yeshe describes the differences in approach between sutra and tantra. In “Part Two: Guru Yoga,” Lama gives a verse-by-verse commentary on the text itself. In “Part Three: Mahamudra,” he elaborates on the essential practice of guru yoga, leading practitioners through various meditations: how to become one with the guru-buddha, how to manifest oneself as Avalokiteshvara, how to recite the mantra, and so forth, all hinging upon mahamudra, the emptiness of one’s mind. And in “Part Four: Mahamudra Is Always Here,” Lama Yeshe explains how to trust our own wisdom and how to bring Lord Buddha’s teachings into every minute of our lives.

Essentially, tantric meditation is sophisticated psychology: marvelous and radical methods for quickly perfecting the extraordinary potential for clarity, joy, compassion, and the other positive qualities that Buddha says are innate within all of us. It is easy to misunderstand tantra, however—and to mystify it. Lama Yeshe’s genius is in his seemingly effortless ability to bring tantra down to earth without diminishing it, to make it real, to show us how to bring it into our everyday lives. If we treat our spiritual practice as some rarefied thing, Lama shows, then we are missing the point completely.

Lama Yeshe devoted most of his short life—he passed away in 1984 at the age of forty-nine—to guiding his students, the majority of whom are from the Western world. He met the first of them in the mid-1960s and, after establishing a monastery on Kopan hill near Kathmandu in Nepal, attracted thousands more to the courses he taught, there and around the world in the centers his students had established, until he passed away.

Lama Yeshe was unsurpassed in his qualities. Living his life as a humble monk, he was in reality “a great hidden yogi,” according to Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche, his spiritual heir. And as a supreme communicator of Lord Buddha’s views about the human experience, he made them utterly irresistible to his listeners. When Lama Yeshe taught, enlightenment was a real possibility.

## MEDITATIONS

The ten meditations that Lama Yeshe guides the reader through are highlighted throughout the text and listed altogether in appendix 2. There are eight steps, but each meditation does not necessarily cover all eight: one, for example, includes all except step 7, and another mentions only one step. Also, some meditations only briefly mention the steps, so, when doing these, flesh out the appropriate steps, taking them from meditation 1, which explains the visualizations most extensively, or from variations that Lama gives in the later meditations. In all cases, for step 2 one needs to refer to the practice, the *sadhanā*, appendix 1. All meditations should be preceded by the prayers of refuge, bodhichitta, etc., in the sadhana. The words in bold type show the new visualizations that Lama adds to each meditation as the course progresses.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## *Editor's Introduction*

*I prostrate to Atisha, keeper of the treasury of the teachings,  
Whose faultless abridgement of its essential points summarizes  
and synthesizes for the first time since the prajñāparamita sutras  
of the Buddha*

*The two main paths of the Mahayana, the profound insight of emptiness  
and the vast action of bodhichitta,*

*In their correct order and proper lineages, from Buddha to Manjushri  
to Nagarjuna, on the one side, and from Buddha to Maitreya  
to Asanga, on the other.*

From *Songs of Experience*, by Lama Tsongkhapa

**I**N ORDER TO BE QUALIFIED to receive an initiation into a tantric practice such as this yoga method, as Lama Yeshe would call it, and then to practice it, one needs to have a heartfelt appreciation for the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment: renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness. An excellent way to accomplish this is to listen to and meditate upon the teachings known in Tibetan as *lamrim*, the “graduated path” to enlightenment.

In the lamrim—a packaging of Lord Buddha’s teachings, unique to Tibet, based upon the elucidations of the eleventh-century Indian master Atisha—the essential points of Buddha’s extensive explanations of psychology and philosophy are extracted and presented from A to Z in such a way that they can be internalized, experienced as something relevant to one’s life. Which is the point. As Lama Tsongkhapa, the fourteenth-century founder of the Gelug tradition, according to whose approach Lama Yeshe’s teachings are given, says in one of his poetic texts on the lamrim, *Songs of Experience*, “All the teachings are to be taken as sound advice as there is no contradiction between scripture and practice.”

It is easy to be captivated intellectually by Buddha’s ideas about reality but to forget to taste them, as Lama Yeshe would put it. It’s also easy to not know

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how to taste them. The type of meditation that one uses to internalize these ideas, advocated by Lama Tsongkhapa, is called analytical meditation (Lama Yeshe touches on it briefly in chapter 10).

Simply, analytical meditation is a method for familiarizing oneself—the meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation, *gom*, is “to familiarize”—again and again with the various approaches taught by the Buddha, bringing them from the head to the heart, until they are one’s own experience and no longer merely intellectual.

In other words, by sitting still and thinking about Buddha’s views again and again and from many angles in a clear and intelligent way with a finely focused mind—in other words, by analyzing them—we are compelled to reassess at ever deeper levels the fundamental assumptions that we hold as truths and that Buddha has shown to be completely untrue. Eventually, we undergo a paradigm shift in the way we perceive ourselves and the world.

Buddha says that the extent to which these assumptions are out of sync with how things actually are is the extent to which we suffer and the extent to which, therefore, we harm others. Thus, a consequence of practice is the ending of suffering, *nirvana*—a psychological state, not some place like heaven.

The lamrim is presented according to three levels of practice. The first two scopes, as they are called, are practices shared by the Hinayana teachings of Lord Buddha, and the third scope is the presentation of the Mahayana components of the path to enlightenment.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, just as a bird needs two wings to fly, we need both the wing of wisdom and the wing of compassion. In order to develop the wisdom wing—mainly accomplished in the first two scopes—we work on our own minds; the main beneficiary is oneself, but indirectly others also benefit. In order to develop the compassion wing—accomplished in the third scope—we continue to work on our minds, but the main beneficiary is others.

### THE PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS

**Mind** The first point to become familiar with—using the approach of Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche—is the beginninglessness of the mind. And especially for Westerners, this demands that we understand the nature of mind in a conventional sense. “The workshop is in the mind,” as Rinpoche puts it, and as long as we’re not clear about exactly what the mind is and what it is not, we won’t make much progress in our practice.

According to Buddha, “mind” refers to the entire spectrum of our internal experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotions, tendencies, personality characteristics, unconscious, subconscious, intuition, spirit; all of this is known as mind, or consciousness. It is not the brain, it’s not physical. It does not come from anyone else, neither one’s parents nor a superior being.

The only other option is that it comes from previous moments of itself, that it has its own continuity, and thus is beginningless. This present moment of mind has to have come from a previous moment, which itself has come from a previous moment, and so forth. Like the chicken and the egg, we cannot find a first moment. No matter how far back we trace the continuity of our mental moments, whichever moment we get to, that moment can’t simply have begun on its own, out of nowhere; it must necessarily have come from a previous moment of that very continuity of mind. Thus, we can never find a first moment. (And it’s the same with physical energy, the universe itself. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said in discussion with scientists: Big bang? No problem. Just not the first big bang, that’s all.)

As a starting point for practice, it’s also crucial to understand the ultimate nature of this mind of ours. According to Mahayana Buddhism, every living being possesses innately the potential for perfection, for buddhahood. The term in Tibetan for sentient being is *semchen*, literally, mind possessor; and according to Buddha there is not an atom of space where there are not sentient beings.

Each of these beings is actually a potential buddha (in Sanskrit, “fully awake”) in the sense that an acorn is a potential oak tree. That is the acorn’s nature, what it really is. We have no choice but to give it the appropriate conditions to enable it to become what it really is, an oak tree. And so with sentient beings: we have no choice but to develop our innate potential for perfection. That is to say, we can develop all our good qualities—such as love, compassion, generosity, wisdom, and so forth—to a state of perfection beyond which we can’t develop them further. This state of perfection, Buddha says, is our natural state.

**The Virtuous Friend** Recognizing that we have this innate potential, we need to find someone to show us how to develop it. There’s nothing we know that we haven’t learned from others, so it goes without saying that to develop our perfection in the way that Buddha describes it, we need to find a qualified teacher.

Having found the teacher, we need to devote ourselves appropriately in

order to get the maximum benefit from the relationship. In short, the heart of this practice is to see the guru as the Buddha.

It is said that the real benefit that comes from a teaching is not so much from the teacher's knowledge but more from our own confidence, our faith, that the teacher is the Buddha. And we will have this confidence only if we have thoroughly and intelligently checked the teacher before committing ourselves. If we're half-hearted, or overly sentimental, about this checking process, there will be no stability in the relationship, and we won't be convinced that the instructions are valid. We are moving into uncharted waters, so we need great confidence. The responsibility is ours.

**This precious human rebirth** Having found a teacher, we need to energize ourselves to want to develop our innate potential; the desire to do so doesn't come naturally. Lama Atisha, the eleventh-century Indian master who wrote the text *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* upon which Lama Tsongkhapa's lamrim teachings are based, recommends that we contemplate how fortunate we are that as human beings we have such excellent conditions: an intelligent mind, a healthy body, access to valid spiritual paths and teachers, and so forth; and that we are free of the appalling conditions that the vast majority of sentient beings experience.

This human life is a rare thing to have. According to Buddha, human beings represent only the tiniest percentage of all living beings. In *The Tibetan Art of Parenting*, one Tibetan lama was quoted as saying that whenever any human male and female are in sexual union, billions of consciousnesses that have recently passed away (from all realms of existence) are hovering around, desperate to get a human rebirth.

If we were to realize how hard we must have worked in our past lives to have obtained this good-quality, one-in-a-billion human body and mind and this collection of conducive conditions, we would be extremely humbled and would find it unbearable to waste even a single moment of this precious opportunity.

To waste this life is to use it for anything less than the practice of morality—and the minimum level of morality is to refrain from harming others. To use this life even more skillfully, we could remove from our minds the most deeply held wrong assumptions about how things exist; and, even more skillfully still, we could fulfill our innate potential for perfection by attaining buddhahood, and then be able to work unceasingly for the benefit of others.

## THE FIRST SCOPE OF PRACTICE

**Death and impermanence** Having primed ourselves for practice, we now contemplate how this precious and rare human life is extremely fragile and can end at any moment. The assumption of permanence is deep within us. The idea that our friend who has cancer is dying and we are not is absurd. As Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche points out, “Living people die before dying people every day.”

By contemplating that our death is definite, that our time of death is uncertain, and that the only thing of any use to us at death is the accumulation of virtue within our minds, we will radically increase our wish not to waste this life.

**The suffering of the lower realms** Given that we could die at any moment—“Best to think that I will die today,” says Rinpoche—and given that there are countless imprints of negativity, the potential causes of future rebirths, on our beginningless minds, it is not unlikely that our next rebirth will be a suffering one. By contemplating the sufferings of such beings as animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings, we can develop a healthy revulsion for those types of rebirth.

All living beings are experiencing the results of their own past actions. As Lama Yeshe says in chapter 2,

It’s not as if someone in a place called Hell built that iron house, lit the blazing fire, and thought, “Aha! I am waiting for Thubten Yeshe. Soon he will die and come here. I’m ready for him!” It is not like that. Hell does not exist in that way. The reality is that at the time of death, the powerful energy of the previous negative actions of that being, existing as imprints on its mind, is awakened, or activated, and creates that being’s experience of intense suffering, which we call Hell. Hell does not exist from its own side; the negative mind makes it up.

**Refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha** Whom can I turn to to give me the methods to prevent such a suffering situation? We can have great appreciation for an excellent doctor, but if we’re not suffering, we won’t go out of our way to consult him. But when we discover that we’re sick, we will eagerly turn to him and his medicine.

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Recognizing that we're suffering, we contemplate the qualities of Buddha, his medicine, and his practitioners, and, based on our wish to get rid of suffering, we turn to them for support. Especially we turn to the Dharma, Buddha's medicine, the methods he taught that we will apply. The Dharma is the real refuge.

**Karma** Now we actually begin to practice: we apply Buddha's instructions on how to avoid suffering. We learn to know what to practice and what to avoid.

According to Buddha, everything we say, do, and think is a *karma*, an action, that will necessarily bring a reaction, a result, in the future. Every thought, word, and deed plants seeds in our minds that will necessarily ripen as fruit: negative actions ripen as suffering, positive actions ripen as happiness. There is nothing that living beings experience that isn't the result of what they've done before. With karma, there is no one sitting in judgment, punishing or rewarding us. Actions bring their own results; it just naturally happens, according to Buddha.

Given the simple logic that we want happiness and don't want suffering, we learn to abide by the laws of karma—natural laws, not created by anyone. What we are now is the result of what we have done, said, and thought before, and what we will be in the future is thus in our own hands. We are the boss. One might say that for the Buddha, karma is the creation principle.

It is not enough, however, merely to refrain from creating negative karma; we need to take care of the karmic seeds already in our minds, planted there since beginningless time. Thus, we begin to "have great respect and esteem for the four opponent powers, which can fully purify us of having to experience the results of our negative karma in the future," as Lama Tsongkhapa says in his *Songs of Experience*.

Given that we've had countless lives in the past and that many of the karmic seeds in our minds from those past lives are likely to be negative, and given that suffering comes from negative karma and that we don't want suffering, it follows that we would want to remove the negative karmic seeds from our minds before they ripen.

Purification is a psychological process. "We created negativity with our minds," says Lama Yeshe, "and we purify it by creating positivity." The four opponent powers are *regret*, *reliance*, the *antidote*, and the *promise*.

First, we need to *regret* the harm we've done in the past to others, because we do not want any more suffering in the future; we're fed up with suffering. Second, we need to *rely* upon the Buddha and his methods; we also rely upon

the sentient beings whom we have harmed by developing compassion for them, aspiring to become a buddha as quickly as possible, since only then can we *really* know how to benefit them. Third, we apply the *antidote* in the form of a purification practice. This is like taking the medicine for our karmic illness—and Buddhism has a medicine cabinet full of medicines. Finally, we make the *promise*, the determination not to create these negative actions, not to do harm, again.

“We can mold our minds into any shape we like,” Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche says. We are “insane,” he says, not to do this practice every day.

Having a strong appreciation for the logic of karma, based on thinking about death and impermanence and the lower realms and on going for refuge in the Buddha, his Dharma, and Sangha—all based on the preliminary three contemplations—we can be assured that, at the very least, when we die our consciousness will continue to experience an environment conducive to happiness.

Psychologically, this is the basic—but nevertheless amazing—level of practice. A person of this level of capability is a mature human being possessing a healthy self-respect, who recognizes that their actions bring consequences to themselves, and who thus wants to avoid committing any negative actions. At this level of practice, there is not yet any talk of compassion for others—that belongs to the third scope. First, we need to develop compassion for ourselves.

This is the beginning of *renunciation*, the first principal aspect of the path to enlightenment.

## THE SECOND SCOPE OF PRACTICE

At this point, we are now subdued enough, and aware enough, to delve more deeply into the way our mind works; to understand in a more sophisticated way Lord Buddha’s model of the mind. We now truly become our own therapists, as Lama Yeshe would say. By familiarizing ourselves with the four noble truths, for example, we can fully develop renunciation.

The third noble truth is Buddha’s assertion that it is possible to be free of suffering. This is another way of stating, according to the Mahayana Buddhist approach, that we all possess the innate potential for Buddhahood.

So, if it’s true that it’s possible to be free of suffering—and Buddha is not talking the way most religions talk, that this can only be achieved after we’ve

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died, in heaven with God; he's talking psychologically—then we need to discover precisely what suffering is (the first noble truth), we need to discover precisely what the causes of suffering are (the second), and then we need to know the way to stop suffering and its causes (the fourth). It's extremely practical.

This needs a lot of inner investigation: the clarity, precision, and depth of analysis that we use in scientific discovery is what Buddha demands we use to discover the nature of our minds, karma, emptiness, and the rest.

There are three kinds of suffering: *the suffering of suffering*—ordinary, everyday suffering and pain; *the suffering of change*—what we usually think of as happiness; and *all-pervasive suffering*—the condition of being propelled into this universe, with this body and mind, all of which are products of desire and the other delusions, and thus are in the nature of suffering.

The causes of suffering are two: *karma*, our past actions that set us up to meet this suffering situation, and *the delusions*, our present neurotic responses to our situation. The punch in the nose, for example—which is what we normally think of as the cause of our suffering—actually plays only a secondary role, according to Buddha. My past harmful actions are the main reason I'm being punched now, and my angry response to the punch is the main reason I will suffer in the future. Thus, the ball keeps rolling. However, once we establish the actual causes of the problem, we will know how to solve it.

We need, then, to become very familiar with the way our mind works. We start by learning to distinguish between sensory consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. Then, within mental consciousness—our thoughts, feelings, and emotions—we need to distinguish between the positive states of mind and the negative. And then, crucially, we need to understand how all our emotions are conceptually based. Anger, attachment, jealousy, and the rest are elaborate conceptual constructions. They're stories made up by our minds.

The root cause of our suffering is the state of mind called *ignorance* (often known as *self-grasping* when it's related to oneself). Effectively, however, attachment is the main source of our problems in day-to-day life. It's the default mode of the mind. Yet, when we hear Buddha say that we can't be happy unless we give up attachment, we panic and think, as Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche puts it, "You mean, I have to give up my heart, my happiness?" This is because we confuse attachment with love, happiness, pleasure, and so forth.

The main cause of the second kind of suffering, *the suffering of change*, is attachment. The experience of pleasure I get when I eat chocolate cake is, in

fact, nothing other than suffering. Why? First, the pleasure doesn't last: Attachment is completely convinced that it will, but the pleasure inexorably turns into suffering—the more cake I eat, the more disgusting it becomes. Second, the pleasure I experience is nothing other than suffering because it's adulterated, not pure. The pleasure is dependent upon delusions: I need to get something in order to be happy. And third, the pleasure is actually suffering because, as our mothers told us, "The more you get, the more you want." I don't actually get satisfaction when I eat the cake, which is what my attachment expects. In fact, I get dissatisfaction instead, as my yearning to eat cake is even greater next time.

Attachment goes to extremely subtle levels. It's insidious. As Lama Yeshe says, he could tell us about attachment "for one whole year," but we'll never begin to understand it until we've looked deeply and carefully into our own minds and discovered the intricacies of it for ourselves. Attachment is a honey-covered razor blade: we are convinced it's the prelude to pleasure, but in fact, it leads to nothing other than pain.

The pleasure we get by following attachment is the pleasure of the junkie: it doesn't last, it is contaminated, and it leads only to more craving. In our culture, it's the junkie who is said to have a problem with attachment while the rest of us are "normal." According to Buddha's model of the mind, attachment and addiction are synonymous. Due to our attachment, in other words, we're all addicts—it is simply a question of degree.

Buddha says that real pleasure, or happiness, is the state of our minds once we've given up attachment. It's our natural state (attachment, anger, jealousy, and the rest are thoroughly unnatural, according to Buddha), it lasts, and it isn't dependent upon something outside of ourselves. Who wouldn't want that?

Contemplating the four noble truths again and again will eventually bring us to a genuine renunciation of suffering and its causes. As Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche says, we will have achieved renunciation when "just the thought of another moment of attachment is so disgusting, it's like being in a septic tank."

The person at this level of capability is an extremely wise, joyful, loving person, and utterly content, regardless of whatever happens in their life.

This renunciation, the first of the three principal aspects of the path, is the culmination of practice of the first two scopes.

### THE THIRD SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The accomplishment of renunciation is the sound basis for the development of love, compassion, and eventually, bodhichitta, the second principal aspect of the path. Without being fed up with my own suffering (renunciation), based on the understanding of why I'm suffering (my past karma and present delusions), I cannot develop empathy for the suffering of others (compassion) based on the understanding of why they're suffering (their past karma and present delusions).

The culmination of this scope of practice is the most sublime level of compassion, *bodhichitta*: the spontaneous and heartfelt wish to become a buddha as quickly as possible because the suffering of others is unbearable, knowing that only as a buddha can one be effective in eliminating the suffering of others.

Bodhichitta comes from the development of *great compassion*: not only is the suffering of others unbearable, but one feels the responsibility to remove it, just as a mother knows that it is her job to relieve the suffering of her child. His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls this great compassion *universal responsibility*.

Great compassion comes from *compassion*, the finding of the suffering of others unbearable.

Compassion is developed after *love*, which is the wish that others be happy. (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchog has pointed out that, depending on the person, sometimes compassion is developed before love.)

The foundation of all these is *equanimity*, the awareness that friend, enemy, and stranger are actually equal, from the point of view of their each wanting to be happy.

Of the various meditation techniques used to develop these amazing states of mind, the series known as exchanging self with others is considered to be the most powerful. Lama Atisha received these instructions of exchanging self with others from his guru Serlingpa in Indonesia. As Pabongkha Rinpoche points out in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, after Lama Atisha received these teachings, they were kept secret, as they were considered to be so far beyond the capability of most ordinary people.

Another way of developing bodhichitta, which comes from Lama Tsongkhapa, combines the techniques taught in exchanging self with others with those of the *sevenfold cause and effect instruction*, eleven altogether.

**Equanimity** Friend, enemy, and stranger are labels invented by the ego. A friend is necessarily a person who helps *me*—not my next door neighbor, *me*. An enemy is someone who harms me, and a stranger is a person who neither harms nor helps me. Consequently, we feel attachment for the friend, aversion for the enemy, and indifference toward the stranger. We are blinded by these views.

Until we can go beyond these deluded interpretations and come to see our enemies, friends, and strangers as equal, our hearts can't grow genuine love and compassion. As Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche says, the love we feel now (for our friends) is indeed love, but it's unstable because of being based on attachment. There are strings attached: as long as you help me, of course I will love you, that is to say, want you to be happy.

We need to argue with our ego's views, gradually seeing the illogic of them, discovering that in actual fact our friends, enemies, and strangers, from their point of view, are completely equal in wanting to be happy.

This equanimity is the stable foundation on which to build genuine love, compassion, great compassion, and bodhichitta.

We now meditate on the eleven techniques for developing bodhichitta.

**All sentient beings have been my mother** Recognizing that our mind is beginningless, it follows that we've had countless previous lives in which we have been connected to all beings countless times. It's a matter of numbers. This contemplation is a practical way to expand our mind to encompass all others.

In order to open my heart to these countless faceless beings, it helps to think about how they've all been my mother in the past. In the West, we might think this is meant to make us miserable, as we tend to think that our mothers are a main cause of our suffering. It's helpful, then, to contemplate the many ways in which our mother has been kind.

**Contemplating the kindness of the mother** At the moment, with our deeply held wrong assumptions—that I didn't ask to get born, that who I am has nothing to do with me, that my mother and father made me, and so forth—it seems reasonable to blame our parents for our problems.

Also, even our view of kindness is mistaken: we think of someone as kind only if they do what we want. However, if we understand that a person is kind when they make the effort to help us, then it's clear our mother has been

kind in a myriad of ways. Even if she gave me away at birth, her kindness in not aborting me is extraordinary.

If all beings have been my mother, then they have all been kind to me in a vast number of ways.

**Contemplating the kindness of all beings** An even more profound way to expand our hearts to encompass others is to contemplate the ways in which *all beings* are kind to me. There's nothing that I've used in my life that hasn't come from the work of countless living beings. I can't find the beginning of the number of beings involved in the making of this book I'm holding: the trees the paper came from, the people who cut down the trees, the creatures who died, the people who shipped the trees, the driver of the truck, the people who made the truck; those who made the paper, who cut the paper, wrapped it, those who made the wrapping; those who built the store where I bought the book...If it were not for every one of them, I would not have a book, clothes, food, even a body.

**Repaying their kindness** I have no choice, then, but to try to repay the endless kindness of these countless mother sentient beings, but for whom I would have nothing. I would not even exist.

**Seeing others and myself as equal** Because of my delusions, instinctively I see my views, my needs, as more important than the views and needs of others. But there is no logic to this at all. In reality, there is not a fraction of difference between me and others, in just the same way as there is no difference between friend, enemy, and stranger. Everyone else wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer, just like me. Just ask them; this fact is not hard to prove.

Even if I have low self-esteem, I don't really see others as more important than me; actually, I resent them. Always, I'm full of an overriding sense of self.

**The disadvantages of cherishing myself more than others** From the point of view of the wisdom wing, the main cause of our suffering is *self-grasping*, the instinctive clinging to an inherent sense of self. From the point of view of the compassion wing, the instinctive wish to take care of myself more than others—the attitude of *self-cherishing*—is the problem.

All my problems with others, in my personal relationships or at work, are because of putting myself first. Even in a relationship with another person in

which I feel like the victim, this too is due to my past negative karma toward that person, which I created out of self-cherishing.

**The advantages of cherishing others more than myself** Everything good in my life comes from having put others first in the past: I have money because of my past generosity, people like me because I've been kind in the past, they trust me because I've spoken the truth. Putting others first is why I feel good right now.

If putting others first is what will make me happy, then how illogical of me not to do so. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, "If you are going to be selfish, be wisely selfish: cherish others."

**Taking upon myself the suffering of others: Developing compassion** Using the meditation technique called *tonglen* (giving and taking), we visualize a suffering person or group of people in front of us. This technique can be done conjoined with the breath: when we breathe in, we imagine taking into ourselves the sufferings of others.

Pabongkha Rinpoche recommends that we start in the morning: after we rise, we visualize taking upon ourselves our own afternoon headache. Then we move on to taking on the sufferings of our dearest friends, then those of our enemies. Eventually, we take on the sufferings of all living beings in the various realms. We imagine that this suffering comes into us and smashes the rock of self-cherishing at our heart; as a result, we imagine that all others are now free of their suffering.

**Giving my happiness and good qualities to others: Developing love** When we breathe out, we imagine giving our happiness, wealth, health, good qualities, and merits to our friends, then to our enemies, and then to all living beings. How marvelous that they are now happy!

**Great compassion** On the basis of these meditations, we gradually become convinced that it's our job actually to take away the suffering of others. If not me, then who will do this? Contemplating in this way will eventually lead to the profound attitude of bodhichitta.

**Bodhichitta** Bodhichitta is the spontaneous and heartfelt wish to become a buddha as quickly as possible because only when we are enlightened will we be qualified to do the job of perfectly guiding others away from their suffering

and to the perfection of their own buddhahood. One who has completely accomplished this sublime level of compassion, bodhichitta, is a *bodhisattva*.

One of the indications of having accomplished bodhichitta, of having become a bodhisattva, is that the thought of “I” no longer arises in the mind; thus, one exists only for the sake of others. It is said that even the breath of a bodhisattva is for the sake of others.

With this realization of bodhichitta, we will have accomplished the second of the three principal aspects of the path.

We now practice the six perfections of the bodhisattva: generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, meditation, and wisdom. The first four are accomplished in relation to sentient beings, the last two in one’s meditation.

**Generosity** We practice this by giving things to those who need them, even as small as a mouthful of food to a dog; giving advice to help people’s minds; giving what is called *fearlessness* by rescuing sentient beings from imminent death, for example, or by liberating people from prison, as Pabongkha Rinpoche suggests.

Sometimes it’s easier to give advice than to give money to a homeless person, for example. We should learn to give what’s difficult to give—and perhaps we could give five dollars, not fifty cents.

A sign of having perfected generosity is, for example, the ability to effortlessly give our body to a starving animal (assuming, of course, that there’s no other supply of food available—bodhisattvas aren’t trying to prove anything). In one of his previous lives, Lord Buddha happily gave his body to a starving mother tiger who was about to eat her babies. Right now, we’re not even capable of giving, as Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche has said, “one tiny, tiny drop of blood to a mosquito.”

**Morality** In our practice of the wisdom wing (the first and second scopes), we focus on the morality of refraining from harming others. In the practice of the third scope, the compassion wing, we focus on actively benefiting others as well: we work to help the homeless, the suffering, the sick, the poor, the dying—whatever crosses our path needing help.

**Patience** Patience is not merely gritting our teeth and waiting for unwanted things to go away. Patience is a courageous state of mind that happily welcomes the difficulty.

There are three types of patience. First, there's the *patience of accepting the harm that people do to us*. The main reason we get so upset is because of our deeply held wrong assumptions that it is unfair for others to harm me, that I don't deserve it, that it has nothing to do with me, and so forth—Lama Yeshe calls ego “the self-pity me.” Buddha says it has everything to do with me: I created the cause to experience it, so I have no choice but to accept it. By thinking in this way, I purify my negative karma as well as develop a brave and happy mind.

There is also the *patience of accepting sickness, problems, and so forth that come to us*, for the same reasons as above. Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche says that “the thought of liking problems should arise naturally, like the thought of liking ice cream.”

And finally, there is the *patience of gaining assurance in the Dharma*, as Pabongkha Rinpoche calls it.

**Enthusiastic perseverance, or joyful effort** Without enthusiasm, we can't succeed at anything in our lives, especially buddhahood. The main obstacles are the three kinds of laziness.

The first is the ordinary *laziness of being too tired*. We assume sleep is a necessity, but there are countless great practitioners who have gone beyond the need for it.

The second kind of laziness is what we usually call *being too busy*: putting off doing what we need to do. It feels like a virtue, but is, in fact, one of our biggest obstacles to success.

The third kind of laziness is the deeply held *belief that I'm not capable*. It, too, feels like a virtue; it seems as if we are being humble. But as long as we think that we can't achieve our potential, we will remain stuck in our comfort zone, never moving forward. In any case, it's simply not true: we all possess the potential to be a buddha. It's our nature.

**Meditation** *Calm abiding*, or *mental quiescence*, is the state of mind of a person who has achieved single-pointed concentration in meditation. There are two kinds of meditation, and this is the accomplishment of the first kind: concentration meditation.

Single-pointed concentration is a subtle level of conscious awareness, during which the grosser levels of conceptual and sensory awareness have necessarily ceased. It is a state of mind not even recognized in Western models of the mind, but one that Buddha says we can all access.

The main obstacles to our achieving calm abiding are the two extreme states of mind that we gravitate between during meditation: over-excitement and dullness. The person who has accomplished calm abiding has gone beyond even the subtlest levels of these two states. The mind when it's single-pointedly concentrated is extremely refined, very sharp and clear, and utterly still. Sensory awareness and gross conceptuality have completely ceased. The meditator can effortlessly access and stay in that state of mind as often and as long as they like. The experience of calm abiding is also an extremely joyful one—far more blissful, according to Lord Buddha, than the best sensory pleasure we've ever had.

**Wisdom** The essence of the perfection of wisdom is the development of *special insight* into emptiness. With the subtler level of conscious awareness gained in calm abiding meditation, we can identify and counteract the primordial misconception, the wrong assumption held deep in the bones of our being, about the way we ourselves and the world around us exist. This misconception is called *ignorance*, and keeps us locked into the cycle of suffering.

This ignorance is not merely unawareness of what's actually happening but a state of mind that actively makes up its own fantasies. It is impossible to see through the elaborate projections of ignorance with our usual gross conceptual level of mind; we need to access the microscope of our mind to do that, using the techniques of calm abiding.

As mentioned above, the extent to which we are not in touch with the way things are is the extent to which we suffer and, in turn, the extent to which we harm others. Ignorance, self-grasping, is the root neurosis, the primordial root cause of this suffering. Its main function is to cling to a separate, limited, and fearful sense of self, and its voices are attachment, jealousy, anger, pride, depression, and the rest. As long as we follow these, we are acting completely against our nature, Buddha says; we will always suffer, and we will cause suffering to others.

First, we need to comprehend the Buddha's explanations about the way ignorance and the other deluded emotions function and about the way the self and other things actually exist. Then, using the microscope of our mind, accessed in single-pointed meditation, we probe and analyze again and again in the second mode of meditation, called *insight meditation*, how this ignorance is a liar and a cheat: that it's been hallucinating the fantasy self all along.

In the subtlety of concentrated meditation we deconstruct ignorance's fantasies, eventually discovering, experientially and irreversibly, the absence of

the fantasy self. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, it's not as if we find the ego and then throw it out—it was never there in the first place. What we find is its absence. The discovery of this absence is the experience of emptiness.

With this, we will have accomplished the third principal aspect of the path, the view of emptiness.

So unbearable is the suffering of others, we will now happily embark upon the skillful practices of the Tantrayana, which will enable us to very quickly become our real self—a buddha.



# BECOMING THE COMPASSION BUDDHA





Avalokiteshvara, the buddha of compassion, in four-arm aspect.

## *Prologue*

### *Mahamudra: Absolute Reality*

#### THE ABSOLUTE SEAL

HERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS of analyzing and explaining Lord Buddha's marvelous teachings on the absolute reality of emptiness, *mahamudra*. Here, however, we will not be trying to understand the various philosophical points of view or to develop a merely intellectual understanding of mahamudra. We will try to achieve a direct experience of it.

Buddha explained mahamudra from two different perspectives: one according to the Paramitayana, his general Mahayana teachings (see chapter 1), the other according to the Vajrayana, his esoteric teachings (see chapter 2). *Maha* means great; *mudra* means seal; *mahamudra* means absolute seal, totality, unchangeability. Sealing something implies that you cannot destroy it. Mahamudra was not created or invented by anybody; therefore, it cannot be destroyed. It is absolute reality.

I see Western scholars talking in extensive philosophical terms about mahamudra and the rest, but I have a question for them: "You talk about these things, but do you meditate?" Sometimes, our mind is interested only in fantasy, which is like going to the supermarket with empty pockets, saying, "This is fantastic. That is good. This is healthy. That is tasty." In the end, you have nothing.

The intellectual world and the practical, experiential learning process are as different as a supermarket and Mount Everest. If you leave mahamudra at the intellectual level, it will never touch you; it will have nothing to do with you. Even if you write an entire book about mahamudra, nothing can stop your problems; nothing can move your wrong conceptions.

But don't worry, I'm not going to talk about mahamudra too intellectually. I'm going to keep it simple.

## MAHAMUDRA EMBRACES ALL PHENOMENA

Lord Buddha explained that mahamudra refers to the unborn, unchangeable nature that exists within all phenomena. It is not as if mahamudra is something special that exists only in some holy place and not in your breakfast muesli. Mahamudra exists within all phenomena without discrimination. Its nature is reality-nature. That's why Lord Buddha says, *chönam kungyi rangzhin chaggya chen*: the absolute nature of all phenomena is the great seal. This mahamudra character embraces all phenomena in samsara and nirvana.

Absolute nature is not some philosophy made up by Lord Buddha or by Nagarjuna, the great Indian master who clarified emptiness. Nobody can invent the absolute nature of reality. But even though mahamudra is the nature of all universal phenomena, our hallucinating, conceptual mind prevents us from seeing it. Instead of seeing totality, we get caught up in relative notions of reality. We have a fanatical, dualistic view of how things are.

That is why the conception, the concrete projection, of the self, "I," appears to our mind; and it appears as totally independent, as a self-entity. Therefore, even if we know about mahamudra, we don't really know at all; we don't realize the interdependent nature of phenomena.

Check up on the ego's view of the I when you're feeling hungry. In reality, your hunger depends on many interdependent phenomena: there is the kitchen...the food...your body and mind...all these things are dependent on each other. If you realize that your hungry I is totally dependent, you'll be able to control your hunger, and after eating, you will have a deeper understanding as well.

When one part of an interdependent combination disappears, the combination itself disappears as well. For example, in our group of seventy people here, when one person disappears, the group of seventy has also gone; the group of seventy no longer exists. Do you agree or not? It's so simple, so logical. If you remove one of a hundred butter lamps, the group of a hundred has gone as well, because the group of a hundred is the combination of each one.

Looking at it another way, even as you are eating your muesli, as your stomach gets full, you're thinking, "Oh, the hungry I feels better now." But even that is a misconception. You are still holding onto the previous hungry I, even though it has disappeared. Maybe this is difficult for you to understand. It's not surprising that many Buddhist professors misinterpret Nagarjuna's view and think that he is nihilistic, that he destroys everything.

Check up. The “you” of this morning has disappeared, but you still think it exists this evening. Similarly, you think that the baby “you” still exists today. But even after one second, the “you” of that previous second has already disappeared. Everything—yourself, your sense perceptions, all the objects of your senses, everything—is in the nature of change; we can say, in fact, that everything disappears.

The idealistic ego thinks, “I built this meditation hall,” for example. But the you who built the *gompa* (meditation hall) has already disappeared. The *gompa*, the making of the *gompa*, and the person who made it—this relationship—have all disappeared.

Here’s another example. When it is getting dark, you see a hose rolled up and think it is a snake. Suddenly, you’re afraid, “Oh!” That’s a good example. Because of the conditions—darkness and the rolled-up hose—you get the idea that there’s a snake there. The combination of factors brings about the wrong conception, and you feel afraid, perhaps even more afraid than if you’d seen a real snake in the distance. This time, because it is so close, you have this hallucination.

This is a good example of how we hallucinate. This snake does not even exist, but your mind paints a picture, creates a fantasy, makes it up. Nevertheless, there is an interdependent relationship of environment, object, and many other things.

It’s the same with the hungry I, the concrete I: it’s also an ego-projection, just as the snake is. Although the I does not exist within your five aggregates—your body and mind—it looks like it does; it appears to be concretely existent. The I seems to exist somewhere within your sense organs, but it appears to your sense perception and your conceptual mind in exactly the same way as the hallucination, or projection, of the snake appears.

Using penetrative wisdom to look mindfully into the situation, you will never find anything that you can point to and say, “This is the snake.” You will never find it. You can’t. It’s the same with the I, the hallucinated concrete idea of a self-existent I. When penetrative wisdom checks up, it cannot find the I anywhere within your body—not in your heart, your brain, your leg, your hand, or anywhere else.

Outside this *gompa*, there are some logs of wood. If we look with penetrative wisdom, we cannot find “Tom” within the energy of that wood. It’s exactly the same if we look within the energy of Tom’s five aggregates: his body and mind. No matter how much we search, from head to foot or from foot to head, we can never say, “*This* is Tom; here he is.” You can never find any “Tom.”

You always think you are something; you are not satisfied with just your name. You seek some reality, some identity, beyond the name. However, the fact is that besides the name “Tom,” nothing else exists.

There is not much difference between the logs of wood and Tom’s aggregates. Of course, the aggregates have some kind of interdependent relationship with Tom that they do not have with the wood outside, but in the end, “Tom” and “wood” are merely names.

Here’s another example: Before the name “Peter,” for example, is given to a child, one would not say, “There’s Peter” when looking at that child’s body. Yet, once you have named your baby “Peter,” automatically, when you look at his body, you think, “Peter.” You don’t remember that *you* gave the name “Peter.” Instead, you think that “Peter” comes from the side of the person, from out there. Such concrete attachment to such a concrete object!

It’s the same when some situation bothers you. You think, “This is bad.” Actually, you have made that situation bad; you have created it by labeling it “bad.” No such concretely “bad” situation exists. You have named the situation “bad” in the same way that you have named the baby “Peter.”

All our judgments are very gross. We see things as having a very gross nature; we never see them in their nature of totality. Therefore, we need to meditate in order to investigate the totality nature of all phenomena.

### THERE IS ONLY NAME

Other religions, Hinduism and Christianity, for example, assert a soul, some kind of permanent entity, which possesses all the goodness of the human being. But Buddhism would say that from a philosophical point of view it is actually impossible that such a solid, concrete entity exists. There is no such concrete soul, spirit, or whatever you want to call it; there is no such permanent, independent entity existing within the human being, not even relatively.

At some point in history on this earth, people thought that there had to be some concrete, solid entity, something self-existent, in order for there to be such a thing as a human being. Such a philosophy was created in order to be able to say, “This is a human being.” So when Nagarjuna came along and vanquished such conceptions, people thought that he was nihilistic: “Oh, don’t go near him; he’ll turn you into a nihilist!” Even many Buddhist traditions still have difficulty accepting Nagarjuna’s view.

But you can see: there are many interdependent parts, you give a name to that combination, and then those parts become that object. Nagarjuna would

say that it's the same with every existent thing: there is just the name. There is no happiness, no unhappiness. He says that if you really check, if you penetratively investigate the situation, the object, it is impossible to find anything.

Take the pain in your body, for example. When you search for the pain with penetrative wisdom in the area where the energy of the pain is, sometimes the pain disappears. I'm sure that you have had this experience. Even if you just make up the idea, "Oh, my knee is blissful," sometimes you will feel bliss. You check up. Good and bad come from the idea, the concept. No such thing actually exists.

All these examples show how ridiculous we are. Everything is just a name. The more superstition there is, the more names we produce. And because there is more superstition in the West, there are more names, more things, more goodness in the supermarket!

A mirage is a good example. I have had the experience sometimes that when I am thirsty and I see a mirage, there appears in my mind a very concrete image of cold, calm water. We all know that a mirage is a totally interdependent phenomenon: a combination of the vibrations of the sun and the sand creates this type of energy, a mirage. But when you look at it, because it appears as if water were really there, suddenly clean, clear water appears to your mind.

This is a good example of how things don't have solid existence. A mirage appears to have a very solid existence, doesn't it? But if you check up, it is merely the coming together of various conditions: an interdependent phenomenon, changing, changing all the time. It is actually the same with everything in the world.

## PHENOMENA DO EXIST—INTERDEPENDENTLY

Nevertheless, the various phenomena do exist. When we describe how things are mere names, this does not mean that we are being nihilistic and are destroying phenomena; we are not saying that phenomena do not exist. When you contemplate the right view, the hallucination, the fantasy of the self-existent object that your conceptual mind believes in, automatically disappears. When this happens, your wisdom experiences what we call right view: emptiness, voidness, or in Sanskrit, *shunyata*.

At the beginning of your contemplation of right view, use your intellect to examine the ways in which phenomena are interdependent, how they come

together in dependence upon various things. Then, when you gain an experience of this, do not intellectualize. Just leave it there; let go. When this wisdom is there, it is a very powerful experience.

Normally, we see the world as concrete. When you go to Sydney, for example, and see the fantastic buildings, it all seems so concrete, so solid. But when you experience emptiness, right view, the whole world becomes like nothingness, so small. Of course, it is not small, but because you are controlling the heavy vibrations that produce all the fantasies, it appears like nothingness.

Nagarjuna explained this reality in his philosophical writings, strongly emphasizing how phenomena do exist, that we are not destroying reality, nor are we saying that there is nothing. Everything does exist as an interdependent phenomenon, even if only in name. If you understand this properly, you will understand that Nagarjuna's view is not at all nihilistic.

The Tibetan term for interdependence is *tendrel*. Each time a thing appears to us or a situation arises, we say, "This is this, this is that." But the moment we have said it, it has already changed.

### SO MUCH FEAR

Thus, we can see that delusions arise when our sense perceptions make contact with an object. Interdependent phenomena come together, and suddenly delusion arises, such as when we mistake the rope for a snake and feel very afraid and emotional. In fact, this is a fantasy, a projection of our mind. In the same way, all universal phenomena are actually projections of the mind, fantasies projected by the mind.

However, the conceptualizing ego always feels that there is something more than what is made up by the mind. But when you check up, intensively investigate the object—the snake, for example—the hallucination disappears. When you realize that it is only your mental projection, your fear is automatically released.

It's interesting that the phenomena that look so real to us are merely interdependent combinations of things; they're all made up. When one of the factors disappears, the whole thing disappears. But until we discover mahamudra—all-embracing unity, reality—everything we experience with our sense perceptions, or even in our dreams, will be a hallucination. We always feel that objects are self-entities that don't depend on mental projection, but everything in the sense world is a hallucinated bubble—it comes from nothingness, formlessness, and its nature is such that it will disappear

into nothingness, emptiness, formlessness. Nevertheless, we sentient beings believe in a concrete world filled with concrete self-entities.

We feel insecure; we have so much fear. This comes from our lack of understanding, our “ignorance,” which means not understanding right view, reality. People often say, “I don’t believe in anything,” thinking that only religious people are “believers.” This is common in the West. In fact, when you have the hallucinated vision of the snake and feel afraid, it shows with perfect logic that you *do* believe in something. Intellectually, you might say, “I don’t believe in anything,” but in fact, you believed the hose was a snake. If you didn’t, why were you afraid? If you’re a true nonbeliever, why did fear arise when you saw the fantasy of the snake?

This shows that you have tremendous belief. As long as you hallucinate, there is always belief. Belief is not just an intellectual thing. Simultaneously, each misconception in our mind is accompanied by various states of mind: feeling, discrimination, cognition, and so forth. These mental factors are automatically there, watching. Therefore, as long you have wrong conceptions, hallucinations, there is always feeling.

People ask, “What’s the best solution for fear?” Here are two methods that are among the most powerful ways to overcome fear. The first is to cultivate more concern for other sentient beings’ pleasure than for your own. This attitude lessens fear. The second solution is right view, wisdom, which completely cuts all fear. Fear comes from the unclear fantasy mind, which produces speculation and superstition. Actually, this is the nature of fear.

It’s the same when you worry, when you are thinking about something that you don’t have. This, too, comes from not having right view. Instead of worrying, try to understand and simultaneously just to act; then you will get what you want. Right now, we don’t put our actions in the right direction; we worry instead. We speculate so much, it’s as if we’re in a dream state.

The right view of wisdom is blissful. This is easy to understand: the nature of wisdom is bliss because it automatically releases agitation, fear, and worry. If you are free of those emotions, you feel naturally joyful, don’t you? In actual fact, emptiness is always there—you just need to recognize it.

You always feel you want a happy life. Well, the happy life is always there—you just need to recognize it. Sentient beings are too much. They’re always wanting something, but looking nowhere. Eventually, when you really see this, you’ll laugh instead of worry. Up in the mountains, Tibet’s great yogi Milarepa was laughing at the world. He couldn’t control it because he saw reality. When you see reality, you, too, will always be laughing. When-

ever you see everything in a concrete way, it's too heavy; you can't laugh. With wisdom, you can control the whole world.

When you perceive the reflection of yourself in a mirror, you feel light. In the same moment that you see your image, you instinctively know that it is not the real you. This is a good example. All existent phenomena, the objects of the sense world, are like a reflection in a mirror. When you understand right view, reality, all relative phenomena somehow become lighter for you. Maybe you see it, but maybe you don't see it. Let's say there is some desirable chocolate, and someone says, "Do you see the chocolate?" The person who understands right view, the reality of this chocolate, could say both yes and no. Why would you say yes? Because relatively, the chocolate is there. Why would you say no? Because it has no concrete self-entity.

When there is that heavy feeling, chocolate seems huge, but when you see reality, it's as if you're seeing through the energy of the chocolate, as if you're seeing it through a veil. It's not too heavy; there is no concrete vision of it.

If you look at an iron door with right view, instead of seeing heavy iron, you see it as very light and feel as if you could walk straight through it. You can have that kind of experience, and it's scientific. In reality, when you check up, an iron door is simply a combination of atoms, electrons, and other particles. Even without the experience of emptiness, without mahamudra, if you check up on the nature of such phenomena scientifically, your concrete conceptions will become lighter.

When you understand the Paramitayana explanation of right view, you can easily understand the tantric view of mahamudra. "But mahamudra is universal; reality is the same," you might say. That's true, but the Paramitayana view is much easier to experience than that of the Vajrayana.

Here, for example, when we practice the tantric mahamudra of Vajrayana, we visualize ourselves in the clear-light nature of the divine deity Avalokiteshvara's body. Our energy becomes Avalokiteshvara, and simultaneously we experience bliss and understand emptiness. This combination is difficult. Why? Generally, when we are blissful, we lose our mindfulness, our penetrative wisdom; we become as if unconscious. Check for yourself. When you are happy, you are intoxicated by sentimental feelings; even if somebody wants to talk to you, you don't even notice them. You are completely full of yourself. Through practicing yoga methods such as this, you learn to have a clean-clear vision of yourself as the deity and simultaneously to experience bliss and intensive, mindful right view. This is the mahamudra of tantric yoga.

## PART ONE

### *Lord Buddha's Teachings*





## *1 ~ Sutra: Rejecting Delusion*

### HINAYANA AND MAHAYANA

LORD BUDDHA gave many different teachings, in accordance with the different levels and needs of sentient beings' minds. It is said that he gave 84,000 teachings as the solutions to the 84,000 delusions. If somebody wanted to gain a mere intellectual understanding of all these methods within their lifetime, it would be almost impossible; however, since enlightenment within a single life is possible, one can not only understand all these teachings intellectually but totally realize them as well.

Take, for example, the gradual path to liberation, the lamrim. It has three different divisions that accord with the three different levels of motivation that sentient beings have for practicing Dharma. Some people want simply to ensure that they get another human rebirth in their next life; others seek only the small liberation of nirvana. Emphasizing that people with these two levels of motivation should focus on releasing their own attachment and delusions, Lord Buddha gave them Hinayana teachings.

Then there are those who are more advanced. Even though they understand their own delusions, they are not particularly concerned with eradicating them or gaining quick liberation for themselves alone. They are far more concerned about the happiness of others, of all universal living beings. Lord Buddha gave such people Paramitayana teachings—the great compassion of bodhichitta—and the other general Mahayana teachings of the bodhisattva's path. Within the Mahayana there are others who are even more advanced, the most intelligent and fortunate ones. Lord Buddha gave them the esoteric Vajrayana teachings. We call such people precious jewels, or precious disciples.

You might think, "I must be at only one of those three levels. Why doesn't Lama just teach me that one?" but that's not how it works. The explanations of one level alone are not enough to lead you all the way to enlightenment. You need gradually to receive all three. Then, acting gradually and continuously, you actualize the first level, then the second, and finally the third.

Whether we call them the 84,000 teachings or the three divisions, everything Lord Buddha taught can be divided into Hinayana and Mahayana. *Yana* is Sanskrit and means vehicle. If, for example, you want to cross a body of water, you get in a boat, and it carries you to the other side. The Mahayana attitude of bodhichitta is like a boat. If you get into that vehicle, it will automatically carry you to enlightenment.

Those most suited to Hinayana, the Small Vehicle, on the other hand, gain an understanding of their own problems and develop an enthusiastic wish to reach self-realization for their own purpose. That attitude carries them to their goal, self-liberation, or nirvana.

The Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, has two divisions. The first is the causal vehicle; the second, the effect, or resultant, vehicle. The causal vehicle is the Paramitayana, or Perfection Vehicle, which is sometimes called the *Sutrayana*, or Sutra Vehicle. It explains the path to enlightenment through the gradual development of bodhichitta and the six perfections of the bodhisattva.

The result vehicle is the Vajrayana—Tantrayana, or tantra. We call it *result vehicle* because the yogi or yogini who actualizes tantric methods brings the result, enlightened action, into the present. The experience of the Buddha's enlightened action is brought directly into the gradual path to enlightenment, right now.

When you receive an initiation into the practice of Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara, you transform your energy, your consciousness, into Avalokiteshvara, here and now; you become Avalokiteshvara (see page 43). Instead of thinking, "Impossible! I'm absolutely impure, deluded; I can't be Avalokiteshvara," you transform your ordinary body, speech, and mind into the blissful wisdom of the divine, Avalokiteshvara, total enlightenment experience. You bring that enlightened experience into the path to liberation right now.

You can see within yourself how the lamrim works. The explanations at the beginning of the lamrim place much emphasis on your own everyday actions. When you begin to see all your inner garbage, you start to feel that you are entirely in the nature of negativity. You feel hopeless. But as you continue to practice the lamrim, you gradually begin to think about all living beings instead of only about your own ego-puzzles, conflicts, and delusions. You become more open. Your mind becomes more universal, less narrow. As your attitude changes, so does the vehicle within you.

Sometimes people talk about three categories of vehicle—Hinayana, Paramitayana, and Vajrayana. This can lead you to think that Vajrayana is different from Mahayana, but that's not right. Both Paramitayana and Vajrayana

are Mahayana vehicles; each can carry you to enlightenment. They do not bring different results; there are different vehicles because Lord Buddha taught different methods for different levels of practitioner. Both Paramitayana and Vajrayana lead you to enlightenment, but one is slower, the other quicker. Tantra is the vehicle that carries you most quickly to enlightenment.

Both Hinayana and Paramitayana assert that we are caught in samsara—suffering in cyclic existence—because of delusion and karma. Therefore, these must be rejected. Tantra, however, maintains that we continuously circle through samsara because our perception of reality is ordinary rather than divine. When we develop a more refined view and continuously hold in our consciousness a vision of beauty and perfection, there's no way that depression or selfishness can arise. However, we have to develop this experience through practice; we can't just leave it at the intellectual level.

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF CLEAR UNDERSTANDING

If you have a clear understanding of the entirety of Lord Buddha's teachings and methods, you will be comfortable with what you are doing, and nobody will be able to disturb your practice. If you don't, even though you may have a degree of right understanding, clever intellectuals will be able to shake your confidence, and your faith might disappear. Even though what you are doing is right, you might start to feel, "I must be doing something wrong. He challenged my practice and I couldn't respond."

It is not always easy in this world. Some professor can come up to you and say, "So, you study meditation?" and then, using words that you don't understand, start talking to you about various philosophies. You know what he means but can't quite put it together. Then, you start thinking that you don't know anything, and you give up even the little meditation you do: "I'm hopeless. I can't do anything. That professor completely caught me out."

We all sometimes feel like this. Therefore, you should try to understand the entire lamrim, both Sutrayana and Tantrayana, from beginning to end. Then you'll be able to actualize your meditations easily, without obstacles.

Lord Buddha taught many different things in dependence upon the different levels of mind of his disciples. He said, "Sometimes I say 'yes,' sometimes 'no,' so don't take my words literally. Use your wisdom to analyze what I say." It is your own wisdom that becomes your liberation.

