

LAMA TSONGKHAPA GURU YOGA
GANDEN LHA GYÄMA

TEACHINGS FROM TUSHITA RETREAT CENTRE,
DHARAMSALA, INDIA, 1986

BY

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Preface

The subject matter of these teachings has been rearranged and collected under various topics. During the process of rearrangement and editing, material may have been lost and mistakes in interpretation been made—for this the editor apologizes. The material in the chapters titled Mandala Offering, Prostrations and Water Bowl Offerings is separate from the seven-limb practices within the *Ganden Lha Gyäma* chapter because it contains detailed instructions for performing *ngondro*, preliminary practices.

The recordings were transcribed by Ingeborg Sandberg and Ven. Ailsa Cameron, and edited by Uldis Balodis. The transcript was first published by Uldis Balodis and Kopan Monastery in 1990. Lightly revised by Sandra Smith, September 2020. Tibetan terms checked and revised by Ven. Gyalten Lekden, September 2020.

The prayers in this commentary have been updated according to FPMT's *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice booklet (2017 edition), and *FPMT Retreat Prayer Book* (2016 edition). Lama Zopa Rinpoche translated many of the verses and Tibetan terms in these teachings. Rinpoche's original translations are enclosed in quote marks and set out beneath the latest FPMT versions of the prayers, which are indented in the text.

In the transcript, Lama Zopa Rinpoche frequently refers to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's *Lama Chöpa (Guru Puja)* commentary. His Holiness gave this teaching during the Second Enlightened Experience Celebration, the same event that preceded Lama Zopa's teaching here. His Holiness' teachings are published by Shambala Publications as *The Union of Bliss and Emptiness*. Rinpoche also refers to the text titled *The Essence of Nectar*. You can find the root text, along with Geshe Rabten's commentary in *The Essential Nectar*, published by [Wisdom Publications](#).

1. Motivation

The motivation for reading this teaching on the profound path of guru yoga should not be one of seeking only the happiness of this life; that is completely worldly dharma. That attitude is actually nonvirtuous, so it is to be completely renounced. You should not even have the virtuous motivation of seeking the happiness of future lives, or even the virtuous motivation of seeking liberation. Not only is this teaching on the profound path of guru yoga a teaching on tantra, it is the highest level—Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra. This practice begins with a brief meditation on the *dharmakaya*, sambhogakaya and *nirmanakaya* and it ends with the Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra practice of the guru entering the heart. Therefore the only motivation for reading this should be the special motivation of bodhicitta.

Think: “It is not sufficient that I myself be liberated from samsara, these aggregates caused by karma and delusion, contaminated by the seed of disturbing thoughts. I must achieve the state of omniscient mind for the sake of all the kind mother sentient beings who equal the infinite sky—on this body.” The reason is that this body is qualified by eight freedoms and ten richnesses and that even in one day, even within one hour, even within one minute, even within one second, you can achieve any great purpose, any happiness for future lives, whatever you wish: the body of a human being or deva, any body, and wealth, perfect surroundings, helpers, anything. If you wish for liberation from samsara you can achieve it. If you wish for the peerless happiness of enlightenment you can achieve it with this body. With this body you can accomplish the causes for all those results.

Furthermore, it is not sure that you can create the cause by practicing Dharma in other future lives, because it is very difficult to create the cause of a perfect human rebirth. Therefore it will be difficult to find a rebirth such as this perfect human rebirth again. That is the main point. Even the perfect human rebirth that you have now will not last for a long time. Death can happen very easily; this life is so fragile, like a water bubble. And the actual time of death is uncertain; it can happen even today, it can happen even while you are reading this book, right at this moment.

To be able to take the essence of having this body by practicing the Dharma right now on the basis of this body, to have the realization of bodhicitta, to achieve the state of omniscient mind, to be able to generate the whole path from contemplation of the perfect human rebirth up to enlightenment, depends on the very root: correct devotion to the virtuous friend. Therefore it depends on guru yoga practice.

Think: “I must achieve the state of omniscient mind quickly and more quickly for the sake of all the kind mother sentient beings who in number equal the infinite sky, therefore I am going to read this commentary of the guru yoga practice related to Lama Tsongkhapa known as *Ganden Lha Gyäma, The Hundred Deities of Tushita*. In this way clarify the purest attitude, bodhicitta.

2. The Benefits of Ganden Lha Gyäma Practice

You may have heard or read in books about the predictions that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha made about Lama Tsongkhapa, so I will not mention them here. Without doubt Lama Tsongkhapa is the one father of all the Victorious Ones, which means Manjushri. That is proven by logic and by stories about him. Strong, definite faith comes from hearing those many quotations in regard to him, principally from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. In the Manjushri Root

Text, Buddha says, “After I have passed away, you will in the form of a child perform the actions of buddha.”

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said that at that time a monastery called Extremely Joyful would be founded, which refers to Ganden Monastery. Also in the scripture *Kadam Legbam*¹ Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, “One of my transformations will be as a bhikshu.” Also Padmasambhava said, “A manifestation of Manjushri, the holder of the teachings, who will reveal the teaching to those who are to be subdued, Losang Dragpa, holder of the sutra and tantra teachings, will appear.” So, there are many reliable quotations and logical reasonings to establish who Lama Tsongkhapa was.

All the buddhas of the ten directions abiding in the infinite pure fields say, “Lama Tsongkhapa is a very brave-hearted bodhisattva, the holy being who clarified the teachings of Nagarjuna and Asanga, the great propagators of the profound and extensive teachings of Buddha.” Hence [the epithet] Tsongkhapa, the Dharma King of the three realms, Losang Dragpa.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo says: “If we keep even a drop of the nectar of the name of this holy being Lama Tsongkhapa in a devotional heart, it plants the seed of liberation and one receives the fortune to practice and enjoy happiness from this life up to enlightenment.” I think this refers particularly to ultimate happiness.

I think to have the opportunity to practice this great holy being’s yoga is, in general, even more fortunate than having the opportunity to receive other teachings and the opportunity to do other Dharma practice. Attempting the guru yoga practice of the inseparability of your own root guru and Lama Tsongkhapa establishes the root of all happiness from this life up to enlightenment. Attempting this guru yoga practice is that which causes all the teachings that you listen to and reflect on and meditate on to go to the right point. Go to the right point means to be of benefit. Every single teaching taught by Buddha—sutra and tantra—is only for the purpose of subduing your own mind. That is the only purpose. So, whatever you do—listening, reflecting, meditating, everything—is for subduing your own mind. This guru yoga practice does that. Its purpose is to direct your mind so that listening is not outer listening, reflection is not outer reflection, meditation is not outer meditation—rather that they are inner practices and thus subdue your mind.

If you do the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice and train in the lamrim by listening, reflecting, and meditating you will not be attacked by obstacles. Regarding obstacles there are three types. In the commentary on *Jorcho* it explains that you should make requests with the three purposes at the end of the mandala offering. In that prayer it mentions the outer and inner obstacles, which includes all the obstacles. In the commentary it also mentions outer, inner and secret obstacles. Inner obstacles are the delusions. Outer obstacles are harms from other living beings and even non-living things such as the elements—which are caused by your own delusions and karma—which do not allow you to continue practicing the holy Dharma. Things such as diseases are outer obstacles. In one of the commentaries it says that secret obstacles are being under the control of somebody who is either an evil-doer or wrong guide, such as a king or some other being, and not having the opportunity to practice lamrim. However, if you do the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice you will not get attacked by these outer, inner and secret obstacles.

You will also be protected from harms such as paralysis due to *trib* [pollutions]. This pollution is not necessarily like factory pollution. I think if there is no inner pollution then outer pollution

¹ Wyl: *bka' gdams glegs bam*.

cannot harm one. Degenerating samaya vows taken during initiations and things like that are the heaviest pollutions and paralysis comes from those. By degenerating the samaya of the holy body one gets leprosy disease and many physical problems. By breaking the samaya of the holy speech one becomes mute, dumb and things like that. By degenerating the samaya of the holy mind the mind becomes crazy or very disturbed and things like that. However, by doing the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice one gets protected from the inner and outer pollutions.

While you are doing guru yoga practice you are not doing the opposite of guru yoga. If you do your various practices with the understanding of guru yoga the results will come effortlessly. It all depends on how strong the guru yoga is in your mind. Much fewer difficulties will arise in your practices and therefore you will not break samaya, and so will not create new causes of problems. Also, you will purify the vices or the negative karmas that have been accumulated in the past. So, in this way there will be no inner pollution and no harm from outer pollution. The spirits called *gyalpo* [king], and naga kings, and powerful spirits situated in certain rocky places, called *tsen*, and the three hundred and sixty spirits called *dön* will not be able to give harm. So, by practicing guru yoga you will be protected from those harms.

Also, you will be able to accomplish exactly what you wish. The specific benefits of the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice are gaining great, quick and profound wisdoms. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said: “If you do the recitation of the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* prayer for even one month using one of the visualizations for great or clear or quick wisdom, you will definitely see development of that wisdom. It is proved by experience. There is no doubt that by doing the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice you can meet Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings from life to life. And furthermore, it gives one the opportunity to be born in the pure realm of Lama Tsongkhapa, Tushita, whenever death happens.” So, there are infinite benefits from practicing *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*.

It is commonly known that when people have much *lung* [wind disease] it can be cured by doing *migtsema* practice, perhaps in a retreat, using a particular visualization. There are various things to do in connection with *migtsema* to give protection from the dangers of weapons and to cure paralysis; also to stop rain or make rain, and to give protection from that which causes people to become crazy. So, there are various things you can do to be able to continue your Dharma practice as well as to benefit other sentient beings.

In Tibet one great lama, Sherab Sengye, and his disciple Dulnagpa were meditating in a mountain valley called Se. In that valley there was a very wealthy family and the son was possessed by a type of spirit called *gyalpo*. They tried various means but nothing stopped the possession. One day the shepherd who looked after this family’s animals told them, “Sometimes I see a big yak on the mountain and sometimes a monk.” So they went to check the hermitage. They requested the lama there to come down and do something for their son. At first this lama did not accept. Again they insisted. So then the lama checked and saw it was time to subdue the mind of this sentient being and so he said, “I will check whether I can be of benefit or not; if I can benefit then I will come down. First take my shoes and one bead from my mala. Hang the shoes from the ceiling over where the son sits and leave the bead at the window. Then check what the son says.” They did that and the spirit king screamed because he had the appearance of a great mountain pressing down on him and the bead that lama had given appeared to him like there were terrifying wrathful deities around him. The spirit was screaming, “Now where should I stay?”

So the family went to see the lama and explained this and so the lama realized that now he could control the spirit and benefit the son. He came down and put the spirit under pledge. In front of

that lama the spirit king promised to not give harm wherever *migtsema* is recited. Then the lama said, “If you don’t keep this vow I will smash you into atoms immediately!” And the spirit king said, “You are a bodhisattva, so please have compassion for me. There are not so many places where *migtsema* is not being recited, so where should I go?” He was only referring to Tibet, I think. I think the lama said to go to Italy! I’m joking!

One of the particular benefits of *migtsema* practice is that this spirit promised to not harm whoever does this practice. The harm sometimes takes the form of sudden fainting or sometimes the eyes roll up and the person shakes. The way the person gets sick may not always be the same. So, *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice is regarded as a great puja for the success of one’s own Dharma practice, as well as for others.

A method such as this guru yoga based on the inseparability of Lama Tsongkhapa and your own guru, the lama, establishes the very root of all happiness, for all the good things, from this life up to enlightenment. It makes whatever you do—listening, reflection and meditation practice—become effective for your mind. It makes whatever you do become Dharma: your mind to become Dharma, and Dharma to become the path, and for no obstacles to generating the path to occur. “The mind to become Dharma” includes the whole of the graduated path of the lower capability being, from the realization of the perfect human rebirth up to karma. With these realizations, with this awareness the mind becomes Dharma. Then, with renunciation of the whole of samsara the Dharma that you practice—the listening, reflecting, and meditating—becomes the cause of liberation; so “Dharma to become the path” includes the graduated path of the medium capability being.

As the main obstacle to the path is the self-cherishing thought, “for no obstacles to generating the path to occur” means to have bodhicitta. With bodhicitta, whatever listening, reflection and meditation practice you do becomes the cause of enlightenment. As bodhicitta is the door of the Mahayana path, through that you are able to complete the Mahayana path and achieve the state of omniscient mind. So, “for no obstacles to generating the path to occur” includes the entire Mahayana path.

If you practice this guru yoga you will not experience inner or outer obstacles. You will be protected from harms such as pollutions, paralysis, and the different types of spirits—nagas, king, or *tse*. All of your wishes will be fulfilled, and in particular you will achieve the great, clear, quick, and profound wisdoms, and the wisdoms of explanation, composition and debating. Also, without doubt you will be able to meet Lama Tsongkhapa’s teaching life after life. Also, by doing *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*, when death comes you will be able to be reborn in Tushita, the pure realm of Lama Tsongkhapa.

3. Preliminary Prayers

Request to Abide at the Heart

Päl dän tsa wüi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Ku sung thug kyi ngö drub tsäl du sö²

² The prayers in this commentary have been updated according to FPMT’s *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice booklet, 2017 edition, and *FPMT Retreat Prayer Book*, 2016 edition.

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And grant me the realizations of your holy body, speech, and mind.

*Päl dän tsa wäi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Chog dang thün mong ngö drub tsäl du söl*

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And grant me the supreme and common realizations.

*Päl dän tsa wäi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Jang chub nying pöi bar du täñ par shug*

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And remain steadfast until I attain the essence of enlightenment.

Short Mandala Offering

*Sa zhi pö keyi jug shing me tog tram
Ri rab ling zhi nyi dä gyän pa di
Sang gyä zhing du mig te ül wa yi
Dro kün nam dag zhing la chö par shog*

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers,
Adorned with Mount Meru, the four continents, the sun and the moon:
I imagine this as a buddha land and offer it.
May all transmigratory beings enjoy this pure land.

Refuge and Bodhicitta

*Sang gyä chö dang tshog keyi chog nam la
Jang chub bar du dag ni kyab su chi
Dag gi jin sog gyi päi tshog nam keyi
Dro la phän chir sang gyä drub par shog (3x)*

I take refuge until I am enlightened
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.
By my merits of generosity and so forth,
May I become a buddha to benefit transmigratory beings. (3x)

Above your crown is the root guru in the form of Tsongkhapa, the embodiment of the Guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. A similar Lama Tsongkhapa is seated on the crown of each sentient being. Nectar beams are emitted which purify the two obscurations of yourself as well as all sentient beings, and which then generate all the realizations.

Nine-Line Migtsema

*Ngö drub kün jung thub wang dor je chang
Mig me tse wai ter chen chän rä zig
Dri me khyen päi wang po jam päi yang
Dü pung ma lü jom dzä sang wai dag
Gang chän khä päi tsug gyän lo zang drag
Kyab sum kün dü la ma sang gyä la
Go sum gü päi go nä söl wa deb
Rang zhan min ching dröl war jin gyi lob
Chog dang thün mong ngö drub tsäl du söl
[Njur du khye rang ta bur jin gyi lob]*

Vajradhara, lord of sages, source of all realizations;
Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of nonobjectifying compassion;
Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom;
Lord of Secrets, destroyer of the entire host of maras;
Losang Dragpa, crown ornament of the sages of the Land of Snow:
To you, Guru-Buddha, embodying the three refuges,
I make requests respectfully with my three doors.
Please bless me and others to be ripened and liberated.
Please bestow the supreme and common realizations.
[Please bless me to quickly become like you.]

Dedication: To Be Like Lama Tsongkhapa in All Our Future Lives

*Päl dän la ma khye ku chi dra dang
Khor dang ku tshai tshä dang zhing kham dang
Khye keyi tshän chog zang po chi dra wa
De dra kbo nar dag sog gyur war shog*

Glorious Guru, whatever your body,
Retinue, life span, and realm,
Whatever your supreme and excellent name,
May I and others become exactly like that.

OM AH GURU VAJRADHARA SUMATI KIRTI SIDDHI HUM

At the end of each of these prayers you can think that nectar flows from Lama Tsongkhapa—the embodiment of all gurus, buddhas, Dharma and Sangha—above your crown, and enters your body and mind; also nectar flows from the Lama Tsongkhapa seated above the crown of each of the sentient beings of the six realms and enters their bodies and minds and purifies them and generates all the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

4. Seeing the Guru as Buddha

I am going to go over some verses which I think will be of benefit. They are from a text which Gomchen-la, a Nyingma meditator who lived in Solu Khumbu, gave me and which was written by his root guru—and His Holiness Trulshik Rinpoche’s root guru. Some people may have met him—he makes many medicines which are remedies against poisons found in Solu Khumbu, very powerful poisons which turn into scorpions or something later! Not lobsters, scorpions. They are very dangerous and very deep diseases related to some kinds of spirits which some people invoke. I think some Westerners who were trekking got sick and although they were treated in the West for many years nothing helped; someone heard that the only way to get cured is to go back to the same place! I think a few of them went back and took the special pills which Gomchen-la made. He was very helpful in protecting people from the danger of untimely death. I think he passed away last year. He showed signs of being the embodiment of the yogi Thangtong Gyalpo, and he looked quite similar to that yogi’s picture.

Earlier I mentioned a little about taking refuge in the guru having established the understanding that the essence of the guru is Buddha. Then there is inspiration to become, or to achieve, the guru. Otherwise he is merely somebody from whom you get just words and an intellectual understanding, just same as the teachers in school—nothing more useful to rely on than that.

The previous Kagyu lamas practiced thus:

Whatever actions are done by the qualified, precious guru all are good;
And whatever actions are done are all of quality.
Even if the act of being a butcher or killing human beings is done,
It is meaningful and good:
It is definite that sentient beings are guided with compassion.

I think it means in the sense of transferring the consciousness of evil-doers to the pure realms and things like that. In other words, it is similar to the wrathful pujas in tantra such as fire-pujas by means of which one can separate a person’s consciousness from the body. So, whether it is done with weapons or by meditation it is to achieve the same end.

Even if the act of degenerate moral conduct is shown,
It is increasing the qualities,
And it is receiving the qualities;
It is showing the unification of method and wisdom.

I think “increasing the qualities” and “receiving the qualities” could be related to the virtuous teacher himself as a practitioner, a yogi; it means the increase of his qualities, the increase (of the realizations) of the rest of the tantric path, quickly cutting off the dualistic view and achieving the Vajradhara state. Or it can be understood to be in regard to the sentient beings—subduing the minds of the sentient beings by guiding them from their disturbing thoughts, the strongly dissatisfied mind, attachment and so on—in general to develop their realizations of the path. Or, saying it simply, to guide the sentient beings. “Showing the unification of method and wisdom” means he is showing that he is the same as Vajrabhairava father/mother, Heruka father/mother and Vajradhara father/mother. This is the way to view actions in a pure form, the way to stop heresy, wrong conceptions, which are the heaviest obstacles to the achievement of the graduated path to enlightenment.

Even if others are cheated by his telling lies,
This is guiding all sentient beings
On the path to liberation
With wisdom and various methods.

Even if the action of stealing is done, it is a method:
It is transforming others' possessions into merit.
Hence is a method to pacify
The poverty of the living beings.

In other words, it becomes a method to guide those sentient beings by causing their possession to be used to accumulate merit for them.

If the act of scolding is done it is the wrathful mantra;
It is definite that it eliminates the obstacles.
If the act of beating is done it is a blessing:
All the realizations come from that, and devoted ones are joyful.

Even if the act of killing a hundred human beings at one time is done,
It is just the action of Buddha benefiting sentient beings.
Even enjoying a hundred princesses
Is the great bliss, transcendental wisdom—Mahamudra.

Gyalwa Ensapa said:

In short, whether great or small realization arises
This is due to whether one has meditated with great devotion or small devotion.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama explained, meditation in this context means that through remembering his qualities devotion arises and through remembering his kindness respect arises.

May I keep this advice as a heart practice,
Recalling the qualities of the kind guru
Who is the originator of the realizations;
And by not seeing mistakes in him
Complete this promise without obstacles.

This means reflecting on his qualities and not looking for mistakes in him.

I think it was Khedrub Sangye Yeshe who wrote:

The buddhas and bodhisattvas who descended in the past
Are presently working for the sentient beings;
If one understands,
This comes down to the qualified guru.

A question can arise, which the lineage lamas explained in the meditation on the guru to stop wrong conceptions toward him. Once when I was translating one student raised the same question: "I also teach Dharma to others and I'm not a buddha, so how can I say to them that they should think of me as a buddha? How is that possible?" There is one short effective advice or meditation from the lineage lamas to stop the wrong conception toward the virtuous teacher,

part of which I mentioned before. In the lamrim in the section on guru devotion it says the guru who is accepted by Vajradhara is Buddha; but when you hear that outline the wrong conception makes the interpretation, “Oh, that means among the gurus there is one who is the embodiment of the Buddha—it doesn’t mean all of them.” The wrong conception argues: “This one is not because I saw such and such a mistake in him. Is this one a buddha? No, because I see such and such mistakes,” and so on. If we try to find mistakes and negativities, then definitely we will see some mistakes. Even if the guru has had a great education and has great knowledge of many things, if we are inclined to look for mistakes we definitely will find some: that he is very impatient or has a partial mind in terms of sects or monasteries or something.

If you listen to the wrong conceptions and are biased that way you cannot find even one guru who has finished with all mistakes and has all the qualities. Then what it comes down to is as I explained before: that those who are guiding you to enlightenment by giving initiations, oral transmissions, commentaries and so on are also sentient beings. Buddha is sort-of hiding somewhere or has become a sort-of fairy tale. So, if you follow that wrong conception the mistaken position which follows is that buddhas do not have all the qualities which are explained in the teachings, because if they do have those they definitely have to guide us and should be guiding us now. But the only thing to point to as the way they are guiding us is, as Khedrub Sangye Yeshe said, our gurus.

The result of seeing only mistakes is as it was for Lekpai Karma, who lived, I think, for twenty-two years with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and offered his services. But because he did not practice seeing the guru in pure aspect as a buddha, after all those years he found Guru Shakyamuni Buddha to be just a liar. He went with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha on alms rounds, and once in a village a woman offered one handful of grains and Guru Shakyamuni Buddha made the prediction: “Due to this cause in the future you will become a buddha...”—it says “without having a sign” or something like that. Lekpai Karma could not work it out—one handful of grains being the cause for her to become a buddha. He thought Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was being devious by flattering the woman just for one handful of grain. Because from his own side he did not listen, did not practice seeing Guru Shakyamuni as a buddha, even though from Buddha’s side he had become enlightened an unimaginable length of time ago, during all those years Lekpai Karma did not see him as having ended all errors and having all the qualities.

In reality causative phenomena, materials, have the nature of impermanence, changing each second because of being under the control of “other,” of causes, but they appear as permanent. Each time there is an appearance of an object to our senses—the I, the aggregates, the external phenomena—it comes from labeling. The appearance comes from your own label, from your own mind. Your own mind labels and then the appearance comes. Before you see the base and before your own mind labels, there is no appearance of that object. There is no appearance of I, there is no appearance of table, there is no appearance of flower, there is no appearance of book, there is no appearance of cushion, there is no appearance of wall, there is no appearance of paintings, there is no appearance of Tushita Retreat Centre. Before you label “Tushita” there is no appearance of Tushita. Before you label there is no appearance; after you label there is an appearance. During each day of your life from morning until night, from birth until death, from beginningless lifetimes up to enlightenment, all appearances—of yourself, of others, of everything, come from your own mind by merely labeling. That is logical, it is reality, that is the actual evolution; but what we believe, or the way things appear, is that subject, object, action and phenomena exist without depending on our own mind merely labeling. That is completely contradictory to reality. We experience so many hallucinations, even without taking LSD and the rest!

Now, although the mind is deeply hallucinated, with many wrong conceptions, yet you think that only you, no one else, can decide who is a buddha and who is not. Having deeply checked in your heart, you decide that only you can judge one hundred percent correctly. That is the case in general. So, understanding the fallacy of this also helps very much in guru practice. If everything that appears is true then the rest of what appears must be true—all the hallucinations, all appearances would be true and in accordance with reality: permanence, true existence, even things like mistakenly seeing a white snow-covered mountain as yellow, or the ground in the form of worms. By using reasoning to show how all appearances, including these hallucinations, are not in accordance with reality helps one to eliminate doubt and lean more to the view that the guru might be a buddha; at least to lean more to that view. An ordinary-appearing sentient being may be a buddha and knowing that makes one be more careful with one's attitudes and actions of body, speech and mind. It is similar in regard to the guru; it causes one to lean more to the view that he might be a buddha.

So back to the objection, "I also teach, but I am not a buddha." The argument against this view is that because you are not a buddha you do not let your disciples practice correct devotion to the virtuous friend, which means you do not guide them from their wrong conceptions and heresy. That means you throw them into the lower realms. The outcome is that they go to the lower realms. Unless they receive the teaching they cannot practice guru devotion, so they cannot change their mental attitudes, and so they create the negative karma to be in the narak and experience sufferings for many eons. That is the greatest interference to successful generation of the whole path to enlightenment.

I often say this, and it is useful to think about it: among sentient beings our parents are the most powerful object; if we create negative karma in relationship to our parents it is more powerful, more dangerous, and the result is much heavier than with other sentient beings. If we create good karma by offering service and helping them the karma is also much more powerful and the result is much greater and more long-lasting. Then, Sangha are a more powerful object than parents and we create heavier negative or good karma in regard to them. The next most powerful are arhats, then bodhisattvas, and then buddhas. By looking at a bodhisattva disrespectfully, with kind-of angry eyes, the karma is much heavier than gouging out the eyes of all the sentient beings on earth. But looking at a bodhisattva respectfully, with a calm mind, the karma is much greater than making charity of our eyes to all the sentient beings on earth. So there are incredible differences.

Then, a more powerful object than the buddhas is the guru: the highest object is the guru. If we are able to practice, we can accumulate the most extensive merit in a very short time, but if we are not careful even the slightest negative karma becomes most heavy and is experienced for the longest time. The strength of the karma created increases from our parents up to the guru. Since the negative karmas created in relation to the guru are heavier than those accumulated with respect to other beings, it is the greatest obstacle to generating the path to enlightenment within our mind. Therefore, there is a need for a method, there is a need to do something. Since correct devotion to the virtuous friend in thought and action is the very root of the whole path to enlightenment, it does not matter whether from the side of the guru they are a buddha or not. In order to achieve enlightenment, the peerless happiness, we need the profit to be gained from this practice. We want the highest happiness, all happiness. It is vital to not allow the wrong conceptions to arise, therefore there is a need to practice constant awareness and guru devotion all the time—the constant awareness that the gurus from whom we have received teachings are buddhas.

When we think of our mother or see her even among a crowd of many thousands of people, immediately and effortlessly the recognition “This is my mother” comes. Similarly, we have to try to transform the mind so that whenever we think of the guru during meditation or during break times, at any time at all, or when we see their form, immediately we remember “This is Buddha.”

You could think this is Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, or if you have a personal deity that you practice, you could think, “This is Tara, this is such and such.” As it is said in the thought training teachings by Kadampa Geshe Chekawa, and also in the *Bodhicaryavatara*: there is nothing your mind cannot become if you train it. So, if you remember each day, when meditating and during break times, it becomes easier and easier. When wrong conceptions such as seeing or thinking about wrong behavior in the guru arise, to the extent that you have meditated and trained you will be able to remember that you are mistaken, and are creating obstacles to the path to enlightenment; and you will be immediately able to remember that the guru is in essence a buddha.

His Holiness often says: even if you cannot see the guru as a buddha, the basic thing is to stop the wrong conceptions, or heresy, from arising, so that you do not create obstacles to your success in the lamrim path. That is the whole point. Because of those reasons, the way the Kagyu lamas train their minds in guru devotion is to see the guru in pure appearance. If you are practicing Heruka, the main thing is to make the complete determination: this is Heruka, completely, one hundred percent, and likewise for whatever deity you practice. Then each time a wrong conception arises you should think as quickly as possible, “This is Heruka,” or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, or whatever. You should have the complete determination all the time. To stabilize that, quotations and stories about your lamas which illustrate their particular qualities of body, mind and speech which are not common to sentient beings, such as their understanding, loving kindness, or skill at guiding other sentient beings, are useful.

With this awareness, respect and the other qualities naturally come—suddenly your way of acting changes. Also fear arises. And if, in regard to your other gurus whom you have less faith in, you think, “This is the embodiment of my main guru”—the one in whom you have great devotion and see less mistakes—faith and also fear comes, the same fear as you have with the guru you have great faith in.

Now, for the reasons I mentioned and those which came in the quotations, before making Dharma contact it is important to check the guru by analysis. That is emphasized very much. Once you have had Dharma contact and the danger of wrong conceptions arises, in order to gain the profit of fulfilling your wishes you should apply the advice that the lineage lamas of lamrim gave, according to how they practiced. If you check well at the beginning, the eight shortcomings of incorrect devotion to the virtuous friend are experienced less. Firstly, it depends on understanding the complete teachings of guru devotion, as without that understanding there is no way to practice, no way to know how to handle and stop the wrong conceptions. Once you have the understanding of these teachings it depends on how much you can practice them, how much effort you put into it, which depends on how well you understand the importance of it. How much the eight shortcomings arise depends so much on that. So, it is your own responsibility. The practice has to be done.

I thought what Gomo Rinpoche mentioned when he was giving teachings to Lama Yeshe, Bakula Rinpoche and Gelek Rinpoche in Gelek Rinpoche’s room in Delhi very effective for the mind. When Lama returned in the evening, after dinner he mentioned what Gomo Rinpoche had said. I think Rinpoche was talking about the meaning of “lama,” which means heavy, or greater

quality. When Rinpoche started to give an initiation he told the three of them, “You people are very learned, and I am not like that, but I have one thing that you don’t have—this initiation, so my quality is just that much greater in that regard.” Even if one has just a transmission of a mantra or something it gives one greater quality.

What degree of quality you are able to see also depends on your own karma—the whole thing depends on karma. Somehow it is dependent on your own mind and how much merit you have and how much the obscurations have been thinned. For some people, when they first meet a guru there is no devotion, but devotion arises later. For others in the beginning there is devotion but later it disappears; especially if the person is near the guru for a longer time it is like a cloud disappearing in the sky, but if he is more distant devotion comes easier! There are these differences. For some gurus you do not have devotion from the beginning, but later, because of your own stable practice of correct devotion to the virtuous friend, devotion develops. So, I think it basically depends on a continual practice of correctly devoting to the virtuous friend through understanding the teachings.

In the *Lama Chöpa* commentary His Holiness did not mention all the outlines of that meditation as they are explained in the elaborate teachings on the lamrim, but His Holiness touched on and made very clear the most important points, those which are a block and that are not clear to us. The *Lama Chöpa* teaching, which contains many of the outlines on guru devotion found in the lamrim, was unbelievably effective. Just one word of those teachings broke all the wrong conceptions. His Holiness said that manifesting in ordinary aspect means having mistakes and disturbing thoughts; that itself is called the ordinary aspect. There is no other way to define an ordinary aspect. Through understanding this point the appearance of any mistakes in the actions of the guru toward yourself becomes the cause to develop devotion, and to see only good qualities. The appearance of mistakes becoming the cause of devotion is the sign of the stable root of devotion having been established within your heart. This is very important—this is the most essential point of guru devotion meditation; then the devotion in your mind cannot be disturbed. Understanding these points becomes the cause for the development of devotion.

It is very much dependent upon how things appear. In Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s lamrim teaching he says: “If the teacher goes to bed very late and the disciple wants to go to bed early but does not find the opportunity to do so, he will see the guru’s going to bed late as a mistake. But, if the virtuous teacher goes to bed very early, for the disciple who likes to go to bed early that is a quality.” You can take this as one example of how it is very much dependent on our interpretation. Many times the problem comes from not understanding the external appearance and not understanding the reality. Reality is beyond the outside appearance that we see. But, because we cling so much to the external appearance, we strongly believe that reality is like that. For example, when we think of I or look at external phenomena, they do not appear as anything other than truly existent I or phenomena. Especially those who have not realized shunyata believe that the I that exists is nothing other than a truly existent I. What exists in reality is the dependent I, the merely labeled I, but for such a person that does not exist. Because it is not knowledge of their mind, they cannot see it, do not realize it. For that person the dependently arising I does not exist. All the problems and confusion arise from this. We believe in, and cling so strongly to, what appears to us. We believe that what appears to us is one hundred percent true, that in reality it is like that.

For example, Lama Yeshe acted angry many times, but on occasions he said, “As the object is a sentient being, how is it possible for me to get angry?” What Lama said is according to reality—for him the two were contradictory. It was impossible to get angry because the person is a sentient being, which means they have a suffering nature, are obscured, are pitiable. Although

Lama had no eight worldly dharmas of clinging to this life, he acted them out: he had no miserliness but sometimes appeared as though he was miserly about things. There are so many stories about this. It was only later, when we saw inner qualities which contradicted this, that we realized that what we saw was not true was not according to the reality. Incredible signs happened at the time of Lama's passing away. So, it is very much one's own interpretation according to karma.

It often happens that a guru seems to experience death and rebirth caused by karma and disturbing thoughts, but later shows inconceivable qualities, contrary to what was his normal life appearance. In *The Essence of Nectar*, in the section on the guru devotion meditation, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo says:

Even if the guru is very cruel or very impatient, if the disciple practices regarding him as Manjushri or Maitreya Buddha, it creates the karma to meet the virtuous teacher who actually has the same qualities as Manjushri or Maitreya Buddha in future lives.

That is an important point to realize. It comes at the very beginning of the guru devotion meditation: the need to develop devotion. The method is to see the essence of the guru as being a buddha. Why should we regard the guru as being in essence a buddha? Because we do not want a loss, but want profit. That is the logical reason.

So, even if our virtuous teacher is as described above, if we regard the guru as being in essence and aspect, (especially in essence), Manjushri, Shakyamuni Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Vajrayogini, Tara, Chakrasamvara, Guhyasamaja, Kalachakra, or whoever, we will receive the blessing of Shakyamuni Buddha, the blessing of Maitreya Buddha, Manjushri, Tara, Chakrasamvara, Kalachakra and so forth. Similarly, if we regard the guru as an ordinary bodhisattva we receive that much blessing; if we regard the guru as a higher bodhisattva we receive great blessings; then, if we regard the essence of our guru as a buddha, then we receive the blessing of the actual buddha. Even if the guru is not a higher bodhisattva nor buddha, nor even an ordinary bodhisattva, if from the side of the disciple they practice properly they receive that much blessing in their heart. Even if the guru is not even an ordinary bodhisattva, if the disciple has correct devotion then they can become a bodhisattva or a buddha before the guru does. This guru yoga practice is done because we do not want loss but do want profit.

5. Guru Yoga

To abbreviate the preliminary prayers, which should be done five times, you can recite the nine-line prayer *ngö drub kün jung thub wang dor je chang...* and concentrate on the meaning.

From the very beginning of the prayer when “Mighty One, Thubwang Dorje Chang” (Vajradhara) is said, it is very important to not have the idea of a distinction between these various aspects of the buddhas and the gurus from whom you have received teachings directly. So from the very beginning you should start the prayer with the understanding of guru yoga and the purpose of practicing it. Then it makes sense and repeating the prayer of request benefits the mind. The unsubdued mind, which is like a very infertile, rough field needs to be subdued by receiving blessings. Then, like the crops, the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment easily grow without obstacles in whatever path we train our mind, sutra or tantra. The path gets completed and we can enjoy the fruits and also help others, just as one can enjoy the crops from the field. So there are benefits at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the process of developing the mind.

Every time you say or hear the word “guru,” you should think of what it actually means: the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of the non-dual bliss and voidness of all the buddhas. That is the absolute guru. This absolute guru manifests in various forms as there is the need, according to our karma, according to our mind. So when you say the nine-line prayer, from the very beginning it should bring to mind guru yoga. That will transform your unsubdued mind which does not see the gurus with whom you have Dharma contact as being in essence Buddha, or, in other words, the absolute guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, which guides you by revealing teachings through various means, such as manifesting in an ordinary form. The unsubdued mind sees the gurus as ordinary, as separate from the Buddha. You see, when the mind is transformed and is abiding in a devotional nature it sees these gurus from whom you have received teachings directly as inseparable from the buddhas, as manifestations of the absolute guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the dharmakaya. Trying to see the guru in that way is practicing guru yoga. When the mind is transformed from having wrong conceptions into realization—the correct way of thinking, the correct understanding, into a devotional nature—it is in a state of constant awareness that they are Buddha. Such a mind is in guru yoga.

In order to develop both the method and wisdom aspects of the path in order to achieve the two kayas, we make offerings. There are two types of merit: merit of fortune and merit of transcendental wisdom. These are created in relationship to the holy object, the gurus, through preliminary practices such as the seven-limb practices and mandala offerings. Guru yoga is practiced on that basis, and then we make requests. If we make requests without guru yoga there is no feeling in the heart and we do not see much purpose in making requests; we feel like we are milking a horn. We will think, “What is the point of making requests to an ordinary person born from a mother’s womb and who has same body, flesh and everything? What is the point of praying, of making requests to somebody who is human being same as me? What am I doing here?” Even though we may be reciting a prayer there is no feeling. The mind is empty as though there is a hole inside your heart.

Visualize Lama Tsongkhapa above your crown and on the crown of each sentient being and recite the nine-line prayer. Nectars flow down and purify all the obscurations. Afterwards Lama Tsongkhapa absorbs into you, or enters your heart, and your body, speech and mind transform into Lama Tsongkhapa’s vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind. The same thing happens to all the sentient beings.

THE MEANING OF THE NINE-LINE PRAYER TO LAMA TSONGKHAPA

Ngö drub kün jung thub wang dor je chang

Vajradhara, lord of sages, source of all realizations;

“The Mighty One, Vajradhara, originator of all realization.”³ From the very beginning remember that all the gurus, these ordinary aspects who guide you to enlightenment by revealing various teachings, are manifestations of the absolute guru. The Mighty One, Vajradhara, is a manifestation of however many gurus you have. That should be intuitive. You should recite the

³ Lama Zopa Rinpoche has translated many of the verses in these teachings. Rinpoche’s original translations are enclosed in quote marks and set out beneath the latest FPMT verses, which are indented in this text.

prayer with this awareness. The prayer we often say, “The guru is Buddha, the guru is Dharma, the guru is Sangha, and is the creator of all,” has the same meaning. “Originator of all the realizations,” also means the originator of all the three times’ happiness—temporal happiness as well as ultimate happiness—every single comfort, every single goodness.

Mig me tse wäi ter chen chän rä zig

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of nonobjectifying compassion;

“Chenrezig, (the Compassionate-eyed-looking One), great treasure of non-truly existent compassion.” Relate this as before to the direct gurus.

Dri me khyen päi wang po jam päi yang

Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom;

Dü pung ma lü jom dzä sang wäi dag

Lord of Secrets, destroyer of the entire host of maras;

“Manjushri, who has stainless understanding. The owner of the secrecy, who destroys the multitudes of maras.” The gross mara is the ignorance holding true existence, the self-grasping ignorance, including its seed. The subtle mara is the dual view. There is also the external mara which exists and causes harm because of the internal mara. He who destroys the hosts of maras is the owner, or the possessor, of “the secrecy.”

Gang chän khä päi tsug gyän lo zang drag

Losang Dragpa, crown ornament of the sages of the Land of Snow:

Kyab sum kün dü la ma sang gyä la

To you, Guru-Buddha, embodying the three refuges,

Go sum gü päi go nä söl wa deb

I make requests respectfully with my three doors.

Rang zhan min ching dröl war jin gyi lob

Please bless me and others to be ripened and liberated.

Chog dang thün mong ngö drub tsäl du söl

Please bestow the supreme and common realizations.

“Tsongkhapa, the crown jewel of the learned ones in the snowland, Guru-Buddha, who encompasses all three refuges (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), I’m requesting you respectfully with my three doors: Please grant blessings that myself and others be ripened and liberated; I am requesting you to grant the general and sublime realizations.”

“General” refers to those eight types of realizations and the attainments. “Sublime” refers to the realization of Mahamudra, or it can relate to the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

Recite this five times with awareness of what I just explained briefly. I think His Holiness explained *söl wa deb* during the *Lama Chöpa* teaching: it is requesting our own and others’ wishes to be actualized. The main thing that we can wish for that we have not yet accomplished is the realizations of the graduated path from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

As the great yogi Sangye Yeshe said: “Before what is called the guru there is not even the name ‘buddha.’ All the buddhas are manifestations of the guru.” If you are not aware of the absolute guru, if you do not relate to that, then this word does not make sense and many of the prayers in *Lama Chöpa* do not make any sense. Especially prayers such as the “Special One-Pointed Request” [LC 53] do not make sense. All the buddhas are manifestations of the guru, so Chenrezig, Manjushri and Vajrapani are the manifestation of the guru’s compassion, the guru’s stainless understanding, and the guru’s power. So, you should think in this way. You should not think, however, that it is only the buddhas and deities in nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya aspect who are the manifestation of their compassion and power and stainless understanding, and that it has nothing to do with the with the present gurus whom you can see all the time and receive advice and teachings from. Everything is integrated in the guru yoga prayer.

The direct gurus manifested in this aspect called Tsongkhapa; hence Lama Tsongkhapa—“To you, Losang Dragpa, at your feet I bow down and request.” The aspect is Lama Tsongkhapa but remember that “Lama” in Lama Tsongkhapa indicates the absolute guru, the dharmakaya, the holy mind of all the buddhas. The absolute guru manifests in ordinary aspect according to your level of karma. So, these gurus are also in the aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa. The gurus from whom you have received direct Dharma contact are the embodiment of the absolute guru, the holy mind, the dharmakaya of all the buddhas. So, they are the buddhas manifest in this particular aspect on which we can impute the label “Lama Tsongkhapa.” Hence, Lama Tsongkhapa is the embodiment of all the buddhas, Dharma, as well as Sangha.

To you, *Guru-Buddha (Tenzin Gyatso, Thubten Zopa, names of other gurus)*, embodying the three refuges,
I make requests respectfully with my three doors.
Please grant your blessings for myself and others to be ripened and liberated.
Please bestow the supreme and common realizations.

“To the guru-buddha, who encompasses all three refuges, I request respectfully with my three doors: please grant blessings to ripen my mind and the minds of other sentient beings.”

In other words, as a seed planted in a well-fertilized field which has all the necessary minerals grows easily, when the mind is ripened it is very easy to generate bodhicitta, very easy to generate renunciation, very easy to realize shunyata, without many obstacles. Also to ripen the mind for the generation stage as well as to ripen it for the second stage, the completion stage. So, you can relate to this passage in this way, asking for your own mind and the minds of other sentient beings to be ripened, and also to be liberated.

“Liberate” also can relate to liberation from the bondage of the self-cherishing thought, from the bondage of attachment or clinging to the samsaric perfections, and also bondage of being overwhelmed or caught in the iron cage of ignorance, the self-grasping. And then, relating it to tantra, liberated from the impure conceptions and impure appearances. So, it encompasses liberation from wrong conceptions with respect to the guru up to the subtle dual view, the last obstacle.

Now do the meditation of the guru entering the heart; or you can absorb him into yourself, and your own body, speech and mind are transformed into the guru’s vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind. That is the essence. After Lama Tsongkhapa enters into your heart it is good to feel what is called enlightenment, the unification of the holy body and the holy mind, the meaning of the fourth initiation, the word initiation. The completely pure holy mind, (the

absolute guru, the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of the non-dual bliss and voidness,) and the completely pure holy body, (the completely pure subtle wind, the illusory body, which is the vehicle of that dharmakaya), is labeled Lama Tsongkhapa.

6. Karma

Karma definitely brings its own result if there are no interferences. Karma is expandable. One cannot experience the result without having created the cause. Karma which has been accumulated never gets lost.

If negative karma is not ceased by generating the remedy of the path within our mind through purifying by using the four powers, we will definitely experience its result. Similarly, if it is good karma and there is no interference, we will definitely experience the result.

The inner phenomenon of karma is much more expandable than external phenomena such as branches of trees or crops. From one small bodhi seed a huge tree can grow, with many branches. One such tree could cover five hundred carriages, and thousands of fruits come from such a tree. But karma is more expandable than that: from one cause we experience so much happiness or suffering. It is without comparison to what comes from a bodhi seed.

For example, the King Ngalänä,⁴ the wheel-turning king, has power over the four continents and, I think, the deva realm of the Thirty-three. All his power and wealth came from the good karma of making one small offering: he made an offering to Buddha by throwing some grains, four of which fell into the Buddha's alms bowl, and one fell on the Buddha's crown. The karma from that offering was small, but the result was unbelievable. This is just considering the temporal result, not to mention that it is a cause to achieve liberation and enlightenment.

That example was in regard to good karma. Regarding negative karma, there is a story in the sutra teachings about Sagama, a woman in a wealthy and powerful family who had thirty-two children.⁵ The youngest one fought with a minister's son, but the minister could not take immediate revenge because of the close relationship of the family to the king. But he convinced the king that the woman's sons were treacherous, and the king punished them by cutting off their heads and sending them to her home. The reason she had to experience this karma is that in one of her previous lives she let thirty-two thieves stay in her house and they killed a cow which they all ate and she felt happy at what had been done. So just that was the cause for her terrible experience in a later life. She did not do the killing or give the order to kill; she simply felt happy. That was wrong rejoicing, and the result was so unbelievable.

If you think about it, the result is unbelievable. You would never dream of such a thing happening. I am sure she never dreamt that such an experience would happen in her life. That we never expect such strange things to happen even though we have created such karma in the past is because we do not see the past karmas fully. We do not have the omniscient mind to see every single karma so when something happens in our life such as meeting some bad circumstances we become depressed or feel shocked; we cannot believe it is happening. This is what Buddha explained in the sutra teachings. The cause is very easy to create, it happens in such a short time, but the result is very difficult to bear; the experience does not end for such a long

⁴ Wyl: *nga las nus*. Skt: Mābhvātā.

⁵ See *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, p. 434.

time, and it is so heavy. A small action can bring an incredible result. Small nonvirtuous actions can bring unbelievable results like in the above example. Whatever small virtues and small nonvirtues we accumulate bring unbelievable results.

There is the story of Gelongma Üpälä Dogchän.⁶ I think after all her troubles she became a gelongma. She had two sons; one was drowned in a river and the other was eaten by wolves. Then her husband was killed by a poisonous snake. Then her house was burnt down and her parents died. Afterwards she took another husband. One day he drank wine at another house and came back intoxicated and killed their son and made his wife eat the flesh. Then she ran away from him and married another man. He died, and in that country the custom was to bury the wife with the husband's body even though the wife was not dead. I think that custom existed somewhere like the Middle East. She was buried with the corpse but that night thieves came and dug her out; then she married the leader of the thieves. He was later executed by the king and again she was buried with a corpse. All these experiences happened one after another because in one of her past lives she had been a princess, and I think she killed her maid's child and then swore repeatedly that she had not. The negative cause was only that, but the suffering result went on and on, one thing after another.

Similarly, we may experience, or see other people such as our friends experiencing, one problem after another. I think a similar thing happened in London not so long ago. A young man, I think Japanese, killed his wife, kept her flesh in the refrigerator and ate it. I think his picture appeared in the newspapers. Even these days very strange, awful things happen, some of which we hear about and some we do not.

During his lifetime King Ashoka was able to build one million stupas in different places in one day and thus accumulate unbelievable merit. He was born as a Dharma king and built many monasteries, which accumulated so much merit. In the sutra teachings it mentions that there are so many benefits from building monasteries. In a book based on the sutras it says that for each brick (or each atom) used in the construction of the monastery we receive benefits for as long as it exists or until the earth ceases. Ashoka accumulated so much merit by building monasteries and making offerings to many monks. He made offerings to the Triple Gem and made charity to sentient beings and so accumulated unbelievable merit during that life. That was because of the karma from having made a small offering to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. One day as Buddha was begging for alms there were three children playing in the sand. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's holy body was very tall, so the three children stood on one another's shoulders. They did not have anything to offer so the topmost child offered a handful of sand into the begging bowl with the thought: "I'm offering gold." The karma was that simple offering but the result was unbelievable. The result is so vast that it does not fit our ordinary minds.

I think it was King Kashika who was born as a king and had many assistants and much material wealth and power because of good karma from one of his past lives when he offered some kind of medicinal drink to four monks. The cause was just that, but the result was being born as a king with all the attendant benefits.

Even arhats, who can see shunyata directly although it is very subtle and difficult to realize, cannot see subtle karmas directly. That is the object only of a Buddha's holy mind. At the beginning of *The Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun* there is a direct meditation, the Tibetan text of which

⁶ Wyl: *utpala'i mdog can*. Skt: Utpalavarṇā.

was written by a very high lama from Sera called Phurchok Jamgön Rinpoche, who is regarded as having been an embodiment of Maitreya Buddha. He was extremely learned and noble, with a good heart, and strict in moral conduct. In that it just says, “Karma is very profound,” instead of mentioning the lamrim outlines on karma. It was suggested that it would be better to expand on that, but actually in the Tibetan text it only says “profound.”

Because karma is extremely profound you should not feel careless, thinking, “Oh, I have created some negative karma, but maybe it’s OK; maybe I will not have to experience it; maybe it will disappear or something.” As it is said in the teaching by the Buddha called *chedu jöpäi tshom*.⁷

Do not think that having created a small negative karma
You will not experience it later.
As a large pot is filled by small drops of water
Even small negative karmas accumulate.

Negative karma becomes very powerful and heavy because of it increasing, and as I mentioned, even though the karma is small, the result is great.

Of course the heavy negative karmas definitely should be abandoned, but even the small ones should be. We do not desire even the smallest discomfort, even unpleasant things in dreams. So, not only do small negative karmas create great suffering which lasts a long time, but since we do not want even the smallest discomfort, such as bad tasting food, we should abandon them as much as possible. Also, not only do the small virtuous actions bring vast good results, both temporal and ultimate, that we can enjoy for a long time, as we desire even the smallest comfort we should practice even small virtuous actions as much as possible.

The *Jorchö* practice of cleaning also has ten benefits. As His Holiness explained during the *Lama Chöpa* commentary, it is a preparatory practice to clean the room before you set up the altar. It is Lama Serlingpa’s tradition that a room where there is an altar, where the merit field is invoked, be kept very neat and clean. That is the reason many of the Gelug monks or lamas who practice the Kadam teachings are very clean and neat. It gives the mind a lot of space—you feel that it is easy to meditate and generate realizations in such a room. But my room is cleaned by other people, not me! Others practice *Jorchö* on my behalf. The results are that, again, you will receive a beautiful body such that when seen by others, even creatures, it is not the cause for thoughts of dislike to arise, and everybody is happy from seeing it. You will have very thin obscurations. Also you will be born in beautiful places, without rocks or thorn-bushes.

In some ways it seems that some people, especially those in the West, are experiencing such karma that they created in the past, and that practitioners in the East stay in rocky places having thornbushes and so on, which is the result of past negative karma. But they are creating the cause for good future conditions by doing these *Jorchö* practices. Also, a result is that you will be very strict in moral conduct. Cleaning the place where the merit field is invoked definitely causes a clear mind. When your room is clean, and everything is neat, it seems like it is easier to think. You will have great enjoyments; you will achieve a body of a happy transmigrating being; and you will be able to achieve full enlightenment quickly. As a result of offering even just flowers you will not receive a body which smells badly, instead it will have a naturally scented smell, without needing the effort and expense of putting the smell of another material on the body. Others will be aware of the scent of moral conduct.

⁷ Wyl: *ched du brjod pa'i tshoms*; Skt: Udānavarga. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, the title is translated as *The Sayings of the Buddha*. The author of this text is Dharmatrāta (Tib: *Chökyob*; Wyl: *chos skyob*).

I met some lamas like this, even very young boys, when I was a small child. When I was around six years old one young incarnate lama came to Thangme Monastery from Junbesi and slept through the entire puja, but after he left there remained an incredible scented, natural smell, which came from his body. I think at that time people who lived in the mountains did not put perfumes on their bodies. I think it is to do with having lived in pure moral conduct and so on in the present life as well as in past lives. Some monks, especially high lamas are like that. It says here that “one goes before the world.” I think it means we receive things such as enjoyments before other people. Another benefit is that we receive beautiful rather than undesirable things. People always want good things but some people always get the opposite, and some get better things than they expected. Again, we will receive great wealth, a higher rebirth and enlightenment.

Offering light also has ten benefits. The particular benefit of offering light is that it is the cause for the five or six types of clairvoyance and the development of wisdom. I mentioned the clairvoyance of the physical eyes which can see distant things, and so on. Through offering light to the merit field we receive the wisdom which discriminates between virtue and nonvirtue. It dispels the darkness of ignorance. The result of dispelling the external darkness at the altar of the merit field by offering light is that our inner darkness is dispelled. We receive other wisdoms such as the wisdom which understands ordinary existence. While we remain in samsara we will always be in places where there is light at night as well as during the day. Some people have to live where for many months there is no light even during the day, besides at night. They did not make the good karma of offering light in the past and that is the result. Experiencing sunlight during the day and moonlight and electric light at night so that things are always very clear is the result of the past good karma of having offered lamps. Also we will have great enjoyments and receive bodies of the happy transmigrating beings, and also enlightenment.

This is a sample; there are some differences according to the offering, but basically the results are the same. Each of the offerings of *arham*, *padyam*, *pushpe*, *dhupe*, *aloke*, *gandhe*, *naividya* and *shapta* has all these ten benefits. There are some slight differences but basically they are the same. So when we say *arham*, *padyam*, *pushpe*, *dhupe*... it is good to remember that each time we perform these mentally transformed offerings, and the mandala offering, each has these abbreviated ten benefits. The accumulation of merit is so unbelievable.

It is said in the *Sutra of the Compassionate Lotus*:

Besides the actions of making offerings to an actual buddha and the Buddha's relics and stupas, even just making an offering by thinking the word “Buddha” is a cause of enlightenment.

So every single offering to Buddha becomes a cause of enlightenment. In the *Chenrezig Sutra* it says:

Accumulating merit in relation to the supreme merit field, even with a motivation concerned only with the happiness of this life, and while dedicating only for the benefit of this life, for example praying, “May this become the cause of happiness of only this life, and may it not become the cause of enlightenment,” without choice that merit will definitely become the cause of enlightenment. Once a farmer has planted seed in the field and all the necessary conditions are present, even if the farmer prays, “May it not grow,” it will grow. It is similar with the offerings made to the supreme merit field, the Buddha.

When we do self-initiations, for example, most of the time is taken up with making offerings. There are so many offerings done in the sadhanas. One set of offerings, then again an offering to this, again an offering to that, again an offering to this. If they are not important, if it is not an essential thing to do, then Vajradhara, Guhyasamaja or Yamantaka or the lineage lamas, would not have included them. They would not have included them just to fill time. The question may arise: why so many? Why not start the self-initiation at the very beginning instead of doing all this? When I do not think of the benefits these questions come. It is a skillful means of the Buddha because it is so important to accumulate merit. In the sadhanas there is much emphasis on the practice of accumulating merit by making actual offerings according to our capability as well as offering extensive mentally transformed offerings.

It may seem a little strange for me to say this, but I think it is beneficial to understand it. Of the actions for correct devotion to the virtuous friend such as obtaining advice and offering various services such as cleaning the holy body, massaging or offering water—the services mentioned in *The Essence of Nectar*—the least is material offering, and that should be the best that we can come up with. Guru yoga practice subsumes other practices such as the various types of offerings found in the sadhanas; the benefits are much greater than performing those other practices. That is why the *Lama Chöpa* direct meditation [LC 84] starts with:

Zhing chog dam pa je tsiin la ma

The supreme field of merit, my perfect, pure guru

I explained *jetsün lama*, the virtuous teacher, earlier. *Zhing chog* means the supreme merit field. The supreme merit field in relation to which we can complete the accumulation of the highest, most extensive merit most quickly is the virtuous friend; and that is accomplished by correct devotion mainly with these three actions. The offering of a bath meditation is a substitute for actually offering service.

Higher bodhisattvas are able to practice purification and accumulation of merit such as by making prostrations by transforming one hundred bodies. The second bhumi bodhisattvas can transform one thousand bodies. The power increases with higher bhumis. I do not remember exactly, but the ninth and tenth bhumi bodhisattvas can transform holy bodies equal to the number of atoms in the three galaxies and accumulate merit by making offerings and so forth to that many buddhas. But we have only one body, not many, and it is very fragile; it cannot last a long time. It is not like rock, or iron. Our life is very short. Therefore, if we do not accumulate even the small merit and purify the obscurations that we can with this body by doing the essential seven-limb practice while we have the chance, it is extremely ignorant of us. The bodhisattvas have so many bodies, but we have only one, so we have to do much more than them.

Lama Tsongkhapa explained in the *Great Lamrim*:

If you do not do as said in the sutra teaching, “In relation to the holy merit field, with devotion we can plant the seed of merit which is the root of all panaceas, all happiness, all good things, all the time, so may we be able to dig the field of merit with the spade of devotion,” it is a great loss.

What Lama Tsongkhapa is saying in reference to the sutra is that if we are dependent on crops and if we have land but do not sow crops during the right seasons, it is regarded as a great loss. We would be unable to not plant crops on the land. Each year has four seasons and it is possible

to grow something in each season, and it would be a great waste to not plant anything at those times. If someone does this it is regarded in the world as very foolish. So if while we have the chance to accumulate the merit which is the root of all happiness, all benefit, all good things, each day during the four sessions, all the time, and we do not do it, it is extremely ignorant. During each day of the year there is the chance to constantly accumulate merit. We can plant crops only four times in a year, perhaps only two times, that is all, but we can accumulate merit all the time. So if we do not do it for one year while we have the opportunity, it is a great loss. Aside from four sessions a day, if we do not plant the seed of the crop of all happiness in the field of merit even for one hour or one minute, it is an unbelievable loss. So there is no question about a month or a year. When we plant a physical crop we cannot plant something on top of it until it has grown and is harvested. But we can accumulate merit with the holy object in every minute, every second. Not only four times a day, but all the time. Therefore if the opportunity is missed even for an hour or a minute, it is extremely ignorant and a great loss. That is what Lama Tsongkhapa is saying.

Through remembering such quotations you will have an incredible opportunity to create the cause of happiness with your body, speech and mind within each twenty-four hours; any happiness you wish for—nobody is stopping you. You have unbelievable freedom. Seeing that helps very much. You will not see the point in being depressed when you see that you have this incredible opportunity and freedom. The only problem is that from your own side you do not take the opportunity, the freedom, that is there.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said,

We need to accumulate merit and purify obscurations until we achieve enlightenment. Therefore, as beginners we have to attempt to accumulate merit and purify the obscurations throughout our entire life.

Then Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo gives the essential advice:

Of the two things—meditation and purifying obscurations and accumulating merit—purifying obscurations and accumulating merit should be the principal activity.

Also, in his lamrim Kadampa Geshe Jayülwa⁸ said:

If we attempt to accumulate merit, to purify obscurations and requests and then train our mind in lamrim, the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment will happen by the way.

“Request” means to request the lineage lamas of the lineage of the graduated path to enlightenment. The Kadampa geshe continues:

Even if we think we cannot generate these realizations for a hundred eons, it’s possible to generate them within ten years, or within seven years, within three years—even within a month or a week. It’s possible to generate what is called renunciation of samsara, what is called bodhicitta, and shunyata.

This advice is from the experience of those Kadampa geshe who dedicated their lives, who knew the skillful way of practicing.

⁸ Wyl: *bka' gdams dge bshes bya yul ba*.

You may think, “I’m so evil. I have done so many bad things. My mind is so degenerated, full of disturbing thoughts and so scattered that I cannot concentrate even for one minute, so how is it possible that I can become a bodhisattva in this life?” It is something you do not expect or think you can do. However, it is possible if you practice as Lama Tsongkhapa advised, as the Kadampa geshe and other lineage lamas practiced lamrim. Their biographies relate how they practiced lamrim and spent their entire lives engaged in these preliminary practices for purifying the obscurations and accumulating merit, and training the mind, and contain the advice they gave from their experiences. These are the basic things. Besides during sessions, even during break-times you should practicing awareness of every action of body, speech and mind continually, so that they become a practice of guru yoga, or renunciation, or bodhicitta, or dependent arising and emptiness. Then even mundane actions becoming a method of accumulating merit and purifying the obscurations.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo is saying that to think, “Oh, I have finished the *ngondros* of a hundred thousand prostrations and mandala offerings and this and that,” and sitting with your mind comfortable and relaxed—in other words, the mind not energetic, like that of a person who has been busy mentally and physically day and night and then retires to comfort and relaxation—you reach nowhere. You may complete some numbers of them but if you then live your life relaxed without continually attempting to accumulate virtue and purify, you reach nowhere.

Then Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo goes on to say that if what you are doing accumulates merit and purifies the obscurations you don’t need to exhaust yourself and worry about not finishing the one hundred thousand. It is not so much the numbers that are important, because if the practices are done skillfully it accumulates much merit and purifies many obscurations, the cause of realizations, and therefore the realizations come. Even if you do not finish a hundred thousand, realization can arise in your mind.

The purpose of counting the number is not that having finished one hundred thousand or four hundred thousand you do not need to do any more. It does not mean that now you have no more obstacles and obscurations. If that were the case then you would become enlightened as soon as the sets of one hundred thousand preliminary practices are completed as there would be no obscurations left. It would take just that. Rather, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo is saying that the purpose of counting the number is to increase the merit through rejoicing. When you have done many, you and also others can feel happy. That is rejoicing. If you rejoice, the merit is greatly increased.

If we really want happiness, all success, we should put all our effort into accumulating merit in relation to the holy objects and accumulating merit with respect to sentient beings. The other thing is confession to purify the obstacles to happiness and the good results we are seeking. Otherwise it is like milking a horn rather than where milk comes from. Milking something we cannot get even one drop of milk from at any time. Or trying to produce oil by pressing sand. It is having a great desire to receive happiness and success in whatever we want but never thinking of the actual cause of happiness and never putting it into practice. It is our own fault that the accumulation of merit is never done and that we are not concerned with putting the cause of happiness into practice. We recite and read scriptures, we do the prayers, we live where there is Dharma, where all the teachings are available, but somehow we expect to receive happiness without ourselves creating the cause, and we expect to not experience undesirable things without purifying their cause, the nonvirtuous karmas and the obscurations.

Also, we have the attitude that all the undesirable things that we see and hear are due to the faults of other people. Besides not thinking about the causes of undesirable things and obstacles to success that we have accumulated ourselves, and not purifying them, which is what we should do, we create more obstacles by blaming it on others. We have the attitude that all the undesirable things we experience come from other sentient beings. That it is other sentient beings' fault. So besides not purifying the obstacles which have been accumulated and that we are experiencing, on top of that we accumulate more and more, mountains, like all the atoms of this earth. Due to this, obstacles and undesirable things continuously happen, one after another. As long as we do not stop creating obstacles by creating negative karmas, and as long as we do not purify what has already been accumulated, we will experience undesirable things and have no success in gaining temporal or ultimate happiness. There will be no end to it, no end at all. Thus we live our lives complaining, with anger, and jealousy, and heresy—all the nonvirtuous thoughts. This life is spent like that and the next life will be the same. Even if we are reborn as human beings we will again live the same lifestyle. So it goes, on and on. In this way the suffering of samsara has no end. Even though there is a possibility that it can be ended, we make it endless. We can end it, but what we do in practice makes it endless.

It all depends on a change in attitude. That is the entire key. To stop experiencing all non-success, all undesirable things, to find all we wish for, the key or the door is to change our attitude, to make the mind better. To be more devoted to the holy objects, more and more compassionate toward sentient beings, to have the thought of loving kindness. It is important to relate everything that we experience in everyday life, be it good or bad, to karma. Otherwise Buddhism becomes just something to speak about to other people but not to actually practice; then the purpose of studying and listening is only to be able to explain it to others, but is nothing to do with our own life, nothing to do with our own mind. Then there is a big gap between Dharma and oneself. A big hole. As one Kadampa geshe says: "A person could almost fit between the Dharma and yourself!" That expresses the feeling that the Dharma has not touched our mind. It is far removed from our own mind.

If you always relate the everyday experiences of your own life to the lamrim, for example to the teachings on karma, then all experiences, bad or good, miserable or happy, become a teaching on lamrim for you. Then more and more faith in karma arises and you will gain inspiration. Since you do not wish to experience the problems, the true sufferings, it persuades your mind to think of the cause; then you see that the cessation of the cause is the ultimate happiness. Because you then see the possibility of a remedy—the path, methods to cease the karma and obscurations—it persuades you to practice that path. The problems, the undesirable things you experience, such as disease, illustrate to you the teaching of the four noble truths. Those undesirable things that you experience arise because of the samsara, these aggregates caused by karma and disturbing thoughts. As you do not want the suffering of samsara, these problems are persuading you to renounce the entire samsara, and in order to renounce that, you should renounce this life. To have renunciation of this life you should meditate on the first part of the lamrim: the way of correctly devoting to the virtuous friend; the perfect human rebirth—the three types of usefulness of it and how it is difficult to find again; impermanence and death; aversion arising from awareness of the sufferings of the three lower realms, then refuge and karma.

These problems you are experiencing are also persuading you to generate compassion and the thought of loving kindness for other sentient beings. As you yourself have so many problems but have no desire at all to experience even the slightest problem, similarly each sentient being wishes for temporal and ultimate happiness, a happiness without these problems—but does not have it. It is not only you; there are so many other sentient beings who do not have the slightest wish to experience problems, but whose lives are full of problems and sufferings, and are devoid

of temporal and ultimate happiness, even though they have a great desire for all happiness. So your problems are teaching you to think of others, the numberless sentient beings, who are suffering and are devoid of happiness, and to generate the thought of loving kindness and compassion. That leads to the arising of the thought which seeks to work for other sentient beings, to do something to free them all from all sufferings and to lead them to the peerless enlightenment. That in turn leads to the thought to achieve enlightenment oneself.

So when there is a problem such as a disaster or something you do not like happens, if you think that the problem is caused solely by others and that you are blameless and have done nothing wrong, that shows you have not meditated on lamrim, especially on karma. It proves you have no faith in karma.

7. Refuge in the Three Jewels

Refuge is one of the four major preliminary practices in all four sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

His Holiness explained details of the visualization of the merit field during the *Lama Chöpa* teaching so I will not go over that here. His Holiness explained the elaborate one and the All-encompassed One, the Jewel tradition, which has all the objects of refuge in one aspect, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. That is visualized in front of yourself at the height of the forehead, a distance of one prostration-length away. In space there is a high, extensive jeweled throne upraised by eight snow-lions. Above that is a variegated lotus, moon disc and sun disc. On that sits in essence your own kind root guru, in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha. If you have the understanding that it is in essence your own kind root guru, blessings are received more quickly. Visualizing the guru in the aspect of a buddha such as Shakyamuni Buddha, or as in many sadhanas where the merit field is visualized in the aspect of the deity, greater blessings are received. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche used to advise this. He has a golden-colored holy body, a pinnacle on the crown, one face, two arms, the right one in the mudra of controlling the earth, the left in the mudra of concentration, holding the begging bowl filled with nectar.

Even just the way Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is sitting symbolizes or explains his having subdued his own four maras, so he cannot be harmed by them. He himself conquered the four maras and then by revealing Dharma destroys the maras of other sentient beings. His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to tell the story about the mudra of his right hand, controlling the earth. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha told Indra, “That you have much power, that you are born in a deva realm having much wealth, is because in the past you practiced much charity.” Then Indra said, “So, you are my witness that I created those causes and I now have this result of being born in the deva realm and having much wealth and control; but what’s the proof that you became enlightened?”

I don’t remember clearly the details of how Rinpoche explained this, but Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, “I achieved enlightenment by having completed the two types of merit.” Indra said, “Who can prove this? Who is your witness? My being like this is verified by you, but who is your witness?”

“I have a witness,” said Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, and put his right palm on the earth and immediately the earth goddess appeared in front of him and said, “Yes, it’s true what Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said. It is true that he completed the two types of merit and became enlightened.” So Indra, and the maras, felt very ashamed. I think it was Indra; however, it signifies having destroyed the mara of the deva’s son.

There is another story that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the mara, or Indra, discussed this with each other and then the earth goddess came—but having destroyed the mara of the deva’s son could also mean the evil god of desire, who wears a garland of flowers and who shoots five arrows which somehow become the condition [for desire to arise]. I think His Holiness mentioned in one of the teachings that these five arrows do not mean material arrows—the main meaning of the arrows is the disturbing thoughts. The arrows are: fighting, pride, being distracted, being extremely distracted, and being unconscious. So, they are interferences for those who are trying to live in pure moral conduct because they change the attitude. One thing they do is change the recognition. They change the attitude, for example from one of renouncing worldly life to being attached to worldly life. They also cause anger to arise and hence fighting and disharmony in the family and between guru and disciple. Also, when we try to meditate they bring distractions and when we try to practice charity toward sentient beings they do not allow it by arousing miserliness. The mara of the deva’s son causes various harms like this. We have not conquered this but Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did, so they cannot harm him. So, the right hand in the mudra of controlling the earth also signifies that.

The nectar that fills his bowl signifies having destroyed his own Lord of Death, his delusions and his mara of the aggregates. If we practice the holy Dharma as taught by Buddha then Buddha destroys our own four maras: the mara of the deva’s son, the Lord of Death, delusion, and the aggregates.

The holy body is adorned with a saffron-colored robe and the holy signs and exemplifications. It is extremely calm and clear, in the nature of light. Radiating from all the pores of the holy body are light rays. Uncountable numbers of Guru Shakyamuni Buddhas emanate on the rays to work for sentient beings. Having finished their tasks, they return and absorb back through the rays. The two holy legs are in the vajra posture.

Around Guru Shakyamuni Buddha are the direct and indirect gurus, buddhas, bodhisattvas, dakas, dakinis and protectors. First there is large throne and five smaller thrones on that. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha sits on the central throne. Behind him is Vajradhara surrounded by the lineage lamas of the blessing of the practice. On his left is Manjushri surrounded by the lineage lamas of the profound path, and on his right Maitreya Buddha surrounded by the lineage lamas of the extensive path. Then there are the three lineages of the Kadampa geshe: those following *zhungpa*, *män ngagpa* and *lamrimpa* lineages.⁹ Then after that *Kadam Sarma*—Lama Tsongkhapa and his disciples. On the front three are your root guru and your other gurus to the right and left, all facing toward the guru in the form of the main figure, Shakyamuni Buddha.

However, we should feel that the root guru visualized as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the root guru in front are oneness; in different aspect but of the same essence with all other gurus. This is one meditation technique. We may have much devotion toward some gurus and do not see many mistakes in their behavior, but with one or two we may find it very difficult to generate devotion because we see them as being full of mistakes. Because the guru is the root of the path to enlightenment, in their lamrim teachings Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo and other lamas taught a technique to develop devotion to those gurus which is to think that they are the embodiment of that guru for whom we have strongest devotion and in whom we do not see mistakes. This is the advice on how to develop devotion and eliminate the appearance of mistakes within our own mind.

⁹ Classical Tradition (Tib: *zhungpa*; Wyl: *gzhung pa pa*); Instruction Lineage (Tib: *män ngagpa*; Wyl: *man ngag pa*); Stages of the Path Lineage (Tib: *lamrimpa*; Wyl: *lam rim pa*).

You may have heard the story about Drubkhang Rinpoche,¹⁰ whose cave is just above Sera College. He had one guru from whom he had learnt the alphabet but he did not visualize him in the merit field because he saw him as being full of mistakes. For many years he meditated on lamrim but no realizations came. So he went to ask his root guru for advice. His guru asked him, “Did you leave out any gurus in your visualization of the merit field? Go back and check.” He returned to his place of meditation and counted all the gurus and found that his alphabet teacher was missing. He went back to tell his guru, who advised him, “You have had no attainment so far because that guru from whom you learnt the alphabet was missing. Now you should meditate on that one as the principal being of the merit field.” I have heard different versions of this advice, one that he should be visualized as being the embodiment of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the principal being of the merit field, another that he should be visualized on the crown of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Immediately he did this meditation, realizations came so easily, like rainfall. Je Drubkhangpa’s biography relating how he practiced lamrim is unbelievable. It is so interesting, and so inspiring, especially how he practiced bodhicitta. We can understand the importance of having to develop devotion toward all of our gurus from that story.

In front of each of the merit field figures are beautiful tables with their understanding of the teachings in the form of scriptures (*lung gi chö*) on them. The definition of *lung* is a teaching which came from Buddha and has virtuous qualities. One meaning of Dharma is realization (*togpäi chö*),¹¹ and the other is understanding of the teachings or scriptural Dharma, (*lung gi chö*).¹² *Lung* because that virtue or quality has to be in mind or thought. So each one’s understanding of the teachings is in the form of texts which are in the nature of light. The pages are of gold, the letters are of silver and radiant, each one making its own sound, with nectars dripping from each letter. Here it says they are in front of each of them, but I have also heard that the scriptures can be on their right side. Then the texts are positioned so that the front edge of the letters face oneself, and if they are visualized as Tibetan scriptures the label of the text, which has a piece of brocade, faces toward oneself. It is the same with all the refuge and merit fields. For example, in the Vajrayogini field of refuge the root guru in the form of Heruka is in the center and behind him all the scriptures are piled up with the front edges of the letters facing oneself.

All the merit field beings are in the aspect of being extremely pleased with you. You should recall the qualities of the merit field, recall their kindness, and while your mind is in a state of great devotion, think: I and all mother sentient beings since beginningless rebirths until now have experienced the various general sufferings of samsara and in particular the three lower realms. When you recite the prayer you should feel strong fear of the three lower realms of suffering and of the general sufferings of samsara, such as the six or eight types of human suffering. Feel true suffering and the true cause of suffering strongly and think that it has been experienced numberless times, without beginning. Still it is so difficult to see the depth of and the end of the samsaric sufferings. In the lamrim prayer in *Lama Chöpa* [LC 87] it says:

Violently tossed amidst waves of karma and delusions,
Plagued by the many sea monsters of the three kinds of sufferings,

I do not know what these sea-monsters are—crocodiles or dolphins or whatever—but they are the three types of sufferings and many of them attack us. The waves come constantly, one after

¹⁰ Drubkhang Gelek Gyatso (1641–1713).

¹¹ Wyl: *rtogs pa'i chos*.

¹² Wyl: *lung gi chos*.

another, and they are so strong and difficult to stop; likewise the disturbing thoughts come one after another. Within each twenty-four hours, even within each hour, they come one after another. They are so strong it is unbelievable.

For example, you may have anger so strong that you do not want to practice patience or anything else, and the only thought is to do what the anger dictates. It is unbelievably strong. Even if you have heard teachings on the thought training practices or patience so many times, and are so used to these practices, at the time it is difficult to remember them. It is similar when the mind is overwhelmed by attachment: the mind becomes completely dark, like a dark room and we are completely overwhelmed by it. It is like a tidal wave that completely washes away whole cities. With self-grasping ignorance it is like this every second.

When you are overwhelmed like that you cannot think of anything. Somehow there is no space in the mind at all to think of any meditation techniques. So, you accumulate karma. You have already finished experiencing so many of the results—the three types of suffering—of those karmas created by disturbing thoughts, but so much is left to be experienced. There is an inconceivable amount left to be experienced. On top of that which is not finished, due to constantly being under the control of the strong waves of delusion every day you continuously create karma which is the cause of the three types of suffering. You create more and more. It is difficult to see the end of even the past causes, but now, on top of that, you are accumulating more. Therefore, you can think in this way: “If I continue living in this way, having the same nature of mind, being under the control of disturbing thoughts every day, there is no end.” Being able to see, to feel, the endless samsaric suffering, make the request: “Please grant me blessings to generate the strong wish to liberate myself from the endless, terrifying ocean of samsara.” Still, it is difficult to see the depth of and the end of the sufferings.

“This time I have received the special body qualified by the richnesses and freedoms, which is highly meaningful and difficult to find. During this time I have met the precious teachings of Buddha which are difficult to meet. If I don’t make it possible to achieve the fully enlightened state, which is the sublime liberation, separation from all the suffering of samsara, right from this second, again I and all mother sentient beings will have to experience the general samsaric sufferings, and in particular the sufferings of the three lower realms. The Guru-Triple Gem who are abiding in front of me have the capability to guide us from these sufferings. I must achieve the state of omniscient mind, the fully enlightened state, for the sake of all the mother sentient beings, therefore I’m going to take refuge in the Guru-Triple Gem.” Thus you and the mother sentient beings take refuge to the Guru-Triple Gem.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo gave particular advice for meditating on the sufferings of the lower realms. First put yourself in the experience of those lower realm sufferings such as the hot and cold narak sufferings, and try to generate the feeling of how unbearable it is. Then, when you have some feeling of how unbearable it is, do the refuge practice, with beams of nectar being emitted which purify your negative karma. Now, if the thought arises, But I was not born in the lower realms; this is not happening, I’m just visualizing it, then think, Yes, I’m not born there yet but I have created the negative karmas to experience these sufferings. Being aware of those karmas, again the solution is to recall the Guru-Triple Gem and purify. In the first instance you generate the experience of the unbearable sufferings of the lower realms to which the solution is to practice refuge—to rely on the Guru-Triple Gem—and then purify. Secondly, remember karma, the cause of these problems, for which the solution is again to take refuge and purify. The third thing is to meditate on the qualities of the objects of refuge and then do the recitation and visualize nectar beams being emitted, at which time you can also practice purification and the receiving of realizations.

REFUGE IN THE GURU

When you say *la ma la kyab su chi o*, your mind should be aware that all the gurus from whom you have received direct Dharma contact are in ordinary aspect but are in essence Buddha—either in relation to your own deity or to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, whichever is more effective for your mind. There are quotations wherein a long time ago Guru Shakyamuni Buddha promised in front of his guru, Rinchen Nyingpo, that in the degenerate time, the time of one hundred year lifespans, also called the time of quarreling, “I’m going to subdue those sentient beings who cannot be subdued by the rest of the one thousand buddhas.” This time we have been born as human beings on this southern continent, and this is the time of hundred-year lifespans, the time of quarreling, during which time Guru Shakyamuni Buddha promised to guide us and subdue us. Among all the actions of the holy speech the highest is revealing Dharma in order to guide the sentient beings. There is no higher or better method to guide us, the sentient beings, from suffering than the revealing of teachings. So these gurus are doing this action of revealing the various teachings that are needed to lead us to enlightenment.

To mention it again: the guru who gave you even just the transmission of OM MANI PADME HUM, no commentary and no other teaching, planted a seed in your mind which at some time, maybe in this life, can become stronger due to your accumulated merit and you will then be able to understand the teachings by experience. When the seed ripens you will be able to meet the teaching, to listen to the commentary and to understand the teachings contained in the mantra, which explains the two bases: the path—method and wisdom—and the two kayas. You will be able to understand the teachings more clearly and deeply, be able to practice and generate bodhicitta, and be able to realize the path. Even if it does not happen in this life, the seed will be experienced in the next life and you will become expert in the meaning of OM MAIN PADME HUM. Like the stories about birds hearing Nagarjuna and Vasubhandhu reciting scriptures and in their next lives becoming monks and scholars who are expert in those teachings. Likewise in your next life you will be able to understand more and practice more and be able to realize the meaning. So the transmission of OM MANI PADME HUM the guru gave you gradually and definitely leads you to enlightenment—there is no doubt at all.

So, these gurus do the highest action, the same that buddhas do: guiding the sentient beings. If we do not point to these gurus as being Guru Shakyamuni Buddha guiding us and working for us, then who else? There is nobody else to point to. If we do not point to them as being those who do the actions which definitely lead us to enlightenment, the highest actions of revealing the teachings, whom should we point out? This is proof that these gurus are the embodiment of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha guiding us to enlightenment. Otherwise, what follows is that according to our wrong conception, according to our ordinary mind, some ordinary sentient beings are guiding us. If they are not the embodiment of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the conclusion is that, although Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did promise to guide us, he became kind-of invisible. He is somewhere, but it is not clear how Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is guiding us now. Yet these ordinary sentient beings are guiding us to enlightenment!

The conclusion according to the ordinary mind is that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is not giving initiations, not giving transmissions or commentaries, is not teaching tantra. It then follows that some sentient being is more skillful than Buddha in regard to guiding oneself. That is the mistaken view which follows if we take the side of the wrong conception. It further follows that the Buddha does not have an omniscient mind, has no understanding of the characteristics of the mind, or of the methods to guide others. Either that or he does have an omniscient mind but not the compassion to guide us. Or, he has compassion but not the perfect power to guide us.

So you see, these many mistaken ideas can be used as arguments against the wrong conceptions. A buddha is one who has an omniscient mind, infinite compassion for all sentient beings and the perfect power to guide; one who has all these qualities is labeled “Buddha.” If these three are not complete he is not called Buddha.

Relating to what Guru Shakyamuni Buddha promised makes it very easy to think that the guru is his embodiment, and so there is more feeling and it is easy for devotion, the root of the path, to arise without the doubts, “Maybe the guru is a buddha, maybe he is not a buddha.” At least lean more to the side that the guru is a buddha. Our mind should be changed from the wrong conception which thinks that the guru is definitely an ordinary being, not a buddha.

Buddhas guide even the animals, those who are not human beings. We are human beings, having received the perfect human body with the eight freedoms and ten richnesses which is a better body than animals have. We can think, we have refuge in our mind, we are able to hear, able to understand, able to attempt to listen, reflect and meditate, unlike animals. So how is it possible that the Buddha can guide animals yet cannot guide us? It is also very helpful to remember the four outlines of refuge: how the Buddha is a worthy object to take refuge in in order to liberate us from all the dangers and the two obscurations. The Buddha is so skillful in guiding others from dangers and fears, and is so skillful in liberating sentient beings from the two obscurations. The Buddha has compassion for all sentient beings without discriminating between those close and those distant, so definitely Buddha has compassion for us. The last point is that Buddha works for all sentient beings irrespective of whether they benefit him or not, whether they make offerings to him or not, whether they like him or not. Therefore, the Buddha definitely has compassion for us and definitely does the actions of guiding us. This is also very helpful for generating realization of correct devotion to the virtuous friend, which is to see the guru as being in essence a buddha.

Remember the quotations from Vajradhara in the lamrim, or whatever is most effective. Then, with the awareness that the gurus are all buddhas—if it is more effective, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha—begin the refuge formula:

La ma la kyab su chi o

I go for refuge to the guru.

During this recitation, with the awareness that they are all in essence Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, visualize the five beams of nectars emitting and being absorbed into you. The five beams could be like this: (from the top) white, red, blue, yellow and green, emitted from the five places of each of the merit field figures. If you are going to recite one rosary of the refuge prayer, do half for purification and half for receiving realizations. When you recite *la ma la kyab su chi o* or *namo gurubhyah*, nectar beams radiate from the central Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and from the root guru, and from all the lineage gurus together.

It is important for your own mind to convince yourself to the extent that you lean more to the view that the gurus are Buddha; to see their essence as Buddha is the main thing in guru yoga. If you see and feel a separation it is not guru yoga. If you recite *la ma la kyab su chi o* without the awareness that they are Buddha there is no feeling, and no inspiration to purify. Recite the refuge prayer having convinced your own mind that they are in essence Buddha—then it will be very effective.

It is very good to remember any advice that the guru gave you, and any mistakes that you have made with respect to it, such as having gotten angry or had heretical thoughts, disregarded the

advice or broken the pratimoksha, bodhisattva or tantric vows. Think, “With this guru I made such and such a mistake, with this one such and such.” Remember those very strongly then purify the general negative karma and the particular negative karma accumulated in relationship to the guru—such as having harmed the guru’s holy body, having disregarded the guru’s holy speech or having disturbed the guru’s holy mind, or having had heresy arise and so having criticized or given up the guru. That includes everything; but it is very effective to remember each of the mistakes that you made with each guru. In this way your refuge will be very, very strong and powerful; and also your repentance will be much stronger and so will the purification. In this way in such a short time much negative karma can be purified that was accumulated in relationship to the guru.

When you have completed the recitation for purifying think that your body is completely purified of the dirty liquid or smoke or coal, or whatever you visualized, which came out through your pores and the lower doors. It is like when your body is very dirty and you have a shower, all the dirt is washed away; or like when you wash a dirty glass. Then think: “Now I am completely purified. Not even the slightest negative karma accumulated in relationship to my guru exists.” Try to generate strong faith in this. During the half of the recitation of *la ma la kyab su chi o* which is for purification meditate more strongly on the white beam nectar. It is explained that visualizing such nectar is a preparation for achieving the illusory body and visualizing beams is a preparation for achieving clear light.

When you do the receiving of realizations visualization then have stronger concentration on the yellow beam nectar. While reciting *la ma la kyab su chio* imagine receiving all the qualities of the guru. When you finish think that you have received all the qualities of the guru’s holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

If you do not think of the guru as a buddha from the beginning then this practice will not give any feeling. So if you can recall each of your gurus with the awareness that he is a buddha, then all the qualities of each of their holy body, holy speech and holy mind is received. I also find it effective to visualize at the end that a replica of each of the gurus is absorbed to myself.

The same meditation can be done with respect to the other sentient beings whom you see. While you are thinking you are purified then you can also think that the other sentient beings are purified; and when you have received the realizations you can also think that the sentient beings have received all the realizations of the guru. So, the basic outline of the practice of refuge is purification, receiving realization and coming completely under the guidance of the gurus. The practice of refuge consists of basically these three things.

The refuge common to the followers of the Lesser Vehicle path—the hearer, listener and self-conqueror—is based on the fear of all samsara and devotion to the Triple Gem. Mahayana refuge, as well as being a reliance upon the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, is based on compassion which feels as unbearable the sufferings of other sentient beings. In the first prayer in *Jorcbö*, the refuge prayer which I talked about, it does not say, “I and mother sentient beings take refuge...,” but that is what should be meditated. When you meditate and you start reciting the prayer, *la ma la kyab su chi o...* or *namo gurubiyab...* as His Holiness explained, first purify all the sentient beings of the six realms visualized in their actual present forms, and the second time visualize all of them in human form. This is an effective meditation technique. In the commentary on *Jorcbö* it explains to visualize all sentient beings as having the suffering nature which they do have, but with human forms, which makes it easier to visualize them reciting the prayer all together, with yourself as the leader. So, everyone is saying, *la ma la kyab su chi o...* along with you. However, the meditation is the same—taking refuge all together. I think in the Kagyu

tradition in the preliminary practices and refuge prayer, besides the meditation there are also the words, “I and all sentient beings are going to take refuge... I and all sentient beings are going to prostrate... I and all mother sentient beings equaling the infinite sky are going to take refuge in the precious Guru-Buddha...”

REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA

When reciting *sang gyä la kyab su chi o* the negative karma of actions such as causing blood to flow from tathagatas is purified. You might think this is a strange thing to include because you have not done it, however, as we cannot remember what negative karmas we have accumulated throughout beginningless samsaric rebirths, it is possible that you have. The mara *Dülbäjin*¹³ threw stones at the Buddha and although Buddha does not have an ordinary body and blood and bones as we do, because of their karma it appeared to ordinary sentient beings that blood flowed. Also, discriminating holy objects such as statues of the holy body of the Buddha as bad and good. That includes statues and paintings of Buddha and things like that. One yogi brought a Manjushri statue to Lama Atisha and asked, “Is it good or not? I paid four golden coins for it.” Lama Atisha answered, “There is no such thing as a bad or good Manjushri holy body, but the craftsmanship of the artist is middling!” So, if you want to make a comment you have to say something like Lama Atisha said rather than saying, “Oh, this Tara’s body is very thin,” or too fat or something—that is disrespectful because it is kind-of saying that there is some fault in the holy body of a buddha. Then, using statues as security when you borrow something—in other words using it as a common object—is disrespectful. Doing business like buying and selling holy objects not with devotion and not to benefit other sentient beings but while seeing them as ordinary materials is bad. Also destroying stupas or statues with an evil mind like anger, or taking out the mantras and things which fill them.

All the negative karmas, the general and particular negative karmas, accumulated with respect to buddha, of having broken and degenerated the advice and precepts of the Buddha—*sang gyä kön chog*, the Precious Sublime One—are included. When we took refuge we took the three precepts of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha which are to be practiced, the advice on three practices to be followed and the advice on three things to be avoided. Having taken refuge in Buddha we should avoid relying on a wrong founder who reveals a wrong path. What we should practice is, while recalling the qualities of Buddha, viewing a statue as the actual Buddha even if it is broken or made of clay. It should be placed in a clean, high place, not thrown in the garbage or stepped over, regardless of what material it is made of, even if it is broken. Even a piece of it must be respected.

If you are going to recite one rosary of *sang gyä la kyab su chi o*, divide the recitation into half for purifying all general negative karma and the particular negative karma accumulated in relationship to Buddha, of having broken the precepts of the Buddha; the other half for receiving all the qualities of Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, holy mind. During lamrim teachings and when we study the eighth chapter of *Abhisamayalamkara* or the *Seventy Topics*, we hear details about the qualities of Buddha’s holy body, holy speech and holy mind. We should remember those teachings at this time.

The holy mind has two qualities: understanding and compassion—millions and millions of times greater compassion toward yourself than you have. It is inconceivable. The qualities of the buddhas’ actions are explained in the *Gyu Lama (Uttaratantra)* through nine examples. In this way

¹³ Wyl: *bdud lhas byin*; Skt: Māra Devadatta.

the study of *Gyu Lama* becomes extremely beneficial for the mind. While you are reciting *sang gyä la kyab su chi o* you should recall whatever you know about the qualities, such as the four fearlessnesses, the ten powers, the eighteen unmixed dharmas, and think that you have received them.

When you do the refuge practice, especially when you take refuge in Dharma, the study of scriptures or philosophy such as Madhyamaka that you have done becomes effective; an understanding of Prajnaparamita philosophy makes your refuge practice very deep, very profound. The more you understand the greater your devotion will be. There will be much joy in your heart that you did the study because when you do refuge practice it will be so clear. Otherwise, right from the beginning your understanding of refuge will be very limited. What is explained is what you have to purify, what you have to separate from your consciousness, and what you have to achieve—which means the path, and the goal: the three bodies of a buddha. That is what all those extensive scriptures explain. So, the whole thing comes into the refuge practice.

When you say *sang gyä la kyab su chi o*, nectar beams are emitted from the four levels of tantric deities, and on the sutra level from the thousand buddhas of the fortunate era, the seven Medicine Buddhas and so on. At the end think that you have received every single quality that the buddhas have. Be completely convinced. And that the same thing has happened to all the sentient beings.

REFUGE IN THE DHARMA

When taking refuge in the Dharma, again there are three aspects, the three basic outlines of the refuge practice: purification, receiving the qualities and coming under guidance. While reciting *chö la kyab su chi o* nectar beams radiate from the scriptures which purify the general negative karma and particular negative karma accumulated in relationship to the holy Dharma. By having broken the precepts of the Dharma or been disrespectful to the holy Dharma, such as by avoiding Dharma, regarding texts as ordinary objects, which is disrespect to a holy object, or eating food bought with money from selling texts. All these negative karmas are completely purified. When you do the meditation of receiving qualities the main thing received in regard to the holy Dharma is the true cessation of suffering and the path—the uninterrupted path of right-seeing and the uninterrupted path of meditation, which means the wisdom directly perceiving shunyata. If you do not know much because of not having done extensive study I think it is good to relate it to the lamrim—having received the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment within your mind. Also the same thing—purification and understanding of the teachings and generation of the whole path to enlightenment—happens in the minds of all sentient beings.

When you recite the taking of refuge in Dharma and visualize being purified I think it is very effective to think in this way: the nature of the ignorance holding true existence is unbelievably harmful—feel the harmfulness of ignorance as extensively as possible. Firstly, even without having realized it, intellectually we can see that what the Buddha said about how the I exists through being merely labeled on the base, the aggregates, by our thought is clearly true. The I exists by depending on the thought and the base, the aggregates; that is very clear, very logical. Not the slightest atom of an I not depending on the base and not depending on the thought exists at all, anywhere. No one forces us to believe in it; nobody says, “If you don’t believe that your I is truly existent I will put you in prison and punish you!” Nobody says, “I will confiscate all your savings and property if you don’t believe that the I is truly existent!”

In reality it does not exist, there is no such thing. Just like the million dollars in our own hand at this moment, it is completely non-existent. There is no reason, no purpose, no profit at all to believe and cling to the idea that I is truly existent, but constantly we cling to the concept that I is independent and is truly existent. The problems that come because of this are inconceivable. The cause of samsara, the ignorance holding true existence, is very funny; the way we think of, or look at, the I is so childish, completely nonsensical. That is the first thing. Then secondly, it is unbelievable how we get overwhelmed by strong attachment and anger and other disturbing thoughts because of that.

While you are saying *chö la kyab su chi o* remember and meditate on all these sufferings, the unbelievable problems and confusion, how you are completely overwhelmed by the various disturbing thoughts arising from ignorance. Then, contemplate karma and all the sufferings of the three lower realms, the sufferings of the upper realms, through to the twelve links. The sufferings of samsara are without beginning and are so difficult to end. Remember the whole problem, from birth through to death. This ignorance is so dangerous, so harmful, much more dangerous than one million poisonous snakes attacking you; much more dangerous than all the atomic bombs on this earth. Referring to these examples, think, “My ignorance holding I as truly existent is much more harmful than if all sentient beings became my enemy and attacked me, even killed me. It is much worse. Without this I cannot receive harm from a million poisonous snakes or millions of atomic bombs. Even everybody on this earth cannot harm me. But with this ignorance even if there is no danger from weapons at all, even there are no poisonous snakes, even there are no beings harming me, it causes me to create negative karma, it throws me into the lower realms and to experience sufferings.” So, have strong renunciation of the true cause of suffering, especially ignorance. It is very effective.

Of the four negative actions to be purified, the first is avoiding Dharma. In the *Lamrim Chenmo* and also Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s lamrim teachings it refers to a passage in a sutra where I think Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is telling the bodhisattva Jampäl that the karma of avoiding the Dharma is very subtle. I do not think it is saying it is very small, but that it is very heavy. I think very heavy is the common expression. It does not mean that it is small and can disappear after some time. Guru Shakyamuni goes on to say, “Jampäl, viewing some of the Buddha’s teachings as good and some as bad is avoiding Dharma. Thinking, ‘This is taught for the bodhisattvas, and these teachings are taught for the hearer-listeners, these for the self-conquerors,’ is avoiding Dharma.” That means thinking, “These teachings are not for me; these are for bodhisattvas; these are for the Lesser Vehicle followers, the hearer-listeners; these are for the self-conquerors.” Saying, “These teachings of Buddha can be practiced, those cannot be practiced,” or, “This is not for the bodhisattvas,” is avoiding Dharma. Saying, for example, “This teaching which explains the path of the listener-hearer and self-conqueror is for the followers of the Lesser Vehicle path, it is not for me,” is avoiding Dharma. Or perhaps, “Oh, I’m a Mahayanist, so I don’t need to study the teachings which explain the path of the listener-hearer and the self-conqueror, such as the teachings on the vows found in the Lesser Vehicle.” Saying, “It’s not for me.”

It is the same if the Lesser Vehicle practitioners say, “These are Mahayana teachings so they’re not for me.” I think it is the case particularly if they know it was taught by Buddha, but, I think, also if they do not know that it was taught by Buddha. Some of the Nepalese people who do not take teachings or initiations from the Tibetan lamas, who are more involved in the Theravadin path, think Mahayana was revealed by and did not exist before Nagarjuna. I think some people think this way in Sri Lanka and in other countries. They say what Tibetan lamas practice is completely something founded by themselves. In reality it was taught by Buddha so saying things like that becomes avoiding Dharma.

Saying, “This is not for bodhisattvas,” is avoiding Dharma because there is no teaching of Buddha that is not for the bodhisattva. Any teaching taught by Buddha is something that a bodhisattva has to know. Why? Because a bodhisattva’s main wish, main concern, is to work for other sentient beings, therefore the bodhisattva has to know which sentient beings have the karma only to be lead to nirvana, the sorrowless state of the hearer-listener, and has to reveal that path to them. And for those sentient beings who have karma to attain the sorrowless state of the self-conqueror, the bodhisattva has to know and reveal that path to guide them. So, in order to reveal those paths the bodhisattva has to know those teachings, has to study them. In other words, if the sentient beings have the intelligence, to lead them to enlightenment according to their karma. So, he has to know all the teachings of the four sects in order to lead the different sentient beings to enlightenment according to their karma. For somebody one sect’s teachings do not fit, they are difficult to understand, and perhaps the Nyingma teachings are more suitable, and faith will arise more easily. The sentient beings have different karma.

If you say, “The study of the Abhisamayalamkara, the Abhidharmakosha, or the Pramanavarttika [a text on logic] is just intellectual study,” and give them up, that is creating the negative karma of avoiding Dharma. Saying, “It just expands the intellect and doesn’t benefit the mind,” is a great criticism of the holy Dharma, and is putting down the Buddha’s teachings. This is quite a common thing to happen if a person does not know the initial practices well and has a lack of understanding and practice of the basic teachings about karma and refuge.

Thinking, “These subjects are too complicated for me,” or, “This is not for me,” is avoiding Dharma. For example, in the six-session yoga when we enumerate the mother tantra vows there are vows such as those concerning the two mudras—the transcendental wisdom mudra experienced through meditation and the action mudra experienced physically—and even though we have not reached that level, if we give up the wish to perform those practices, or if we feel some aversion, it is avoiding Dharma. It may not be the right time, but we have to have faith in the benefits of those practices and wish to practice them when, in the future, we have reached that level of the path. They are the skillful means of utilizing attachment on the path. Similarly, even though we cannot understand the extensive scriptures now, we should not think, “This is not for me,” but should think, “I cannot understand now, but I will plan to be able to study and understand them in the future.” Then there is a wish, we are not rejecting it. It is advised in the teachings that we should make prayers to be able to study and be able to understand in the future.

Also Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in the teachings on refuge that saying, “This is good and this is bad,” regarding the teachings of the four sects, which are teachings of Buddha, is also avoiding Dharma. These things basically happen because of a lack of understanding the first part of the lamrim outline—the four qualities of the lamrim teaching.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo used this example: though there are many things involved—the paint, color, brush and pencil—nothing is contrary to the production of a painting. Everything is helpful for producing the painting. The materials are all different but each is an aid to the other for actualizing the painting. It is similar regarding the Lesser Vehicle teachings and the Mahayana—both the Paramitayana and the four types of tantra teachings—and the different presentations of the teachings within the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Within the various teachings of the Lesser Vehicle, the Paramitayana and tantra, nothing is contradictory to a person’s achievement of enlightenment. It is the method for any sentient being to achieve enlightenment, therefore there is no contradiction.

The first quality is to understand the meanings of the words and realize all the teachings of Buddha without seeing them as contradictory. The next quality is to see every scripture of the Buddha as advice, which means there is not even one syllable to be neglected. This comes about through the study of lamrim—by listening, reflecting and meditating. Then, the quality of immediately finding the view of the buddhas. This means that with any study that we do such as of the five treatises, such as the *Pramanavarttika* and the *Abhidharmakosha*, we can easily relate their contents to the lamrim outlines of the paths of the beings of the three capabilities. We can relate to it as always being a commentary of the three principal paths, particularly on shunyata. As Lama Tsongkhapa mentioned in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, the essential meaning of all the scriptures of the Victorious Ones is renunciation; the path which is admired by the Victorious Ones and their sons is bodhicitta; the door for the fortunate ones wishing for liberation is shunyata.

If the appearance of dependent relation,
Which is unbetraying, is accepted separately from emptiness,
And as long as they are seen as separate,
Then one has still not realized the Buddha's intent.

“As long as we see the meaning of non-betraying appearance—dependent arising—and the meaning of emptiness as separate, we still have not realized the pure view of the Buddha.” I think “still” here means that even if the person believes they have realized shunyata, even if they have had some experience and they interpret that as having realized shunyata, as long as the meaning of dependent arising and emptiness appear as separate, no matter how much they announce like the sound of thunder in all ten directions that they have realized shunyata, they have not realized shunyata.

By depending on the skillful captain, the guru, and entering the ship of lamrim, we can traverse the ocean of the extensive scriptures, and without danger we can then immediately find the pure view of Buddha, the three principal aspects of the path, the jewels of the ocean.

Also, stepping over scriptures, Dharma texts, is avoiding Dharma. This was said by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo in the lamrim teachings. The lineage lamas commonly advise that if you know that putting spit on Dharma books when turning the pages is disrespectful, you will not copy others who do it. It creates negative karma, obstacles to realization, so you will not follow such an example. I have not seen Western people doing this, but anyway it is good to know. During some lamrim teachings in Darjeeling His Holiness Ling Rinpoche said that if you do this then you will get born in the vajra hell. His Holiness said that when you turn the pages of a text to count them or something, you should put clean water in a container and dip your fingers in it and turn the pages. If you do not know that these acts are creating the negative karma of disrespect there is the danger that you will copy somebody who does it. Also at that time His Holiness said to not drop newspapers into the toilet. It may refer to Tibetan newspapers, I'm not sure, but at that time it sounded to me like it meant English newspapers. During the Kalachakra initiation His Holiness the Dalai Lama said one should avoid disrespect to printed matter as much as one can, but in regard to English print there is not much choice because it is all over the place.

Another thing is marking certain lines or certain subjects in books in order to be able to find them or emphasize them. Many Tibetans, when they want to mark something in a book, use the dirt in between the teeth! I think this is because it was not easy to get glue in Tibet—it could not be bought, and this is the easiest thing to use. They take out the gunk then put it on the page and

then stick some paper there to mark the place. Again, that is due to not having studied lamrim and not having practiced. I think if you make a mark as an offering, in the same way as when painting stupas or doing a painting of the Buddha, then it is meritorious. But if you make a mark while seeing it as an ordinary material, I think the karma is something else! Some other karma! Not merit, some other karma; possibly rebirth in the “black line” narak. Such actions accumulate the negative karma of disrespect. I even wonder about colors. When I am marking a text I have doubts about whether it is alright or not; but I think it might be alright because when we do a painting of Buddha there are different colors used. I think the main thing is the attitude.

There are also other things. If wind is blowing away pages and so on you can put rosaries and things like that on top; otherwise you cannot put objects on top of texts. That is stated in Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s lamrim teachings. When I returned from America after Lama passed away and went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama with the FPMT Board members, I requested His Holiness to give some advice to the organization. I think a brochure or something, not a particular text, was offered and I think there was a stupa to be blessed. The stupa was placed on top of the brochure, and His Holiness said, “You should not put a stupa on top of a text.” It is good to know details like that; otherwise, through not knowing these details, we daily create obstacles to attainment.

On my last tour when I was in Hawaii I was very surprised when I visited some students’ house. I was so happy to see their altar. I am not sure how much of a professional he is, but I think he designed the house and the altar himself. He did not waste any part of the construction—every part was usable. He kept all the scriptures, the small Tibetan Library publications from many years ago, the scriptures translated from Tibetan, and the teachings, so neatly right on the top shelf. Then below he kept the statues. There is a glass front. It is very nice—all very clean and neat. Then the other side opens. You would not think there is something inside because it is just flat, but inside there are big *damarus* and cymbals and various things they brought from Bodhgaya or Dharamsala. I think he has everything there! That was the best set-up I have seen in a private house. I am sure there are others that I have not seen! But in their house on seeing the way the altar in the shrine-room is set up you would immediately know that this is a family who knows the refuge practice. So I told them this and they were happy to hear that they had done something good!

Also when you wrap scriptures you should not do it as though you were packing luggage, like packing a rucksack! When you wrap a scripture it should be done with the attitude that you are offering robes; then during every moment that you are doing it you accumulate merit, the cause of happiness. So if you do not think like this you will miss an opportunity. You can accumulate such merit and dedicate it to every sentient being—so, it is an incredible thing. It is said in a lamrim text:

The negative karma of avoiding Dharma is this heavy: one who avoids the Dharma creates karma much heavier than that of destroying all the stupas on this earth; one who avoids the scriptures creates negative karma much heavier than that of having killed arhats equaling the number of sand-grains of the river Ganga.

If, like the Dharma scriptures, the holy objects such as statues or paintings of buddhas are kept respectfully and neatly in a high place it seems effective for the mind. If kept in disorder your meditations will be unclear, a lot of disturbing thoughts will arise, and you will not be able remember the object. The mind will be in kind-of disorder. When your altar is clean and neat then the mind is kind-of happy, calm and clear. It seems that there is some relationship, it affects the mind.

One thing is that Buddha's teachings should be kept separate from other religious books which contain wrong advice on conduct, or wrong views. Normally when the lineage lamas teach lamrim they give this advice during the section on the practice of refuge. If on the altar Buddha's scriptures and other books are mixed together it affects the mind and maybe interferes with gaining clear understanding and stable faith in the right view: karma and shunyata. The right view for worldly beings is understanding karma, and the other right view is of shunyata.

I checked well—almost each book—that the couple I mentioned earlier had, and they kept the books by lamas in one section. They were mostly those from Dharamsala, like the translated teachings of Geshe Sopa Rinpoche and Geshe Rabten Rinpoche. I am sure they must have read them all!

Also treat Dharma books with missing or torn pages with respect; if you see them lying on the floor or on the road respectfully put them in a high, clean place. You may be able to still see something, even one or two syllables, which is a teaching, some advice to yourself which reveals the path which liberates you from the two obscurations and which leads you to enlightenment—therefore it should be considered to be the actual Dharma. In Tibet and places like Solu Khumbu, where I was born, where there are rocks, and where it does not rain, they build small walls and paint them white, kind-of like a stupa, and they put scriptures with missing pages and so on into those. As they do not get rained on it is respectful. If there is no other choice at all, as a last resort, while reciting OM AH HUM you offer fire and burn them. Otherwise you and many other people create negative karma if they are put on the ground. The Kadam geshe, who were lamrim lineage lamas, because of their respect for the holy Dharma would pick out a piece of paper with letters on it even if it had been thrown into the middle of the toilet—in the middle of the things!—and put it in a high place.

I want to mention something in regard to avoiding Dharma: using scriptures as a material security deposit or selling them and using the money for buying food—that is, regarding the scriptures as ordinary materials. You may have heard the story about one great yogi of Chenrezig, Lama Serkhangpa. He and four monks were invited to the home of one family to do puja. I think the family had lost their wealth and they had sold their twelve volumes of Prajnaparamita scriptures and they offered food bought with that money to the yogi and monks. Right after he ate the food the great yogi got an incredible pain in his holy body. He checked and a white syllable AH was moving around inside his body causing much pain. As he often had visions of Chenrezig he asked Chenrezig what it was. Chenrezig told him, “This is because you ate food bought with money received from selling scriptures. You have very thin obscurations so that's why you are experiencing the karma immediately. Why nothing has happened to the four monks now, why they are comfortable, is because after this life they are going to be born in the narak realms.” Then Chenrezig advised him to write a Prajnaparamita scripture with gold and to practice the *drubtor*¹⁴ to purify the pollution. That is a particular practice for purifying the pollution of having eaten food bought with money gained from selling statues and scriptures and things like that. So the yogi practiced this.

Once when the Sangha were having an interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama somebody raised the question about publishing books and Dharma texts and things like that and having to live on that money. As I recall His Holiness said, “If you work at producing books and there is no other way, then you have to live on money that comes from selling those books.” Regarding this I want to say that if you have other means to easily support yourself it is good, and it is

¹⁴ Wyl: *sgrub gtor*.

better to choose that way. The main thing is that it depends on your attitude. Generally what you hear in the teachings is that you should not sell Dharma scriptures, statues, and so on. But, since there is nobody who makes offerings of statues and scriptures to everybody else, the two or three people who start a business to, say, make statues, whether their attitude is the thought to benefit others or the thought to benefit themselves, the thousands or however many they make give many other sentient beings some opportunity. Firstly, just buying for example, White Tara or Amitayus—the Infinite Life Buddha—makes the life of the owner or benefactor longer. If they buy it for somebody who is in danger of untimely death it causes their life to be longer. Having a thangka—painting—done is one of the methods to relieve someone from the danger of untimely death. Not only that, it purifies karma; it is often found through astrological or divination methods that if you make such and such a statue you will be purified and not get born in lower states but rather as a deva or human being— otherwise it would be as a spirit or yak or a naga! Without mentioning making offerings to the statue or painting.

Also every time the people who buy the statue or painting look at it they experience great purification. It is mentioned in the sutra teachings that even by looking at paintings or drawings of buddhas with anger creates the karma for that person to eventually see millions of buddhas. The disciples of Buddha were able to see Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, receive teachings and offer service; and, for example, those who have achieved the path of great merit are able to see the nirmanakaya aspect of uncountable buddhas. That is a result of their having been prepared by seeing paintings and statues of Buddha. Seeing such objects arouses faith and generates the wish to be like that. Then, people make offerings so it gives many sentient beings the opportunity to accumulate merit and purify their negative karmas. Even though these two or three people only intended to earn profit for themselves, so many others receive that great benefit. Even if these two or three people have to be born in the narak, by the power of those holy objects thousands of sentient beings create the cause of enlightenment. Every single virtuous thing they do with respect to the Buddha, such as paying respect by prostrating, becomes not just the cause of wealth in this life and future lives, not just a good rebirth, but is the cause of enlightenment, even if they have not generated a virtuous motivation.

You can see that if nobody publishes books, if nobody bears the hardships even if it is negative karma, then all the rest of the sentient beings do not get the opportunity to meet the Buddhadharma through reading, and to then listen, reflect and meditate in order to generate the path, which is the actual thing which will separate the obscurations from the consciousness. Why I wanted to bring this point up again is that if nobody produced these objects then at this point we would not have accumulated any merit by making offerings at the altar every day. We would not have accumulated so much merit with the holy objects that we have in the house. Our lives would be empty of all those merits which we have accumulated since we met Buddhadharma and started to practice refuge and bought or received these holy objects.

In a previous life when Maitreya Buddha was a monk he met a girl who wanted to commit suicide because of not having found a man. So, having generated unbelievable compassion he decided, “Whatever suffering, even the heaviest and longest narak suffering, I have to experience because of living with her, I’m going to experience it in order to protect her from the heavy negative karma of killing herself.” With such incredible, unbelievable, compassion he renounced himself completely, not cherishing himself even in the slightest, only cherishing the woman. As a result of living with her instead of the action being nonvirtuous and being the cause to be born in the narak it became a highly skillful method, a virtuous action which caused Maitreya Bodhisattva to experience forty thousand eons less in samsara. Similarly, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha when a bodhisattva traveling on a ship, because of his unbelievable, unbearable compassion which completely renounced himself and only cherished others, killed a man who

intended to kill five hundred people. That caused him to spend one hundred thousand eons less in samsara.

It is important to have strong, unbearable compassion toward other sentient beings who are suffering because of not having the Dharma wisdom eye and to have the thought of completely renouncing yourself and cherishing others: Think, “I’m going to experience whatever suffering results. Whatever trouble arises from this, I’m going to experience it for the sake of others.” In this case you are not exchanging yourself only with one sentient being but with all those thousands of other sentient beings who get the opportunity to accumulate merit by doing listening, reflection and meditation practice because of having read those books. That is unbelievably great. If your attitude can be one of complete sacrifice like this, I think that due to its power it is great purification in itself, as in those two examples.

While reciting *chö la kyab su chi o* you should recall the qualities of the Dharma. The first quality is that the teachings of Buddha are not contradictory to each other. The second quality is that every single word of the Buddha appears as advice. The third quality is you immediately find the pure view of the victorious ones. Through listening, reflection and meditation practice on the lamrim these three things are realized by the practitioner. And due to this comes the fourth quality, that all your heavy negative karmas are naturally stopped.

When taking refuge in Dharma I think it is good to concentrate on how the Dharma guides; the same with Buddha and Sangha—having taken refuge in them, how do they guide us? That is very effective, it gives more inspiration.

The quality of, or the benefit of, the Dharma arises from guru devotion. I want to emphasize how the realization of guru devotion protects us from heresy, disrespect, and all the problems which arise from that. Seeing the guru as being in essence a buddha and having guru devotion does not allow heresy to arise. If heresy does not arise we do not accumulate the negative karma of disrespect with the body and speech. If there is no disrespect in the mind there will be no disrespect with the body and speech. So those eight shortcomings and those heaviest of negative karmas accumulated in relationship to the guru are stopped. As guru devotion is the root of the path, from that the eight benefits arise such as constantly becoming closer to Buddha.

By having correct devotion to the virtuous friend throughout the twenty-four hours, however much advice you follow, even one piece of advice, each second of doing that you get closer to enlightenment. The first benefit is that all the buddhas are pleased; the next is that you do not get influenced and do not receive harm from the maras and evil friends; all vices and delusions naturally cease; all the realizations of the path increase easily and immediately; you do not experience a shortage of virtuous friends in all future lifetimes; then, you quickly achieve enlightenment. So, the benefits of just the realization of guru devotion are inconceivable—they extend up to enlightenment and to every single sentient being that you lead to enlightenment by you yourself becoming enlightened. Think extensively of all the benefits of guru devotion and recite *chö la kyab su chi o*.

Then think of the benefits of renouncing this life and the entire samsara. I explained the benefits of shunyata meditation before. Then of how the two stages of tantra protect you. Then, without having bodhicitta how the self-cherishing thought gives you incredible harm, and how bodhicitta brings unbelievable benefit. This is very effective. Recite *chö la kyab su chi o* thinking of these benefits. It gives incredible inspiration, you want to have the realization immediately—you cannot wait for even a second!

The first thing that has to be renounced is the evil thought of the worldly dharmas, the clinging to this life. Firstly think from the negative view, that throughout the twenty-four hours the evil thoughts of worldly dharmas do not allow your actions to become pure Dharma. All your fears, expectations, worries, anxieties like, “Something is going to happen to me,” even though it is not happening. Our dissatisfaction, which brings depression and unhappiness, and many diseases of the body, all comes from the evil thoughts of worldly dharmas. Because of so much concern for food and clothing and reputation, the comfort of this life, we are unable to continue Dharma practice. If we try to do a retreat, even if we try to meditate for just one hour, we do not remember what we are supposed to remember, but what we are supposed to not think about all comes to mind! It even takes a long time to start! All this happens because of the evil thought of the worldly dharmas.

These things basically happen because of a lack of understanding of the first part of the lamrim outline—the four qualities of the lamrim teaching. But having achieved the realization of the perfect human rebirth, its usefulness, the difficulty of finding it, and impermanence and death—especially that the actual time of death is indefinite—(the realizations of the graduated path of the lower capability being,) we will feel an unbelievable loss, as though we have lost great mountains of gold, if we waste our perfect human rebirth for one hour or even a minute. Having even the realization of the perfect human rebirth, especially its usefulness and that it is difficult to find again, and on top of that that the actual time of death is indefinite, we cannot waste time. The stronger the realization of those meditations the more difficult it is for the evil thought of worldly dharmas to arise; it is easier for our normal actions like eating, walking or sleeping to become Dharma. There is no time for meaningless actions but plenty of time for Dharma practice.

If someone has found a definite understanding of karma then they fear creating even small negative karmas the same as they fear creating heavy ones such as breaking a root vow. They also see that it is so important to create even the smallest merit. As it says in one text: “By having found definite understanding of karma, please grant me blessings to avoid creating even the very subtle negative karmas, and to practice all virtues.”

So, if you think of the shortcomings and the problems caused by the thought of the worldly dharmas first, then next of the realizations of the graduated path of the lower capable beings, you will see the incredible benefits and feel what incredible tranquillity it brings to your mind, how it cuts off the obstacles. Like a continuously flowing river, the mind becomes free of the obstacles of the evil thought of worldly dharmas, and the mind remains in the Dharma day and night.

If you have studied the *Abhisamayalamkara*, *sa lam* or the Seventy Topics, which describe the paths and grounds (stages), you should recall those topics and do direct meditation on them while reciting *chö la kyab su chi o*. With incredible happiness you can scan the entire paths and grounds very extensively, and you can think of the benefits of having those qualities. Then this practice will be very profound.

During the second repetition of *chö la kyab su chi o* you can do the direct meditation on the tantra paths and grounds. Recall their qualities and benefits, how, if you practice, the Dharma refuge of secret mantra protects you from the obscurations, how tantra, the highest skillful means, guides you. Having received the four initiations the qualified vajra disciple becomes a receptacle for training his mind in the gradual path of generation (*kye rim*) which is complete in the characteristic that it leaves the potential to purify ordinary death, intermediate state and rebirth.

Practicing the generation stage which is similar to the path of the three kayas enables one to achieve the path of the three kayas.

Then on the basis of that preliminary stage we achieve the seclusion of speech and due to that we are able to generate the seclusion of mind—the clear light of example—which is the direct cause of the dharmakaya. The practitioner who has had that experience of simultaneously-born bliss, the clear light of example, is the one in terms of whom we can talk about the achievement of enlightenment in one brief lifetime, since the direct cause of dharmakaya has been established. Then due to that we are able to achieve the impure illusory body, which is an incredibly skillful method allowing the possibility of achieving enlightenment in one very brief lifetime in a degenerate time. Becoming enlightened in one lifetime is possible through the practice of Kriya Tantra, but here we are speaking of being able to achieve enlightenment in one very brief lifetime in a degenerate time, and one reason this is possible is because of realizing the impure illusory body which is an incredibly skillful means of secret mantra.

Before the bodhisattva achieves the path of unification of the clear light of meaning and the pure illusory body, the realization of the clear light of meaning directly perceiving shunyata, which avoids the disturbing thoughts, and the pure illusory body which arises from that, and which has abandoned the disturbing thoughts, have to be realized separately. According to the Paramitayana, from the Mahayana path of merit up to the Mahayana path of right-seeing takes a numberless eon of accumulating merit; then the second numberless eon of accumulating merit takes the practitioner from there up to the eighth bhumi. And the third numberless eon of accumulating merit is for the eighth bhumi to the tenth bhumi. Now, all that merit that the bodhisattvas accumulate from the path of merit up to the tenth bhumi has to be completed before achieving the path of the clear light of meaning; and the skillful means for doing that is achieving the impure illusory body. So that is the incredible benefit of the impure illusory body.

After achieving the impure illusory body, the clear light of meaning, and then pure illusory body, are achieved. Then one again meditates in the clear light, and then achieves unification—the unified state of no-more-learning—which is the direct cause of dharmakaya. With the vajra concentration one completely eliminates the subtle dual view, and then one achieves the completely pure holy illusory body, and then the holy mind, the unified clear light having the seven qualities. Then without any motive or the slightest effort we are able to work for sentient beings spontaneously and without the slightest mistake according to their mental characteristics. It is like the one moon being reflected in all bodies of water. It has no thought to reflect, no motivation like, “I’m going to send a reflection into these waters,” but when it rises its reflection appears wherever there is water and no obstruction—in oceans and even in dewdrops. A buddha works for the sentient beings like that.

When reciting *chö la keyab su chi o* or *namo dharmaya* divide the time in half, say half a rosary for purification of general negative karmas, the impure conception and those things and in particular the negative karma accumulated in relationship to the holy Dharma. Then during the rest of the recitation, you concentrate on receiving the qualities and generating the realizations from guru devotion through to enlightenment. Here you can meditate on the Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra path and generating those realizations, thinking of the benefits and how we are guided through taking refuge in the tantra path. Then think you have generated all those realizations.

So here again there were the three things: purifying, receiving realizations and coming under the guidance of Dharma.

REFUGE IN THE SANGHA

Ge diin la khyab su chi o is taking refuge in the Sangha. Each of the three objects of refuge—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—has an absolute and a relative, or conventional, truth aspect. So when we take refuge, we take refuge in all these. When we take refuge in Sangha we take refuge in the absolute Sangha—and that can be a lay person or a monk or nun, as long as the being has realized absolute Dharma, the true path and the true cessation of suffering. It does not depend on the form, it depends on the realization of the absolute Dharma—and the conventional truth Sangha. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in the lamrim that four pure gelongs constitute a conventional truth Sangha. Therefore when we say *ge diin la khyab su chi o* we are taking refuge in the absolute and conventional truth Sangha of the ten directions. We are not saying, “I’m going for refuge to the Tibetan Sangha but not the fair-haired Sangha!” This we should understand.

The question arose in my mind that if you take refuge in the ordinary Sangha is it the same as taking refuge in worldly gods? The lamas of the lamrim path emphasize so much that we should not rely upon the worldly gods such as Indra or Brahma and worldly protectors because they are not beyond samsara. We should not prostrate to and take refuge in worldly protectors and things like spirits even if they give material wealth and help because they cannot guide us from the lower realms. Ordinary persons are the same in that they are not free from samsara; but I think the main thing is what the Sangha are doing.

We cannot take the worldly gods’ life as an example, but the Sangha are an example. What they practice in their life is what we have to take as our example, what we have to copy, what we have to put into practice. What they do is protect karma by living in moral conduct—two hundred and fifty-three vows—the source of happiness up to enlightenment. If we put what the Sangha practice into practice ourselves it is the main method, the real thing, which saves us from the lower realms. The more precepts we take and put into practice through the inspiration or example of the Sangha, the more negative karma to be born in the lower realms get stopped. Also it purifies the negative karmas collected in the past. This is the real protection; this is the real means, the real rope or hook, to keep us from falling into the lower realms. So now we can see that there is incredible benefit in taking refuge in the Sangha.

Also, it is the Sangha’s responsibility to be the example for others by practicing moral conduct well; it gives incredible inspiration to other sentient beings. Being an example is the best way of guiding other sentient beings from the suffering of samsara. So in some ways it is a big responsibility. We can offer unbelievable benefit to other sentient beings if we practice well and become a good example. But if we are not a good example, we can throw the other sentient beings into the lower realms by causing them to lose their faith. So that is the way the ordinary Sangha guide; that is their particular function. Having the three qualities of higher training in moral conduct, concentration and wisdom is how the absolute and the conventional truth Sangha guide us. The main thing is being an example by having these attainments.

For example, when we hear or read Lama Tsongkhapa’s biography it makes us want to become like Lama Tsongkhapa—that is Sangha guiding us. Likewise, on hearing Milarepa’s life story we want to become like him, to have the same realizations; and we want to find a virtuous teacher just like Milarepa had. When I was somewhere between the ages of six and nine I had read Milarepa’s life story three times. At that time I did not know grammar and so on, I just read, but I think because I was young and my mind was clear, the effect was so strong—somehow the visualizations seemed quite clear. From that I had a strong desire in my heart to find a guru like Marpa, Milarepa’s guru.

There was a monk who took care of me when I was in Tibet and made the offerings to Domo Geshe's monastery where I took the *getsul* [novice] vows and practiced memorization of the three volumes of texts according to that monastery's tradition. He gave me the texts to memorize because I had learned to read in Solu Khumbu, Sherpa country. So, he asked me whether I would be his disciple. I said, "Yes, OK!" In Solu Khumbu when I was small I had a very strong intention to go to the greatest Nyingma monastery, Mindrolling, because all the monasteries in Sherpa country are Nyingma. Mindrolling is the main monastery where the teachings and initiations are preserved or received. However, when I was at Tashi Lhunpo, the Panchen Lama's monastery there was one Sherpa monk who was a little bit like a *dob dob*.¹⁵ He had a *shemtab* which was black from butter, and he carried a long key. It did not seem that he studied or went to pujas so much; what he mainly did was travel back and forth from the monastery to the city. This monk wanted me to become his disciple. His name was Kachen; he was a Sherpa. My two alphabet teachers and one Sherpa man were with me. We stayed for seven days. We did not go for puja but we went to get the money! When the puja was almost finished you could still get in line to get money. I think maybe he showed us how. On our last night there this Sherpa monk insisted so much that I should stay and become his disciple. I do not think I slept that whole night; I was wondering how I could escape from this. Both of the teachers who were with me have passed away; they both agreed that I should stay there to become that monk's disciple. But I did not have the slightest desire to become his disciple! I could not think of a way to escape, what to do. But fortunately the next morning, I do not know why, my gurus agreed that I could go with them.

My karma was to become a monk. Somehow I met one elder monk from Domo Geshe's monastery fulfilling some responsibilities at a branch of the main monastery at a place called Phari. They sent monks to the various branches in India and around Tibet where they would stay for some years until a replacement was sent. I think everything was brought on by karma. I stayed there. The next day he gave me the Yamantaka sadhana to memorize—the long one! At that time I had a very old *chuba* and an old hat. The manager asked me to sit outside the door of the family's house and memorize scriptures while they did puja inside. So I sat there and the family gave me *tsampa* and things like that. I think the next day I joined them in puja. Perhaps he taught me to say the Tara prayer by heart, but there was nothing in particular that I could learn from him. But anyway he was very, very kind. So I asked him, "Can you be like Marpa?" He said, "Yes."

The conclusion is that I think I am unbelievably fortunate to have met many virtuous teachers with the same qualities as Marpa. The only problem is that from my own side I have not done a single practice properly. That is the whole problem. The problem is not of not having met a guru like Marpa—I have met so many gurus with the same qualities as Marpa. From the gurus' side everything is perfect—whatever qualities Marpa, Milarepa or Naropa had, they also have. The reason nothing is happening is that I have not done a single practice properly.

Now, there is a big difference between taking refuge in even ordinary Sangha—those not free from samsara, who do not have the realization of absolute Dharma—and relying upon worldly gods. What the ordinary Sangha are practicing now is the path to becoming absolute Sangha. Doing the practice the Sangha are doing—living in moral conduct—is the essential thing which leads us to liberation and enlightenment. This is the way the Sangha guide us. One quality of the Sangha that we can see is moral conduct, that which we ourselves are unable to practice. Then,

¹⁵ Wyl: *ldob ldob*. A monk within the Gelug monasteries in Tibet who had less interest in studying and more in worldly matters such as appearance, sport and fighting. *Dob dobs* usually did much of the manual labor, as well as cooking, serving tea in assemblies and caring for elderly monks.

there can be many other qualities than we do not see. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, what we should abandon is following evil friends who lead us into wrong ways, opposite to what the Sangha practice, and to where the Sangha guide us. What we should practice when we see the Sangha is remember their qualities and respect the robes.

When we say *sang gyä la kyab su chi o*, that refers to the absolute buddha—the dharmakaya—and to the conventional truth buddha—the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. We take refuge in both. Saying *chö la kyab su chi o* refers to the absolute Dharma—the true path and the true cessation of the sufferings -and the conventional truth Dharma—the scriptures. Then regarding the Sangha, the absolute Sangha are those who have attained the absolute Dharma and the conventional truth Sangha is four pure *gelongs* [monks]. When we say *ge diin la kyab su chi o* we are taking refuge in both the absolute and the conventional truth Sangha. So now we can see that there is no way we can criticize—that is the opposite to taking refuge. So, if we say *ge diin la kyab su chi o* or from the *Lama Chöpa*, *sang gyä cho dang*... but then at other times, “Oh, that monk is bad; that monk is so impatient; that monk is so miserly,” and so forth, it is contradictory.

On the negative side what has to be purified is the negative karma of having caused disunity among the Sangha. Even if you have not done it in this life you cannot say you have not done it in past lives. If you can remember every single past life in beginningless rebirths and know that you have not created that negative karma it is alright! If that is for sure! There are some details that I think His Holiness mentioned during the *Lama Chöpa* teachings such as taking offerings that belong to the Sangha; in other words, using them for yourself. You have to get permission to use things that belong to the Sangha, even a broom. If you are going to use it for the Sangha then there is no need to get permission, but if you are going to use it for yourself then you need permission. Not having obtained permission, the karma is very heavy.

If you completely offer food and tea to the Triple Gem and then take it for yourself, I wonder whether it is stealing or not? If through cherishing other sentient beings it is used to be healthy and have a long life in order to benefit them by offering oneself as a servant to the Guru-Triple Gem or a servant to the sentient beings, that is a different matter. But my question is regarding when it is taken with self-cherishing thought after having offered it. I once asked His Holiness Ling Rinpoche this question and Rinpoche said, “It’s not that you have completely offered it—you have just offered the purity of it to Buddha before you eat it, so it may not be stealing.” But my question is about the case where you offer it completely, not just offering the purity before you take it. When one picks up stones or plants or something from some place, even if they do not belong to a person one has to ask permission from the spirits who are living in that area. The great yogin Tre Kyorpon Rinpoche,¹⁶ now passed away, who reached the second stage tantra level of clear light and who guided many of the ascetic meditators such as Gen Jampa Wangdu (who gave us the lineage of the *chulen* practice), advised those monks that when they take flat stones for the mandala offering practice they should ask permission from the spirits living in that area—otherwise it becomes stealing.

If you are the manager of a monastery and while there is plenty to offer you offer very little food or tea—tea like just hot water!—or if somebody wants to offer a hundred thousand dollars and you say to them in a caring way, “Oh, you don’t need to offer that much,” thus cutting down the offerings to the Sangha—even if by one dollar—you receive very heavy negative karma. That is taking away offerings that belong to the Sangha. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo used the

¹⁶ Wyl: *tre skyor dpon rin po che*. Here *tre* is short for *tre hor*, which is the largest *khangtsen*, or regional house group, at Sera Je Monastery.

example of a benefactor wanting to offer butter to the Sangha and the manager of the monastery taking a small slice and saying, “Oh, you don’t need to offer that much to the Sangha.” Even if he takes a small slice he receives the very heavy negative karma created by taking away things belonging to the Sangha. Another case is not offering things that you have decided to offer, such as a text.

The other very heavy negative karma is from criticizing the Sangha. It is said in the sutra teaching *Dode Ökji Gyälpo*:¹⁷ “If we abuse a lower gelong our achievement of liberation is delayed by one eon.” You may remember this example from His Holiness Zong Rinpoche’s teachings. Dramze Serkya,¹⁸ who criticized the Sangha by saying, “You are like a tiger, and you are like a donkey,” and so on, using eighteen different animals, was born as an animal with eighteen different heads in his next life. This happened because of having met a nonvirtuous teacher, his mother, who advised him, “When you lose your debate with the Sangha call them nick-names.” Another story is of a person who criticized a monk, saying, “You are jumping like a monkey.” He was born as a monkey for five hundred lifetimes. Those actions are very, very heavy.

If we, who have perfect human rebirths, find it very difficult to practice Dharma, how could we practice while being in the bodies of dogs or monkeys? Think about this. Even with a perfect human rebirth there are so many difficulties, we cannot practice as we wish; having taken those other bodies it would be impossible. This thought arises in my mind sometimes. To use this human body is so unbelievably difficult—so many interferences arise from it. So there is nothing left to say regarding the opportunity to practice if we are separated from the human body. Already so much negative karma has been accumulated, so now the question is, how will it be when the appearance of this body of a happy transmigrating being—this human body—stops, and when the appearance of a lower realm arises? That depends on just this very fragile breath, this movement in and out. If the negative karmas are not purified, whenever this breath stops the appearance of the lower realm will be there. It is very easy for negative thoughts to arise and to create these karmas, especially of criticizing the Sangha and lay people. Negative karmas have already been accumulated but it is so difficult to find the time to purify them. Even if we find the time we are so busy with life, so distracted, thus it is difficult to purify completely. Therefore, knowing these things, it is extremely important to not create any more—to not give ourselves any more donations of negative karma!

Then we should purify any negative karma of having degenerated the precepts of having taken refuge in the Sangha. We should not step over robes, rather, we should respect them. If they saw a piece of red or yellow cloth on the road the Kadam geshe used to hold it above their head due to recalling the qualities of the Sangha. Because those who wear this cloth have incredible qualities, they used to put such cloth in a clean high place. When we see a member of the Sangha, whoever he is—whether he is an ordinary person, or an arhat, or a bodhisattva or whatever—from our own side we should think, “He’s my guide, guiding me from the fears of the lower realms, and from the fears of the whole samsara; he is protecting me from those dangers and guiding me on the path to enlightenment.”

When he was giving *Jorchö* commentary His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to tell us to visualize even the *dob dobs* from Sera, Gaden and Drepung! I think it is translated as “monk police”—those who bring *thukpa* and tea and so on. Rinpoche told us to visualize even those

¹⁷ Wyl: *mdo sde'i 'od kyi rgyal po*. That is the title as mentioned in this teaching. The sutra referenced here may be: *Serö Dampa Dode'i Wangpöi Gyälpöi Do*; Wyl: *gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po'i mdo*; Skt: *suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtreन्द्रarājasūtra*.

¹⁸ Wyl: *bram ze ser skya*; Skt: Brahmin Gaura (or Mānvagaura).

with the Sangha—pouring thukpa. I am just joking! Actually the Sangha—the bodhisattvas, hearer-listeners, daka-dakinis and protectors—in the *Lama Chöpa* merit field are transformations of Lama Losang Thubwang Dorje Chang, the root guru. But what I think what His Holiness meant is that if you visualize any other Sangha there you probably have to think that they also are an embodiment of the Lama Losang Thubwang Dorje Chang and are absolute Sangha. Anyway, whether we visualize them or not, when we say *ge düin la kyab su chi o* we are taking refuge in both those in the visualized merit field plus all absolute and conventional truth Sangha throughout the ten directions.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo in his lamrim teaching referred to something his guru Dhagpo Rinpoche said in *Kyabgön Lama Rinpoche*¹⁹—*the Refuge-Savior-Guru*: “If you criticize monks by saying, ‘Oh, that monk down there is very impatient; and that monk up there is very miserly,’ and so on, it means that you think you are better.” So when you say *ge düin la kyab su chi o* you have to create a new refuge: “To these, these and these Sangha (*ge düin*) I take refuge, but not those, those and those!” [Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s advice] is very effective for the mind.

Think that all those negative karmas you have accumulated with the Sangha are purified. If you are going to recite one mala of *ge düin la kyab su chi o* use half the recitation for purifying negative karmas—both the general negative karma, and particular negative karma accumulated in relation to the Sangha. Then think of the qualities of the Sangha and that they are generated within your mind. Regarding a bodhisattva who has not achieved the state of arhat before but is directly entering the Mahayana path, after having the realization of bodhicitta he generates the path of merit on which they constantly increase the thirteen types of merit; then on the path of action they realize the four noble truths through a mental image; and then become an arya being on the path of right-seeing. Then they achieve the first bhumi. Those of you who have studied Salam can remember all the qualities of the bhumis. Even if you have not studied that there are books which explain it which are very inspiring to read when you contemplate the qualities of the Sangha.

On the first bhumi the bodhisattva’s mind is able to focus in one hundred concentrations, is able to emanate one hundred bodies, each one having hundreds of bodhisattva disciples surrounding it, to whom it is able to give hundreds of teachings; he is able to go to hundreds of different buddhas’ pure realms and able to receive teachings from them. There are about twelve points like this, and each point is magnified one hundred-fold on consecutive bhumis. On the second bhumi it increases to a factor of a thousand: such as being able to emanate one thousand bodies. Then I think on the third bhumi it is 100,000-fold. But I do not know about the very last bhumi—I have no idea. It is numberless of numberless! It is very inspiring to remember the qualities of the Sangha. Arhats, having completely abandoned true suffering and the true cause of suffering, the root—ignorance—and even its seed, can perform infinite miracles such as manifesting a mountain inside an atom. I do not remember his name, but after Guru Shakyamuni Buddha passed away, one arhat was able to lead eighty thousand sentient beings to the right-seeing path within seven days by revealing the teachings; they all became arya beings by directly perceiving shunyata. This is an example of the incredible qualities and powers they have. Further qualities of the absolute Sangha: the dakas and dakinis have the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness and the protectors have the quality of the four actions—pacification, increase, control and wrath.

¹⁹ Wyl: *skyabs mgon bla ma rin po che*.

Nectar beams are emitted from the bodhisattvas, the arhats (hearer-listeners and self-conquerors), the dakas, dakinis and protectors which enter one's body and mind and the minds and bodies of all sentient beings and purify us of all those negative aspects which I mentioned earlier. Then we generate all the realizations that they have. Thus, you engage in the practice of the three outlines—purification, receiving their realizations, coming under their guidance—in regard to the Sangha. These are the three major practices of refuge.

There is also a way you can do these all together whilst reciting *la ma yi dam kōn chog sum la kyab su chi o* for either one rosary or just a few times. I think this is mentioned in the commentary on the *Jorchö* practice. *Yidam* refers to the deities. Nectar beams are emitted from all of these objects of refuge and you do the visualization of purification, purifying negative karma in general and the particular negative karmas accumulated in relationship to the guru and Triple Gem, and then the generation of the realizations. Thus, you are doing the same thing.

So you can see from this very brief explanation of refuge how many heavy negative karmas that we often create naturally get stopped by just the understanding of refuge and karma.

8. Preliminary Practices from *Jorchö*

When taking refuge at the beginning of *Lama Chöpa*, instead of going straight into the text, I find it effective to start by meditating on renunciation of samsara; then to take refuge for the sake of all sentient beings in order to liberate them from the suffering of samsara, specifically the two types of obscurations. That is how the *Jorchö* practice begins. If you do the practice of refuge in this way, following a prayer which reminds you of the depthless and unbearable suffering of samsara that you are experiencing and that other sentient beings are experiencing, it is very effective and the refuge practice becomes very sincere. It is normally explained that the causes of refuge are the fear of samsara and devotion to the Triple Gem, so when doing *Lama Chöpa* instead of straight away saying, “From the state of exalted white virtuous mind ...” [LC 2] and then *Namo Gurubhya, Namō Buddhaya ...*, [LC 3] if the prayers from *Jorchö* are recited it is very effective and very powerful. So I thought to go over those prayers.

In the *Jorchö* after the refuge prayer, *La ma la kyab su chi o/ Sang gyä la kyab su chi o/ Chö la kyab su chi o/ ge dun la kyab su chi o*, there comes the prayer *Sang gyä chö dang tsog keyi chog nam la...*, for generating refuge and bodhicitta. If you are going to do the practice according to the *Jorchö*, then before the Ganden Lha Gyäma practice of visualizing Lama Tsongkhapa (the second field of merit), being pleased by your generation of bodhicitta a replica of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha absorbs to you and you become enlightened in the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and you enlighten other sentient beings in his essence. After that you do the practice of the four immeasurables and after that the generation of special bodhicitta.

REFUGE AND BODHICITTA (FROM JÖRCHO)

*Sang gyä chö dang tsog keyi chog nam la
Jang chub bar du dag ni kyab su chi
Dag gyi jin sog gyi päi tsog nam keyi
Dro la phän chir sang gyä drub par shog.*

I take refuge until I am enlightened
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.

By my merits of generosity and so forth,
May I become a buddha to benefit transmigratory beings.

“To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha I go for refuge until I achieve enlightenment.” Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the resultant refuge, that which we are going to achieve. “I go for refuge until enlightenment” is the causal refuge. “Due to the merit of practicing charity and so on...” refers to the merit accumulated by practicing the six paramitas—the merit of method and the merit of wisdom. “May I achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all the migratory beings.” How? By accumulating the two types of merit.

Because the mind is empty of existing from its own side, that is, it is a dependent arising, it can be separated from the two types of obscurations. That is achieved by listening, reflecting and meditating with such a mind (not having true existence) on the teachings which explain that the mind does not have true existence. We achieve the two kayas by listening, reflecting and meditating on the wisdom realizing the emptiness of the mind, that it does not have true existence, in conjunction with the method aspect, bodhicitta. Relating it to tantra, we practice the generation stage and then the method—illusory body—in conjunction with wisdom. We are then able to benefit all the migratory beings without the slightest mistake.

Dro la means migrator. It has two interpretations. One reason we are *dro la*, migratory beings, is because whether we are eating, whether we are sleeping, sitting, walking, whatever we are doing, we are constantly running toward death, getting closer and closer to death. Without stopping for one minute or one second we are getting nearer to death; we are in front of the Lord of Death. Even if we are singing, even if we are lying on the beach, even if we are laughing, whatever we are doing we are constantly going toward the Lord of Death. In other words, these activities could be called “dying”. I find it quite effective to call them dying. Normally dying refers to the time of having trouble breathing; normally when the later signs of death are happening people call it dying because then it is definite that the person is dying. They are not dead yet, but we call it dying because certain things are happening. When there is no hope. Similarly, if we refer to ourselves now as dying, “I’m dying,” it is very effective for controlling the mind, because in actuality we are constantly running toward the Lord of Death without a minute’s or second’s break. I think it was the Thirteenth Dalai Lama who said, “[The person is] running like a messenger in front of the Lord of Death, so even if we refer to him as ‘alive’ he is in danger of dying.” So, thinking, “I’m dying,” is very effective during sessions and break-times. But if you say that to somebody while you are strong and healthy they might think you are crazy!

The other meaning of *dro la* is that being under the control of karma and delusion we migrate to the various realms because of the consciousness migrating to different bodies. So, without freedom, we suffer.

After that, a replica of Buddha absorbs into you and you become enlightened, having the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Then you send forth beams of light from each of your pores, and on the tip of each beam are Guru Shakyamuni Buddhas which sit on the crown of each sentient being. Nectar rays flow down into each sentient being and purify the two obscurations and generate the whole path. Then the crown buddhas absorb into them. You then generate great joy by thinking, “How wonderful it is that I have enlightened all the sentient beings into the state of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.”

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLE THOUGHTS

Think: “I have just visualized this, but actually they are not enlightened; they are suffering in samsara. And the reason they are still suffering in samsara is because they are under the control of attachment and anger, thus they discriminate and see some sentient beings as close and some as distant.” Then generate the four immeasurable thoughts.

The first one is the immeasurable thought of equanimity. Sentient beings are still suffering in samsara because of being under the control of anger and attachment and thus discriminate between sentient beings as being close or distant, so generate the immeasurable thought of equanimity. First comes the immeasurable wish: “How wonderful it would be if all the sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free from anger and attachment and discriminating some sentient beings as distant and some as close.” After that comes the immeasurable prayer: “May they abide in equanimity,” and the immeasurable thought of taking responsibility for others: “I will cause them to abide in that equanimity.” Then the immeasurable request: “Please Guru-Buddha, grant me blessings to be able to do this.” The remaining immeasurable practices follow that pattern—the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, immeasurable compassion and then immeasurable joy.

The practice of generating the four immeasurable thoughts can be repeated more than once. The purpose is this: as when her one beloved son is sick a mother will think about him more, over and over, and her compassion will thus increase, by reciting the prayer of the four immeasurables and doing the meditation many times over, your loving kindness and compassion will increase. There is no rule saying that if you recite it more than three times you will be jailed or kicked out or something! So when you are not with a group of people, as His Holiness mentioned and as it is sometimes mentioned in the scriptures, you can generate the bodhicitta by reciting the prayers seven times. In the Vajrayogini practice it says to recite it seven times. So, you can recite it many times in order to expand the bodhicitta.

While you are saying these prayers you can do the *tonglen* practice. When you are generating the immeasurable thought of equanimity be aware of how sentient beings are suffering through creating karma under the control of discriminating thoughts such as anger and attachment. Think of just the human beings on this earth that we can see by traveling around—just their problems are unbelievable. It is unbelievable how much the human beings just on this small earth are suffering. All their problems arise because of these discriminating thoughts. For example, even without thinking of the sentient beings suffering in the narak, the animal, the preta and deva realms, or other human continents, right now your friends and people you know are having problems, suffering due to being under the control of discriminating thoughts like anger and attachment. When you think about it, when you look at the world, it is so unbearable for your mind. They are so many and suffering so much, repeatedly. Not just having the problem of being under the control of the discriminating thoughts like anger and attachment once; their lives are constantly tormented for the entire thirty or forty years. Even if they live for very long, say one hundred years, the entire life is lived in suffering and problems resulting from discriminating thoughts—attachment and anger. First of all there are such great mental sufferings, and secondly physical sufferings. Because of mental unhealth they also physically unhealthy.

While you are reciting the prayer three times do the taking-on of their anger and attachment, and that which causes all their problems—the true cause of sufferings and the true sufferings, the two obscurations. Take it right inside your heart onto the self-cherishing thought which brings everything undesirable to you and to others; that which interferes with succeeding in all of your wishes and the wishes of all sentient beings. All that is absorbed.

His Holiness explained the tonglen practice during the commentary on *Lama Chöpa*: you can visualize the sufferings and their causes as pollution or as fearful sharp weapons such as the wheel of sharp weapons that Vajrabhairava holds. These completely destroy the self-cherishing thought. Also they can be visualized in the form of ugly, terrifying creatures which completely devour the self-cherishing thought. Use whichever is most effective. If visualized as pollution you absorb it into the self-cherishing thought, the I that you feel inside the heart, inside the chest. Not outside, but inside the chest. Not in the belly, not in the head, but inside the chest. The I that you feel there, that you feel is so precious, about which you constantly feel, “I’m the most important. This I is the most precious and most important.” The I that you care most about and are concerned that might get cold or might get a headache, that might get sick or might fall down! That you are always trying to protect against something which might happen. That I which you feel inside your chest. which you cherish the most among all the sentient beings.

Everything is absorbed onto this I and it becomes completely non-existent. Like a mirage: in the distance there is an appearance of water because of sand in the hot sun, but when you actually reach that spot you do not find one drop of water. Water is non-existent on the basis of that sand; there is not even one drop. Likewise this I that you cherish so much is completely non-existent right there. When you feel this is really non-existent, without even the slightest trace left, then you are seeing the emptiness on the I. Try as much as possible.

If some fear arises in your heart that means your meditation on shunyata, such as when reciting the *Heart Sutra*, has been worthwhile, it has affected your mind. Why worthwhile? Because the meditation was able to harm the ignorance grasping the I. That is why the fear arises. If your meditation is unable to harm the ignorance grasping the I, fear will not arise. Even though the I is merely labeled on the base of the aggregates, it does not appear to be merely labeled but appears as if it is existing from its own side. Ignorance holds that as one hundred percent true. Then the self-cherishing arises on the basis of that falsely appearing I; it holds the truly existent I as so precious, so important. So when the meditation comes nearer to the object of ignorance—the truly existent I, which is in fact completely non-existent—you start to have some degree of awareness that the non-existent truly existent I is non-existent. That that which is false is false. So when that awareness regarding that which you cherish so much starts to arise, fear also arises. The pollution is absorbed onto the I, or the I is devoured, and this I that you cherish so much becomes non-existent. Meditate on the emptiness by concentrating one-pointedly for a while.

Then you can practice taking again or practice the immeasurable thought of loving kindness and dedicate. Just before you meditated on the precious I that you cherish so much as being non-existent. Now, as you dedicate, be aware that that I does not exist; it is completely non-existent. That I does not exist, but what is left—the I which is meditating and performing the dedication—is the I which is merely labeled on the aggregates. Because the mind is doing the action of dedicating the body, possessions and merits to the all the sentient beings, you have the thought, I am dedicating to other sentient beings. The I is merely labeled on the aggregates according to that activity. So, with the awareness that I is merely labeled, that I is a dependent arising, dedicate to other sentient beings. As you have discovered, the subject—you, the I doing the dedication—is merely labeled on the aggregates, so likewise your merits, body and possessions, as well as the sentient beings, are merely labeled.

When you generate the four immeasurable thoughts such as immeasurable loving kindness, compassion and joy, first of all you create infinite merit just generating each of these. But if on top of this you do tonglen with each one, when you do the taking-on of suffering infinite merit is accumulated because there are infinite sentient beings. And when you do the dedication you do it

to all the sentient beings so again infinite merit is accumulated. So, through knowing this skillful means and putting it into practice you can accumulate inconceivable merit in a very short time; then that much work is finished.

SPECIAL BODHICITTA

For the sake of all mother sentient beings
I shall quickly, quickly, in this very life,
Actualize the state of the primordial Buddha-Guru-Deity.

I shall free all mother sentient beings from suffering
And lead them to the great bliss of buddhahood;
Therefore, I shall practice
The profound path of Guru-Deity yoga. (*1x or 3x*)

The special bodhicitta is the motivation to practice tantra, especially Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra: “At any rate I must achieve enlightenment...” This means, “No matter how long it takes and no matter how hard it is to practice the path to enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings, I’m going to do it.”

“To reach enlightenment quicker and quicker for the sake of all mother sentient beings through the profound path of guru yoga, I’m going to meditate on lamrim.” I mentioned the meaning of “quicker and quicker” earlier. This is the generation of special bodhicitta.

Then, as His Holiness explained, the lineage lamas of the experiential path at the rear absorb into Vajradhara, the lineage lamas of the extensive path on the right absorb into Maitreya Buddha, the lineage lamas of the profound path on the left absorb into Manjushri, and then the deities, the protectors, dakas and dakinis completely absorb into the guru. The thrones absorb into the lotus. All of your own gurus absorb to the root guru and the root guru goes into the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha. I think the other figures melt into light and are absorbed but the root guru enters the heart without melting into light. Now Guru Shakyamuni Buddha turns into blue light and absorbs into you, and you instantly arise as Yamantaka, with one face and two arms and embracing the mother. Due to the embrace you experience the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. You then send beams to all the sentient beings and transform all environments into mandalas and all beings into Yamantakas. They all absorb back into you. This is like the beginning of *Lama Chöpa*, and you can do this at the beginning of the *Ganden Lha Gyäma*. Also you can do the four types of offerings—outer, inner, secret and suchness— and also at the end the practice of the guru entering the heart.

Now you are Yamantaka, with one face and two arms. The short way to arise as Yamantaka, without doing the dharmakaya and sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya meditation, is thus: Guru Shakyamuni Buddha melts into blue light, absorbs into you and you then instantly arise in the form of Yamantaka.

DHARMAKAYA MEDITATION

It may be beneficial to explain the elaborate method as it may be of help for doing other dharmakaya meditations. When you do Vajrayogini practice and so on there are some slight differences, but it may be of help. So, you are Yamantaka, with one face and two arms. To begin

you can generate the motivation: “In order to lead all sentient beings to the dharmakaya state I’m going to do the dharmakaya meditation.”

You, Yamantaka’s holy body, absorb into the HUM. Think that the appearances which will come are the signs of death. As each of the signs happens, it is very effective to think and say the words: “These are the actual signs of death.” That gives you the impression that you are dying now, that you are not just making something up. It is very good to do this meditation with the feeling, “I’m dying now.” Then you will be more careful and less distracted, as if it is really happening—in the way the military train.

Now the mirage-like sign of death appears due to the earth element sinking into the water element. It is like the illusion of water. Look at the mirage and think, Now the mirage-like sign of death is appearing. Then think, “This time I must recognize the clear light; this time I will not miss it. I’m going to recognize the clear light and I’m definitely going to meditate on bliss and voidness.” Make this strong determination and right after that look at the mirage-like vision: there is an appearance of a mirage and on that you have labeled “mirage-like vision.” Your thought has merely labeled mirage-like vision, therefore true existence on this mirage-like vision is completely non-existent. Now, that wisdom which is aware of that emptiness is in the nature of great bliss. Stay on that and concentrate for a short while. Your main awareness is of the vision which is sealed with bliss and voidness, but a part of that mind is in a state of expectation because the next vision, the smoke-like vision, is about to happen. One part of your mind is waiting for that—it is about to happen. Then it happens.

The mirage-like vision has gone and now a smoke-like vision arises. Think, “The mirage-like vision has gone and now the water element is absorbing into the fire element, and the death sign of the smoke-like vision is happening.” A part of the mind is thinking, “This is happening,” and a part is preparing to recognize the next vision which is about to happen: The vision like fire sparks emitting is about to happen. Concentrate more on the smoke-like vision with just a part of the mind expecting the next appearance. Then again think, “This time I must recognize the clear light and definitely meditate on bliss and voidness.” Make a strong determination, or preparation. This smoke-like vision is like a house filled with smoke, or like a house full of incense when you have lit a lot of it. Now, this looks like it is unlabeled, as if it exists from its own side. But actually that is not true; on this appearance the thought has merely labeled “smoke-like vision.” True existence on this smoke-like vision is completely not there. And the wisdom which is aware of the emptiness of the smoke-like vision is in the nature of great bliss. Meditate there for a while.

I am not going to go through each vision in detail; use the above as an example—the rest of the meditations follow the same pattern. The main point is this: when the death sign of the mirage-like vision arises you meditate on emptiness and bliss. Now, when the smoke-like vision arises the experience of its emptiness should be stronger than the previous experience of emptiness, and the bliss should be stronger than the previous bliss. That is the technique for doing this meditation. So, when the vision like fire-sparks emitting arises, the emptiness is stronger and the bliss is much stronger than before.

Then comes the flame-like vision. It is not of the actual flame. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche used to always say this. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said the same thing. It is not the actual flame but the glow of it. When one lights a brass butter-lamp there is a kind-of yellow or white glow; it is not so much the light itself but its radiance, the brightness around it. But in the texts it seems like the light itself is being referred to. Now the experience of emptiness is much greater

and because of that the bliss is much greater. With the white vision it is again much greater. Then comes the red vision, and then the dark vision. Then during the clear light the emptiness is greatest and the bliss is greatest.

I do not need to explain how the HUM gradually absorbs during those visions—I think you already know the various colors of HUM through taking LSD! It is explained in *The Way of the White Clouds*. During the time the nada is absorbed you experience the dark vision. The clear light appears after the whole of the nada has been absorbed. The appearance is like a very clear dawn in autumn. The understanding you should have is of emptiness. At this time you can think, I don't exist. If you have difficulty feeling emptiness but just see space like when looking out of the window of an airplane, instead of meditating just on space it is better to think, I, the meditator, is completely non-existent. Thinking that hits the mark, because the I which appears to us and the I which we believe in is nothing other than the truly existent I. That is the only thing to point to, so since we do not feel that it is non-existent, to think, I, the meditator, I, self, is completely non-existent, is a way to cheat that false idea. So, just meditate on it being completely non-existent. Even if you cannot recognize the object of refutation—a truly existent I—by thinking, I, the meditator, is non-existent, you naturally feel that the truly existent I does not have the slightest existence at all. Completely take that view and hold that for as long as you can.

Now, that wisdom which is aware of the emptiness is experiencing great bliss—bliss which if it were materialized would not fit in the sky. They are oneness. The entire experience of emptiness is pervaded by bliss. Bliss is emptiness and emptiness is bliss. Like having put water into water—you cannot separate them. Feel the oneness. Then, on top of that, think, “This is my actual resultant-time Yamantaka's holy mind, dharmakaya.” Completely decide, “This is it.” It is kind-of that you have achieved now what you expect to achieve in the future. Hold strong divine pride thinking, “This is it.” Now, on this valid base you label, “This is I.” So here again there are four things: the appearance is clear light, the understanding is of emptiness, the experience is of bliss, then holding divine pride of that as one's resultant-time dharmakaya. In the mantra OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM the last syllable, HAM, means “I.” Stay there for a while. The most important aspect is the emptiness. Please do it like that.

That process of meditation helps to recognize the clear light as well as to immediately remember emptiness and experience bliss. Usually it is explained quite simply, but His Holiness Zong Rinpoche used to explain these details. Rinpoche was the one from whom I heard the explanation on these five stages. Then I discovered that this way of meditating with the details comes from Lama Tsongkhapa's explanation on the five stages. With each appearance you have to practice the four mindfulnesses. This is an incredible preparation for recognizing the clear light and being able to meditate on bliss and voidness.

Using the first vision as an example, the first mindfulness is to recognize the mirage-like vision. The second mindfulness is that the smoke-like vision is about to happen. The third mindfulness is to make the determination to meditate on bliss and voidness when the clear light vision comes and to recognize it as the dharmakaya. The fourth mindfulness is to meditate on the bliss and voidness of the mirage-like vision. This cultivation of the four mindfulnesses is the same whichever vision is appearing. That is Lama Tsongkhapa's advice.

So, this might be helpful for a clearer idea of how to meditate on the dharmakaya when you are doing sadhanas, especially when you do retreats, since that is generally the only time we do the long sadhanas! That is the only chance to do it perfectly.

I hope the explanation of the dharmakaya meditation will help your practice of other sadhanas. Most sadhanas, whether short or long, have a dharmakaya meditation; that is the most important part. Even if you do not do the other meditations much, you should meditate on the dharmakaya section. His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche often and strongly advised this. You should meditate on the dharmakaya section of the sadhana precisely. It then becomes a preparation for death. You then prepare for death every day. And this *pona*, which you do by yourself, is the best.

If it is difficult to feel the emptiness when you meditate on dharmakaya, if the I is solid like a rock and you do not feel emptiness at all, instead of trying to see the object of refutation and trying to feel the non-existence of it, leave that aspect of the meditation. In that case the most powerful way to feel emptiness is to just meditate on being merely labeled. Just think of that, just work on that. In the *Three Principle Aspects of the Path* Lama Tsongkhapa says:

Without the wisdom realizing ultimate reality,
Even though you have generated renunciation and the mind of enlightenment
You cannot cut the root cause of circling.
Therefore, attempt the method to realize dependent arising.

“If you do not have the wisdom realizing real nature, even if your mind is well-trained in renunciation and bodhicitta you cannot cut off the root of samsara. Therefore, attempt to realize dependent arising.”

These last words—“Therefore attempt to realize dependent arising”—have incredible taste. They contain all the secrets for realizing shunyata. All advice is contained in that. It is unbelievable advice. He does not say “Therefore you should realize emptiness.” Instead he is saying “Therefore you should attempt to realize dependent arising.” It is so powerful, like the atomic bomb. It is the safest way to protect yourself from the two extreme views. It was Aryadeva, I think, who said that if we fall into the extreme of nihilism, thinking that nothing exists, the karma is much heavier than that of killing I think it is ten million human beings. The word is *chewa*, but I do not remember what that number is exactly. Therefore the safest and quickest way to realize shunyata is to meditate on dependent arising.

So if the “object of refutation” and “true existence” do not make sense to you, if you do not recognize the truly existent I and do not recognize that the truly existent I is false, it is best to leave it and just meditate on how the I is merely labeled. Just work on that. While you are in the clear light there is an I which appears to exist from its own side. So right on top of that think, The I is merely labeled. Just meditate on the meaning of the I being merely labeled. “I” is a name; a name does not exist from its own side, a name is given, imputed by the mind. We can completely agree with that. This I is merely labeled; concentrate on just that. Try to feel that. This automatically eliminates eternalism, the view of a truly existent I. In this way you can feel the emptiness, that a real I existing from its own side is non-existent. By making the effort the understanding that this I is merely labeled comes naturally as the answer, or experience, in your heart.

The logic that the I is a dependent arising eliminates both eternalism and nihilism. Firstly it ceases the view of eternalism, that the I is truly existent, because through understanding that the I is a dependent arising—merely labeled—you realize that the I is empty of existing from its own side. And through understanding that the I is empty of existing from its own side the realization that the I is a dependent arising—merely labeled by thought—comes as a result. That is the realization of the conventional truth of the I. Unshakable faith in the existence of the I comes.

That is how the logic that I is a dependent arising eliminates both eternalism and nihilism. Therefore this logic is called the King of Logics.

During thought training teachings His Holiness Ling Rinpoche said that the object of refutation is the non-differentiation of the base from the label. We are unable to differentiate the base to be labeled from the label which is imputed on it. It is possible that a person will understand that the base and the label are mixed before he recognizes the object of refutation; for example, that the table appears to exist inside the base of the table. I think how well a person is able to recognize the object of refutation depends on how much he understands emptiness. According to its function of dispelling darkness, when you see light your thought labels, 'There's a light, on that. However, not being aware that you yourself have merely labeled it "light," it appears that the light exists from its own side. Similarly, when the light goes off there is darkness and you cannot see things and immediately your thought labels that "darkness." Even though the darkness is labeled by your own thought, due to not being aware of this what appears is unlabeled darkness. What you believe, or what appears, is unlabeled darkness, darkness existing from its own side. Darkness existing from its own side is itself the object of refutation.

So when you meditate on the appearances, it appears that the white vision exists from its own side, that the red vision exists from its own side, that the dark vision exists from its own side and then that the clear light also exists from its own side. That which appears to be existing from its own side can be seen to be empty just there, empty of existing from its own side. In this there is a possibility to feel the emptiness. Then you can meditate on that wisdom experiencing bliss, and then the remaining part of the meditation can be done.

Then on a lotus and sun and moon discs you manifest as a blue light one thumb-length high. Hold the divine pride, "This is my actual resultant-time sambhogakaya," for a while and then manifest again as Yamantaka with one face and two arms, embracing the mother, and marked with the three syllables OM AH HUM. Hold the divine pride, "This is my actual resultant-time nirmanakaya."

After this you generate the second merit field—Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples. If you are doing *Ganden Lha Gyäma* the elaborate way, after meditating on the divine pride of the nirmanakaya, you can bless the inner and outer offerings as done in the Yamantaka sadhana—the way it is done in *Lama Chöpa*.

SUMMARY OF THE PRELIMINARIES

In the graduated practice of the *Hundred Deities of Tushita* first comes the section on how to meditate on refuge with the recitation for taking refuge to the Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and then all together.

After that recite the short prayer *sang gyä chö dang tsog keyi chog nam la...* which is for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. After that a replica of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha absorbs into you and you become enlightened in the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Then you enlighten all the sentient beings by emitting Guru Shakyamuni Buddhas on the tips of beams, which rest on the crown of each sentient being and purify them. Then they are absorbed, which enlightens the sentient beings in the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

After that comes the practice of the four immeasurables, and then the generation of special bodhicitta. The merit field is extremely pleased that you have made the vow that you are going to

sacrifice yourself in order to work for sentient beings. The merit field absorbs to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, he melts into light and absorbs into you.

You then generate into Yamantaka father embracing the mother, and purify the environments and the beings, transforming them into Yamantakas within mandalas. They then absorb back into you. Then comes the meditation on the absorptions, then the meditation on clear light, dharmakaya. This is the generation stage meditation which leaves the potential to purify the impure, or ordinary, death. Meditating in this way according to the path is the cause to achieve the resultant dharmakaya. Then you utilize the intermediate state into the path to achieve the sambhogakaya: from the dharmakaya you manifest as the sambhogakaya in the form of a blue light and hold the divine pride of being the sambhogakaya. Then utilizing birth into the path to achieve the nirmanakaya: from the sambhogakaya you manifest in the form of Yamantaka father and mother, the same as you visualized at the beginning. You hold the divine pride of being the nirmanakaya. Then you bless the inner offering and the outer offerings as in the Yamantaka sadhana.

9. Ganden Lha Gyäma: Part 1

VISUALIZATION OF THE MERIT FIELD

I will go over the description of the visualization, which is in verse. Reading it is very effective for the mind.

*Lha dang mi yi chö päi dzä
Ngö su sham dang yi kyi trül
Kün zang chö trin la na me
Nam khäi kham kün khyab gyur chig*

May divine and human offerings,
Both actually arranged and mentally emanated,
Become clouds of the finest Samantabhadra offerings,
Filling the entire realm of space.

“In front of oneself, in the center of an ocean of clouds of all-pure offerings...” *Kün zang chö trin* means “clouds of all-pure offerings.” There are two ways to interpret all-pure offerings. One is in regard to bodhisattva Samantabhadra’s method of offering, which is explained in a commentary on *Lama Chöpa*. The same method is used for mandala offerings. Twenty-five or so beams are emitted from the one offering, at the tips of which are bodhisattvas holding offerings. Again from these offerings many beams are emitted manifesting many bodhisattvas with offerings. In this way the whole of space is filled. But here it relates to tantric practice, and “all-pure” is to be understood as referring to your transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness manifested as various offerings which fill all space. It means that the nature of the offerings is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. These offerings that you are offering to the merit field are not stained by the wrong conception grasping at true existence. They are pure in that sense, and also that they are of pure appearance. You, the merit field and the offerings are all three the appearance of the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. So, the offerings are pure in that the ordinary impure appearance and ordinary conception have been stopped. Clouds of offerings expresses that there are many, as does an ocean.

What you are is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. That itself is the resultant Yamantaka's holy mind, the dharmakaya, so that itself is the absolute guru. Your own mind, the deity's holy mind and guru's holy mind are all three oneness; you, the deity and the guru are one. You are this, and your transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness manifests as various offerings which fill all space.

Also in *Lama Chöpa* [LC 9] the visualization of the second merit field starts with bliss and voidness:

De tong yer me lha lam yang par
Kün zang chö trin thrig päi ü
Lo ma me tog drü bü yong dze
Dö güi pag sam jön päi tser
Dong nga bar wäi rin chen thri teng
Chu keye nyi da gyä päi teng

In the vast space of indivisible bliss and emptiness,
Amidst billowing clouds of Samantabhadra offerings,
At the crest of a wish-granting tree,
Adorned with leaves, flowers, and fruit,
Is a precious lion throne ablaze with gems,
On which is a wide lotus, sun, and full moon.

De tong yer me lha lam—"In the center of clouds of all-pure offerings, in the space of bliss and voidness..."

The clouds are extremely white like piles of white curd. These white clouds are not like the ordinary ones we see outside in the sky; they are the appearance of the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, same as the offerings. In the center of these clouds of offerings are eight lions supporting a radiant jeweled throne, two on each side, with tails toward each other and upturned faces looking at Lama Tsongkhapa. The significance of the way the lions are looking, with one eye up and the other one forward or downcast, is as His Holiness explained in the *Lama Chöpa* commentary. The more precisely you can do your meditation the more you will enjoy the sadhana. The less complete it is, the more aspects you miss, the less enjoyment you will find. Then it is more boring, and after some time, not knowing that it is due to your lack of understanding, the question will arise, "Why am I doing this?" Then doubt in the benefits of the meditation will come. Firstly, strong faith in karma is one of the things which makes the practice enjoyable. Another thing is that the stronger your bodhicitta is, the more compassion you have, if you are doing the practice for others, there will be much more enjoyment. And especially if you can do the whole practice with the awareness of emptiness, that will be the most interesting! If in addition to that you can generate bliss, then you will have great excitement. Then you will want the session to be longer, or you will not be able to wait to start the next session. Other people will follow the schedule, but you will not be able to wait!

On the throne are a variegated lotus and sun and moon discs. To each side of that throne is a similar one. The central throne is a little higher than the other two. On it sits your own guru, a transformation of the transcendental wisdom of all the victorious ones, which is of the same taste as the dharmadhatu—the absolute nature. The wisdom one-pointedly abides in the absolute nature, like having poured water into water—oneness. The transcendental wisdom of all the victorious ones, the buddhas, eternally inseparable from the absolute nature; of the same taste as, or oneness with, emptiness, through having completely cut off the subtle dual view.

One's own guru, the dharmakaya of all buddhas, who is not separate from Lama Tsongkhapa, manifests as Jamgön Chökyi Gyälpo Tsongkhapa, the Pacified Savior, Dharma King, Tsongkhapa. This aspect is not separate from all the direct and indirect lineage lamas, and the various aspects of deities, the sutra-aspect buddhas, the bodhisattvas, the dakas, dakinis, protectors—those various aspects which have different labels.

Lama Tsongkhapa has a youthful white holy body but with a red complexion which symbolizes that it is a transformation of the unification of method and wisdom. His hands are in the mudra of turning the Dharma wheel. One hand signifies the revelation of the causal Paramitayana and the other the revelation of the resultant Vajrayana. It also symbolizes that there is no contradiction between emptiness and dependent arising. When lamas give commentaries or other teachings they begin with a certain prayer during which they have their right hand in the mudra of expounding Dharma. It means the same thing. Three fingers are held upwards: the first finger signifies the revelation of the graduated path of the lower capability being; the second finger the graduated path of the medium capability being; the third the graduated path of the higher capability being. Revealing these three teachings generates these three paths in the mind of the disciple by leading him through the three paths consecutively, and hence to enlightenment, the unification of the holy mind and holy body. The two fingers forming a circle signify the unification of the holy body and holy mind, enlightenment.

One's own guru also is a transformation of the transcendental wisdom of all the buddhas, which is of the same taste in dharmakaya. Previously I mentioned the transcendental wisdom of all the buddhas being of the same taste in the absolute nature related more to the objective reality. That transcendental wisdom one-pointedly abides in the absolute nature of all existence, forever inseparable from it, oneness with it, like having poured water into water. In Maitreya Buddha's teaching *Dodëi Gyän*²⁰ it says:

The unimaginable beams of the sun's orb disperse
And there is the action of the sun illuminating the world;
Likewise, in the sphere of faultlessness uncountable numbers of buddhas are merged,
And perform the action of illumination through transcendental wisdom.

“Faultlessness” means without obscurations. Here the beams of the sun which illuminate the world is a simile for the transcendental wisdom of all buddhas being of the same taste in the dharmakaya.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo, referring to Maitreya Buddha's teaching *Dodëi Gyän*, gave this example: the waters of all rivers go into the ocean. If you take one drop from the ocean it contains the water of every river, every stream, from every city, because all the water that went into the ocean is mixed. In the quotation from Maitreya Buddha it says that in the dharmakaya all the buddhas are merged and are performing one action; that action is the transcendental wisdom illuminating the sentient beings' minds. Like a drop of water taken from the ocean, the guru is a transformation of the transcendental wisdom. An appearance of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha or Vajradhara is an appearance of however many deities or buddhas there are throughout the ten directions—all the various manifestations having different aspects and different labels. So, this guru is the embodiment of all those; all the buddhas are in essence one. So transcendental wisdom manifests in the aspect of Jamgön Chökyi Gyälpo Tsongkhapa, the Pacified Savior

²⁰ Wyl: *mdo sde'i rgyan*.

Dharma King Tsongkhapa. This is one aspect but is inseparable from all those manifold aspects. They are not separate from each other; it is one aspect which is inseparable from all other aspects.

The aspect is of having a youthful white holy body with a red complexion; this signifies that it is a transformation of the unification of method and wisdom. He shows the mudra of turning the Dharma wheel, which signifies that the causal yana and resultant yana are non-contradictory, and also that emptiness and dependent arising are non-contradictory. With his hands in that mudra at his heart he holds the stems of upali flowers. The upali flower symbolizes the thought of loving kindness and compassion. On one is a sword, the sword which cuts off the ignorance which seals our bondage. If you are packing something you tie a strong knot to seal it, which does not allow it to come open. Similarly when you stamp a seal onto an envelope it prevents it from being opened and seen by those who are not supposed to see it. The sealing of our bondage is similar: because of our ignorance of not knowing the absolute nature of the I, attachment binds us to samsara. Ignorance stabilizes that, seals that. Attachment is one factor, but ignorance is the main thing which causes us to be trapped in samsara, to be stuck like an elephant drowning in mud. It causes us to continue to experience bondage, not allowing us to be liberated from it. This is the function of ignorance. So this is the sword which cuts off the unknowing mind sealing our bondage.

On the other upali is a text, each syllable of which proclaims the way to meditate on the complete path to enlightenment. Lama Tsongkhapa holding the text signifies that he reveals only pure teachings which have been well examined using the three methods of analysis: whether or not the teaching is harmed by a direct valid mind, or harmed by an inferential valid mind, which can be of two types—depending on reason or depending on faith. The latter means having a realization through faith in what Buddha said. An example is teachings on karma, such as the one which says that one has received the body of a happy transmigrator in this life through having practiced moral conduct in past lives, or has wealth in this life due to having practiced charity in past lives.

He is wearing the three robes, which may refer to the *shemthab*, *namjar* and *chögö*. The three robes signify that he is living in pure moral conduct; for males the highest practice according to pratimoksha is keeping the two hundred and fifty-three gelong vows. He is wearing a pandit's hat the color of well-refined gold. A teaching which has been checked using the three types of examination is very pure, and the hat being a color similar to well-refined gold signifies that. The hat being very high and pointed symbolizes having realized the highest view. Without talking about other doctrines, there are eighteen different schools in Buddhism. The tenets can be listed as Vaibhashika, Sautantrika, Cittamatra and then the two subschools of Madhyamaka—Svatantrika and Prasangika. The purest view is that of the Prasangika, which really cuts the root of samsara—ignorance. So, it signifies that Lama Tsongkhapa has realized the highest ultimate reality with respect to persons and phenomena.

Lama Tsongkhapa and the two disciples are seated in the vajra position to show that they have actualized unification in the essence of the four vajra postures. There is the unification with learning, but here it refers to the unification of no more learning, that is, enlightenment. The names of the four postures are: the drop posture, wind posture, vein posture and the body posture. The drop posture refers to retaining the drops. Blocking the hole with the downward moving wind in the form of a syllable is the wind vajra posture. The vein vajra posture refers to the meeting of the veins of the father and mother. The body posture refers to the syllables that one decorates the secret places with during the embrace at the time of unification. There are three recognitions, and these practices come at that time.

At the heart of Lama Tsongkhapa is the father Manjushri, with orange beams radiating from all his holy body. At Manjushri's heart is the *yeshe sempa*, the transcendental wisdom being, Dorje Chang (Tibetan), or Vajradhara (Sanskrit), like a radiant blue jewel. At Vajradhara's heart is a concentration being, blue syllable HUM, like an eternal flame. This is the *sempa sum tsig*, a translation of which could be “pile of three brave-minded beings.” My guess is that “brave” means having attained the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, the holy mind of dharmakaya. The derivation of *sempa* is: *sem* is the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness; and *sempa* is an expression meaning brave through having achieved that. A person who has bodhicitta is brave because he has the thought of wanting to bear, or being able to bear, the hardships of working for sentient beings; that is a *sempa*. A person who chooses to do the hardest work for others, who takes on the responsibility himself, is a “brave-minded” bodhisattva. Here *sem* relates to the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness; and *sempa* is brave in having that. This is my own interpretation.

On the right throne is the sublime arya being, the Savior of the World—which means Avalokiteshvara—in the aspect of Gyaltsab Dharma Rinchen, the elder disciple. He has the aspect of an older person with a very peaceful expression. At his heart is a four-armed Chenrezig, and again a Vajradhara and HUM—the pile of three brave-minded beings as before. What this means is that he is Chenrezig, but in the form of Dharma Rinchen. He is an embodiment of Chenrezig.

On the left throne is the Owner of the Secrecy in human form, Khädrub Mawäi Nyima,²¹ youthful, in the relaxed dancing position—the way Tara sits. When those who are learned debate, they sometimes assume such postures. At his heart is the Owner of the Secrecy, Vajrapani, wearing a blue scarf. The aspect of Vajrapani which is most common to us is called Korwachän. As before there is the pile of three brave-minded beings.

Lama Tsongkhapa and the two disciples are sitting in front of you showing by their expressions that they are pleased with you. The words to convey this could be more poetic, as they are in Tibetan, but I cannot make them that way; from me they are like hail, or hard as rocks!

That is the first visualization.

ABSORPTION OF TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM

Visualize the pure realm of Tushita above the merit field. This is the method for the elaborate practice of the *Hundred Deities of Tushita* guru yoga explained by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo. You are on the northern side of Mount Meru, which has four levels. The asuras are situated on these four levels. The first level is called *öchän*, the second level *daväi trengwa*, the third *näzangpo*, and the fourth *mijowa*.²² On the top of Mount Meru is the deva realm called “Thirty-three.” Higher above that is the deva realm called *Thabdräl*,²³ “Release from Fighting.” That is the place we should escape to, where there is no fighting! But it is temporary. Above that is another deva realm called Tushita. But the pure realm of Tushita is separate from that—just like a city and its

²¹ Wyl: *mkebas grub smra ba'i nyi ma*.

²² According to *Liberation*, the four levels of the asuras are: (1) Bright, or having Light, Tib: *öchän*; Wyl: *'od can*; (2) Moon Garland, Tib: *daväi trengwa*; Wyl: *zla ba'i 'phreng ba*; (3) Excellent Place, Tib: *näzangpo*; Wyl: *gnas bzang po*; and (4) Immutable; Tib: *mijowa*; Wyl: *mi gyo ba*.

²³ Wyl: *'thab bral*.

monastery. The Tushita pure realm is higher than the ordinary Tushita deva realm. It is the place from where the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon descend.

This holy place is the place of “one-lifetime bodhisattvas.” That might mean that those who become bodhisattvas having been born in Tushita become enlightened in that same life. The base of the pure realm is golden with round designs in lapis lazuli. It is very smooth like the palm of the hand and very comfortable. I am not sure whether there are kookaburras or not! Or kangaroos! His Holiness Zong Rinpoche told the story that one day in Varanasi when the monks were doing examinations Professor Upadeva, who gave a talk at the Third Dharma Celebration (in Delhi), asked His Holiness Zong Rinpoche whether there are cars in the pure realms. Maybe it is full of taxis and buses! Anyway, it is without undesirable things; there is no ugliness, no discomfort, there are no rocks or thornbushes or things like that. When you walk it is like walking on those soft beds in the West. If you step on one it goes down and then lifts up. I have not got used to the beds, so for me sitting on the hard floor is much more comfortable and relaxing.

It is full of parks of beautiful flowering plants. In the teachings it says they have huge flowers. There are many beautiful lakes and swimming pools. There are wish-granting trees which grant whatever enjoyment one asks for. The wind moving the trees gives off the sound of Dharma. As you can see in paintings, the trees are well decorated with flowers and small bells. At the bottom of the lakes is not ordinary sand but jewel sand, tiny pieces of sparkling jewels. There are various beautiful birds flying around continually making very enchanting sounds of holy Dharma. The air is completely filled by sweet scents. Just thinking of the pure realm Tushita brings incredible joy to one’s heart. You should think that you are experiencing the complete enjoyments of the pure realm.

In the center of this is the Victorious Palace, the Dharma celestial mansion “High Banner,” which is beyond compare with any king’s palace, or even the deva realm palaces in regard to quality and beauty. In front of this Dharma celestial mansion is the *Kungarawa Yiga Chödzin*.²⁴ In monasteries, like for example in His Holiness’ temple, there are shelves where the scriptures are kept which are called *kungarawa*. So in front of the High Banner is the kungarawa called *yiga chödzin* which means “the joyful mind of holding Dharma,” where Maitreya Buddha gives teachings. In the center of the *Kungarawa Yiga Chödzin* is a jewel throne uplifted by the eight snow lions. On this sits the Substitute of the Victorious One, the Unconquerable, Maitreya Buddha. “Unconquerable” because Maitreya Buddha conquered the disturbing thoughts and even the subtle dual view. We can say that now we are defeated by the disturbing thoughts and by the subtle dual view, but Maitreya Buddha has completely destroyed them. The Savior Maitreya Buddha’s holy body is like refined gold, and from it beams having the magnificence of one hundred thousand suns are being emitted in all ten directions.

He has one face and two arms, and his hands are at his heart in the mudra of turning the Dharma wheel, the same as Lama Tsongkhapa. He is holding the stems of two naga trees, both of which have flowers: on the right is a wheel and on the left one a vase called *riipa chilug*, the water vase. I think there is a story related to Brahma which I think His Holiness Zong Rinpoche explained. After gelongs have taken lunch during a puja they pass this vase of water to clean their mouths, which means they should not eat after that. Thousand-arm Chenrezig holds the same type of vase in one of his hands.

²⁴ Wyl: *kun dga’ ra ba yid dga’ chos ‘dzin*.

He is adorned with precious jewels and divine scarves. On his crown is the stupa of enlightenment. It is the same type of stupa as the one at Kopan containing Lama's relics—this shaped stupa is called the Stupa of Enlightenment and it is the essence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. There are eight different types of stupas. It is like Tara having Amitabha on her crown. Many deities have one of the Dhyani Buddhas as a crown, which can be seen on some statues. It means that even when one becomes enlightened one still respects the virtuous friend because one attains enlightenment, the state of having completely ceased all obscurations and their stains and having achieved all the qualities, due to his kindness in revealing the teachings. So Tara and Chenrezig having Amitabha on their crowns means Amitabha is their guru. Similarly Maitreya Buddha having Guru Shakyamuni Buddha on his crown shows that Shakyamuni Buddha is his guru.

He is seated on the throne as though on a chair, which indicates that he has the intention of descending to this, the southern continent, right this minute. It is like an important person seated on a chair sort-of about to stand up to come to help you. His holy face is looking at you with a smile of extreme pleasure.

To the right of Maitreya Buddha is Lama Atisha in the aspect of the deva's son Namkhe Drime, Stainless Space.²⁵ To the left is Lama Tsongkhapa in the aspect of the deva's son, the Son of the Victorious One, Gyältshab Jampäl Nyingpo. These are the holy names by which they are called in the pure realm. Also there is Lhodrag Drubchen, Great Yogi of Lhodrag, in the aspect of a deva's son called Drime Özer. He was one of Lama Tsongkhapa's gurus. Lhodrag Drubchen attained Vajrapani, so is an emanation of Vajrapani. You may remember from Lama Tsongkhapa's life-story that when he was going to India in order to examine the teachings more closely he met Lhodrag Drubchen on the way who told him not to go. Lama Konchog told me that there is a request prayer to this great yogi Lhodrag Drubchen in the requesting prayer of the lineage lamas. As this yogi is an embodiment of Vajrapani, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo used to tell those with paralysis to recite that requesting verse.

An inconceivable number of beings from the ten directions are gathered there to hear Maitreya Buddha's spontaneous teachings, the incredibly enchanting melodies of the Prajnaparamita scriptures. Not only are the surrounding buddhas and bodhisattvas gathered there able to hear, even you can hear so clearly. And you can clearly hear the enchanting sound of the holy Dharma even from the wish-granting trees being moved by the wind and the songs of the various birds. The meanings of the words appear in your mind and you generate the path. You experience the perfect fragrances of the pure realm.

Meditate very clearly so that all the decorations and qualities of the beings and the place are as if you are actually seeing them, as if you have actually gone to the pure realm.

Once you have visualized the pure realm of Tushita make a very strong request from your heart to Maitreya Buddha and the surrounding buddhas and bodhisattvas: "Please, please guide me also." The Tibetan word for "please guide" is *je zung te*; what it means is the wish for help in attaining the position of someone like a king or prime minister or president or whatever. In this context it is the request to be guided, not just from some problems, but to the state of omniscient mind the buddhas have reached through developing the mind by training in the path.

²⁵ (1) Namkha Drime, Wyl: *nam mkha' dri med*; (2) Gyältshab Jampäl Nyingpo, Wyl: *rgyal tshab jam dpal snying po*; (3) Lhodrag Drubchen, Wyl: *lho brag sgrub chen*; and (4) Drime Özer, Wyl: *dri med 'od zer*.

Visualizing the pure realm as very beautiful and very desirable is a technique to generate a strong wish to be there right now. Generating such a wish is a method of transferring the consciousness to the pure realm. This is also a practice for transforming the impure environment into a pure realm. As you practice the yoga method *Hundred Deities of Tushita* daily, you will think of the pure realm of Tushita and each time generate the wish to be there, so each time it will plant a seed, or prepare you to be born there at the time of your death. Each time you generate the wish it makes the karma stronger and stronger and stronger. It is like making a plant grow quickly and strong by putting water and minerals on it every day. The basic cause for being born in the pure realm of Tushita is to study Maitreya Buddha's teachings and practice them.

At the heart of Maitreya Buddha is the transcendental wisdom like a very clear reflection of the infinite knot, one of the eight auspicious offerings, appearing in the very clear shiny golden mandala base. On this is a heap of white clouds, like we see in the paintings, the essence of which is compassion which feels as unbearable the sufferings of we sentient beings in this southern continent and wants to free us from our sufferings.

In the center of that cloud inseparable from your own kind root guru is the Dharma King of the Three Realms, Tsongkhapa, the father and sons, as the three piles of brave-minded beings. All the buddhas' omniscient minds, compassion and power are embodied into one—the Dharma King of the Three Realms, father and sons, the three piles of brave-minded beings, *sem pa sum tsig*, as I described before in regard to the samaya being. You should visualize as if you are actually seeing them at Maitreya Buddha's heart.

INVOCATION

*Gan dän lha gyäi gön gyi thug ka nä
Rab kar zho sar pung drüi chu dzin tser
Chö keyi gyäl po kün khyen lo zang drag
Sä dang chä pa nä dir sheg su söl*

From the heart of the savior of the hundred deities of Tushita,
On the peak of a cloud resembling a clump of extremely white fresh curd,
King of Dharma, omniscient Losang Dragpa,
Please come here together with your sons.

A translation: "I am requesting you, the Dharma King, Omniscient One, Losang Dragpa, and sons, who are seated on the top of the water holders like piled-up white curd, to descend here at this place, from the heart of the savior of the hundred devas of Tushita."

"Water holders" means clouds. Say the prayer slowly, melodiously and with strong dauntless faith. You should think that it is as if you have gone to the pure realm and are making the request like this. I think the Tibetan word *kyema* is an expression of sadness: "I don't have the fortune in this life to come to your pure realm and actually meet you; therefore, please come down to the southern continent, Dzambuling, to be my guide, my savior, my refuge." Say this prayer with this wish, and dauntless immutable faith. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo says that if you say this prayer slowly and with very sweet chanting there is no need for any doubt at all as to whether Lama Tsongkhapa will instantly come before you. Lama Tsongkhapa in Tushita hears and will instantly descend in front of you. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo goes on to say, that the reason there is no need to doubt that Lama Tsongkhapa will descend before you right away

when you say this prayer is that even before you become enlightened, when you have achieved the great path of merit you achieve the concentration of continual Dharma. At this stage you obtain the five types of clairvoyance. Clairvoyance of physical sight is such that one can see phenomena and sentient beings even hundreds of *pagtshä* distant. I think eight *gyangdrag* is one *pagtshä*, and one *gyangdrag* is five hundred arm-spans.²⁶

When Lama Atisha showed the aspect of having an illness such that he could not control his bowels and he excreted in his bed, Dromtonpa his translator served him with great devotion by cleaning the bed and taking away the excrement. One day as Dromtonpa was taking care of Lama Atisha in this way he achieved the clairvoyance of being able to read the minds of sentient beings as far away as an eagle can fly in eighteen days. Due to the power of his service to his guru so much negative karma was purified and he accumulated so much merit. Similarly, the clairvoyance of the eye allows one to see very far. The practitioner who achieves the great path of merit has these clairvoyances. There are five Mahayana paths; the first one, the path of merit, has three stages—small, medium and great—the final one being the great path of merit. With the clairvoyance of the deva’s ear we are able to hear very distant sounds, even many *paktses* distant. As one who has achieved the great path of merit is able to hear sounds from afar, it is impossible that Lama Tsongkhapa’s omniscient mind cannot see that you are invoking and requesting him. That is what Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo is saying. It is very effective. These practices are more meaningful and enjoyable if you know the reasons that they work, rather than just following the rules of a tradition and invoking this and that.

After that the transcendental wisdom that you have visualized at the heart of Maitreya Buddha descends: Lama Tsongkhapa onto Lama Tsongkhapa’s crown, Gyaltsab Rinpoche onto Gyaltsab Rinpoche’s crown, Khedrup Rinpoche onto Khedrup Rinpoche’s crown. They are absorbed, they become oneness, and that oneness is stabilized. That is the meaning of DZA HUM BAM HO.

If you are going to do the practice of offering the bath you should do it at this point.

SEVEN-LIMB PRACTICE

The condensed practice for accumulating merit and purifying the obscurations is the seven-limb practice and mandala offering. Lama Tsongkhapa, in the *Great Commentary of Lamrim*, said:

In degenerate times such as these, when we listen to teachings we cannot comprehend;
When we try to reflect on the meaning of the teachings we cannot understand;
And when we try to meditate we cannot generate the realizations.
So at this time the essential advice is to attempt to purify the obscurations, to accumulate merit, and to make requests.

That is the essential thing to do, so you should put the most effort into this. That is the answer to the difficulties and problems. Otherwise, however much you try, however much you do retreat, however much you listen and study the scriptures, nothing happens, no change takes place in the mind. However many times you listen to lamrim or thought transformation teachings—those extremely skillful meditations for transforming bad conditions into the path to

²⁶ Wyl: *dpag tshad* and *rgyang grags*.

enlightenment—no change happens in your mind and in your behavior. If nothing is improving, this is the solution.

Gen Jampa Wangdu used to advise me to think this way. The conclusion he came to through his own experience was that no matter how much you listen or speak, the main thing is to purify the karmic obscurations. This is true, because the reason nothing is happening, why no experience or realization of the graduated path to enlightenment comes in your mind, is because it is blocked by the obscurations, the negative karma. As Geshe-la says, without the obscurations this mind would be omniscient; with them it is not. Actually the omniscient mind is a subtle mind, but speaking generally it is like this. Without obscurations you would be a buddha now; but since you have an obscured mind you are not a buddha, but a sentient being. It is differentiated by this. By doing strong purification progress will happen in your mind; the realizations of the paths and bhumis will come.

If you wish to take the essence of having this body, and if you do not become enlightened with this body of very brief life in this degenerate time, the best thing is to at least achieve a valid base for the title “bodhisattva” by generating bodhicitta before death. That is the most meaningful thing that can be achieved with this body if you cannot achieve stages such as simultaneously-born bliss or clear light. The most beneficial thing you can do for all sentient beings is to develop your mind by training in the lamrim through listening, reflecting and meditating.

King Indrabhuti, who became enlightened in his brief lifetime, was asked, “What should be done to quickly achieve enlightenment?” He gave this advice: “Practice the seven limbs.” Then he explained how important this is by using the simile of a carriage: if any of the seven critical parts is missing it cannot perform the function of transporting things; likewise, if any of the seven-limbs is not practiced one cannot achieve enlightenment.

REQUESTING THE MERIT FIELD TO REMAIN

That sentient beings can develop happiness, and the extent to which they can develop it, depends on the existence of the teachings of Buddha and the development of those teachings. And that depends on the holders of the teachings, the holy gurus, who implant the teachings within one’s own and other sentient beings’ minds. This includes the buddhas of the three times, including Lama Tsongkhapa, who manifested in an ordinary aspect. If the gurus manifest in a higher than ordinary aspect we would not be able to see them due to not having the karma. We do not have the karma to see the buddhas if they do not manifest in ordinary aspect, and if they manifest in a lower aspect we would not recognize them as a virtuous friend and would not have the opportunity to receive teachings. So, their present aspect is exactly according to the level of our own karma. Since we have no merit to see a higher aspect than this, even if Maitreya Buddha or Manjushri or Tara are in front of us, the only way we can see them is according to the appearance of our own mind, our own karma. Therefore they take ordinary aspects; that is all that can appear to us. That is the reason we make this request.

The essential methods for accumulating merit and purifying obscurations are the seven-limb practice and the mandala offering. Accumulating merit and purifying the obstacles is the cause of being able to generate the graduated path to enlightenment, so this is another reason to request Lama Tsongkhapa to have a stable life for one hundred eons, as is mentioned in the prayer. When Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen heard someone making the prayer, “May His Holiness live for one hundred years,” he said it should not be said like that but rather the request should be to live for 10,000s of 10,000s of years. Even if in reality it may not be possible to live so long, but to pray in this way is auspicious for His Holiness to remain in this aspect longer.

We request the guru to have a stable life in order to accumulate merit. As I mentioned, for people who have not met and so do not know Buddhadharmā, and therefore do not practice, all their temporal happiness such as excellent surroundings, helpers and wealth, is basically from good karma created in the past; they are enjoying the result of past good karma such as having practiced moral conduct, charity and patience. Sometimes it can be the result of actions done out of compassion or loving kindness in this life; some people who have a good heart experience the results of actions done through cherishing others and helping them with a sincere heart, and things like that. So if these sentient beings do not meet the Dharma in this life and so do not get to know about karma and do not practice abandoning the cause of suffering and creating the cause of happiness, they just finish the merit which they created in the past. If a person has worked very hard for some years and collected some money but does not think of the future and use it to earn more, if he just lives on what he has saved, when it is finished he will have nothing left and will meet with difficulties.

These sentient beings are like that; the way they pass their lives is by finishing the little merit which they accumulated in the past, without using the present good results such as their wealth, surroundings and precious body of a happy transmigrator. They do not take any essence from having these things; they do not use them to accumulate more merit for the temporal and ultimate happiness of future lives through to enlightenment. Then when that little merit is finished, what is left is the negative karma. Since there is then no strong merit for receiving a body of a happy transmigrator able to practice Dharma, what is left is the powerful nonvirtuous actions, so it only remains to take an unfortunate body of a suffering transmigrating being. Those sentient beings may not think that they are religious persons, but all their happiness, comfort and everything comes from having accumulated merit. The opportunity to do so arose because of the teachings; if the teachings had not been revealed they would not have had the chance to accumulate merit because they would not have known the methods for creating happiness. In this way the sentient beings' happiness is dependent on the teachings.

It is said by the lineage lamas in the lamrim teachings: "Sentient beings' karma and the buddhas' actions have equal power." If our happiness and suffering were not in our own hands completely in the hands of the buddhas, there would not be any sentient beings left, because the buddhas would not allow us to remain as sentient beings even for a split second. For them it is unbearable that any sentient being is obscured even for a split second.

This is an effective way to recognize the kindness of the virtuous friend. Without the existence of this ordinary aspect that you have the karma to see, to receive teachings from, and to communicate with, there would be no way for yourself and other sentient beings to hear teachings. Then there would be no way to understand the meanings of the words, and no way to develop the realizations within your mind and the minds of other sentient beings, thus no way to create the causes for temporal and ultimate happiness. So that is why it is so important to request them to have a stable life.

One lama, I think it was *Chän Ngawa Lodrö Gyältsän*,²⁷ said in the lamrim: "It is incredibly fortunate to see the guru as a human being, rather than as a dog or a donkey." You may recall some stories related to this. Just think about His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the present living guru, who is in an aspect which we can see. But although His Holiness has manifested as a human, not an animal, if he was in the aspect of being sick, of having obstacles, then we could not receive teachings again. So we would not have all these incredible opportunities, which are

²⁷ Wyl: *spyän snga ba blo gros rgyal mtshan*.

unbelievable. I met one of the representatives who has worked for His Holiness for twenty years and he said to me on the day of the long-life initiation, “This time His Holiness gave an incredible amount of time to teach the Westerners.” He was very surprised that His Holiness had given so much time to teaching, because His Holiness is so busy that actually there is no time. It was true of that time and of all the past times. So, if he had taken a human form with obstacles we could not receive teachings. So we are incredibly fortunate. We should realize how unbelievably fortunate.

Even receiving teachings from the many other lamas both in the West and the East is basically due only to His Holiness’ kindness. If His Holiness had not done the holy action of coming out of Tibet there would be no opportunity even to receive teachings from other lamas, and therefore no opportunity for us to practice. Practicing Dharma, or His Holiness’ advice, or His Holiness’ teaching, is the means of defeating the delusions. There is no way of defeating the delusions other than through Dharma practice.

*Diin gyi nam khar seng thri pä däi teng
 Je tsün la ma gye päi dzum kar chän
 Dag lo dä päi sö nam zhing chog tu
 Tän pa gyä chir käl gyar zhub su söl*

In the sky before me, on a lion throne, lotus, and moon,
 My perfect, pure guru smiles with delight.
 Supreme field of merit for my mind of faith,
 Please abide for a hundred eons to spread the teachings.

It says: *je tsün la ma gye päi dzum kar chän*. *Je tsün* means venerable, a description of the qualities of the lama. *Je tsün la ma* summarizes the graduated paths of the beings of the three capabilities. *Je*, the graduated path of the lower capability being; *tsün*, the graduated path of the medium capability being; *la ma*, the graduated path of the higher capability being, which includes the Paramitayana and the tantra path. So, it means the lama has completed or gone beyond the graduated paths of the beings of the three capabilities; which means he has achieved the two kayas, the unification of the holy body and holy mind.

“Jetsun lama in a smiling, pleased aspect, seated on the lion throne, lotus and moon disc in the space in front of me: I am requesting you to live for hundreds of eons...” Like the “hundred” in *Hundred Deities of Tushita*, this is an expression of many; it does not mean just one hundred.

To mention it again, in order to be able to fulfill the wishes of all sentient beings, to free them from all obscurations and lead them to enlightenment, we need to develop an understanding of the meanings of the words of the teachings and their complete realization. To achieve that we need to accumulate merit, the cause, as I mentioned at the beginning. Therefore, it says here “to be the sublime field of my devotion and merit.” The most powerful field, from which one can receive the most extensive merit, is the guru. As a field of merit the guru is even beyond one’s parents, the Sangha, arhats, bodhisattvas, and even the three times’ buddhas. It is effective to recall the story of the bodhisattva *Tagtu ngu*, the Always Crying One.²⁸ While practicing just Paramitayana, not tantra, because of cherishing his guru Chöpak more than his life and offering him service for seven years, he accumulated the merit which normally takes two countless great

²⁸ Wyl: *rtag tu ngu*; Skt: Sada Prarudita. The ever-weeping bodhisattva (sada is “always” and prarudita is in “tears”); he is mentioned in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras (Prajnaparamita) and is used as an example of unwavering devotion to the guru.

eons to accumulate in the Paramitayana. That was because he received merit from the highest among the merit fields, the virtuous teacher.

Those of you who worked very hard, who had the opportunity to offer service, who bore the hardships of heat and cold, hunger and thirst while Lama Yeshe was alive, should feel extremely fortunate. You accumulated unbelievable merit by having been able to correctly devote to the virtuous friend. There are three types of correct devotion to a virtuous friend through action: obtaining his advice, offering respect and performing various services, and making material offerings. Best is obtaining advice and putting it into practice. Lama gave advice on how to do retreats and on how to work in the centers—it is the same thing. Even if you were not living with Lama, or not around him every day, by serving him even when distant and putting into practice the advice that was given, it was the same thing, and it gave opportunities to accumulate so much merit. So, we should remember that and feel highly fortunate.

I used to think like this especially when Lama for some years kept talking about passing away. I am just expressing the thoughts which used to come—that even a small service such as cleaning or something, if not done now while there is this incredible opportunity to accumulate the highest, most extensive merit, will not be able to be done later even if one has the wish. Such thoughts used to come, but I did not do anything. Now Lama is no longer in that aspect, so there is no opportunity to serve Lama now. I am referring to the highest field of devotion and merit. If you were able to do something that Lama advised in the past—a practice or work or whatever—by recalling it and rejoicing, your merit increases. So, you should feel very fortunate at having been able to offer services in the past and even now continue to do what Lama advised and wished in general, or something particularly related to you. It still accumulates the same extensive merit. As you say these prayers you can think you should do such practices and not miss any opportunity.

Recognizing that all of your happiness, all good things, are dependent on only the guru, and seeing how extremely important it is to not separate from the guru, request him to have a stable life, with a strong mind. Like, for example, a desperately ill patient having an unbelievable need for the one doctor who may be able to cure him, who everybody says is the most skillful, who is beyond compare. If oneself were that patient and met such a doctor, one would beg him from the heart to please, please not go away until one's disease is cured. In this degenerate time, sentient beings are so difficult to subdue and oneself could not be subdued by all other buddhas and bodhisattvas, so that you were left without a savior, without a refuge. So with the thought, I don't have anyone other than you to rely on, and having realized his kindness, make a strong request for him to have a stable life.

If you had cancer or leprosy, or some contagious disease that other people are scared of, the wish to receive help from the doctor able to cure it would be so strong in your heart. But, such a disease is just of this body and will last for some months or years. Now, the cause of all these problems that need so many things to cure them, such as doctors, hospitals, medicines, operations and so on, is the disturbing thoughts whose continuity does not have a beginning. That is the real disease which is always present; we are requesting the object of devotion, the merit field, to have a stable life in order to cure this completely. Actually there is no comparison with our need for the guru who reveals the teaching, who is the doctor who cures the disease of the disturbing thoughts; he ends the true sufferings which did not have a beginning. The effect of the ordinary doctor who can just cure cancer or other diseases to do with this body is completely overshadowed. Think like this and then make a strong request for him to have a stable life.

The benefit of this practice of requesting the virtuous friend to live a long life is that negative karmas accumulated in connection with him such as having disturbed the holy mind, which will prevent you from seeing a virtuous friend in future lives, are purified. Doing the practice of the seven limbs is the same as doing a long-life puja. The result is that you achieve the vajra holy body. And, by the way, long life for yourself!

It is not sufficient just to be able to request a stable life or perform a long-life puja or whatever for your gurus; that alone is not sufficient. The purpose of requesting them to have stable lives is for them to reveal the teachings and for you to put the teachings into practice. Otherwise, there is no reason.

It is said that if you have a mandala, you should put five heaps on the base and offer a visualized throne. Visualize that you are offering the throne not just with your one body, but with numberless replicas of yourself filling entire space. When you have finished the request the throne you are offering is absorbed into the merit field's throne, and think that the merit field has accepted the offering with a pleased mind. Also Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in his lamrim teaching that you can transform replicas of yourself holding a throne equal to the number of buddhas and other beings in the merit field you have visualized, such as that of *Lama Chöpa* or the *Hundred Deities of Tushita*. If you cannot do that, then do it with just this one body. The merit you gain is proportional to the number you visualize.

PROSTRATION

The next verse is the limb of prostration: “Your holy mind which is the wisdom seeing all the objects of knowledge.”

She jai khyön kün jai wai lo drö thug

Your holy mind has the intelligence that understands the full extent of objects to be known.

All objects of knowledge are included in the two truths.

THE TWO TRUTHS

There are two bases, the absolute truth and relative truth. The absolute truth is a truth for the holy wisdom as it sees reality: as non-truly existent, or empty by way of true existence. In English the term absolute truth is very short; in Tibetan it is longer: *dön dam den pa*. *Dön* is the object, the reality, which is empty of true existence. *Dam* is the subject, the wisdom; it means holy. *Den pa* means it is true for that wisdom as it sees it. So, *dön dam den pa* means “that which is true for the holy wisdom.”

The conventional truth is that which is true for the all-obscuring mind— *kun dzob den pa*. *Kun* means all, which here refers to the emptiness; *dzob* means obscuring, which is the function of the ignorance; *den pa* means it is true for that as it sees. So, the meaning is the phenomena which are true for the ignorance holding true existence as it sees them. Because of that function, ignorance is called “all-obscuring.”

So, for the wisdom that sees the reality of the I, its emptiness of a truly existent I is true. Now, the I itself, on which the reality is dependent, is true for the ignorance, the all-obscuring mind holding true existence, as it sees the I. That is a brief explanation of the definitions of the two truths, word-by-word.

Why is this ignorance holding true existence called “all-obscuring”? The function of ignorance is that it obscures realization of the emptiness of the I and the aggregates—all emptinesses. The ignorance holding a truly existent I sees the I that is merely labeled on the aggregates by thought, the actual I which really exists—which performs all activities from morning until night like eating, sleeping, sitting, and walking, which experiences happiness and suffering, which suffers in samsara, which will become enlightened, which practices Dharma, which creates the cause of suffering, which creates the cause of happiness—but sees it as existing from its own side. It sees the I that is merely labeled on the aggregates but sees it in a different aspect—as not merely labeled, as completely existing from its own side.

It is like when two people look at a third person and one sees that person as very kind, the other as cruel. Both of them see the one person, but they see different aspects. Thinking about this example is helpful for guru yoga practice.

In Tibet a teacher had two disciples who returned to their monastery from a distant place. They had spent days walking on foot. When they reached their teacher’s house he gave them some cold tea. One disciple thought, “How unbelievably kind our teacher is that he especially made the tea very cold for us since we are so exhausted.” He felt much gratitude in his heart. The other disciple thought, “We have traveled so long and are so exhausted, but he didn’t even offer us hot tea,” and he got very angry. Both saw the same teacher, but in different aspects—one as very cruel, the other as very kind. That is an example for your guru yoga practice. As I mentioned, it depends so much on how you interpret the situation. Things are very much dependent on one’s own mind.

So, ignorance holding a truly existent I sees the I that is merely labeled, but as existing from its own side, and believes that is one hundred percent true. The wisdom realizing emptiness of the I sees the I as empty of existing from its own side. The ignorance holding the truly existent I and the wisdom realizing the emptiness of the I are complete opposites. The wisdom sees no existence of the I from its own side at all, not even an atom. Ignorance sees the I which is merely labeled as existing from its own side; wisdom sees the I that is merely labeled as empty of existing from its own side, empty of being truly existent. It realizes the reality on the I, the emptiness on the I.

The expression “emptiness on the I” has great meaning. If you are able to recognize the object of refutation on the I—true existence on the I—you can understand the emptiness on the I. It is like first seeing a person and then labeling “bad” or “good” on that. There appears to be true existence on the I which is in fact merely labeled. If you are able to recognize the object of refutation on the I, when you hear “emptiness on the I” it makes great sense. Otherwise saying the word “on” does not have any meaning.

That is why the development of this wisdom realizing the emptiness of the I is able to completely eradicate the root of samsara, which is the ignorance holding the I as truly existent. The particular quality of the holy mind is that this wisdom sees all existence, *kun dzob den pa*, the truth for the all-obscuring mind, and the truth for the holy absolute wisdom. These are the two bases, and the two paths to practice are method and wisdom. What is achieved by realizing these bases through listening, reflecting and meditating on them, and thus developing the

wisdom/method path, is the rupakaya and dharmakaya. These perform actions for the benefit of sentient beings without the slightest mistake. Until we become enlightened, except during equipoise meditation concentrating one-pointedly in shunyata, during which the dual view is absorbed but not cut off, whenever phenomena appear they appear as truly existent. This is so even for arya bodhisattvas and arhats. Before we become enlightened, when we directly perceive shunyata we cannot see the conventional truth: at the time we are concentrating on the emptiness of the I we cannot see the conventional I. But when the conventional I becomes an object of the mind we cannot concentrate on the emptiness of the I. While we are a sentient being we cannot directly see both truths—the absolute nature of the I and the I—at the same time. Only a buddha can directly see both truths at the same time; a buddha’s omniscient mind while seeing the absolute nature of the I or the aggregates, of everything, sees all conventional truths at the same time. Or, while seeing all the conventional truths, at the same time sees all the absolute truths. There is no dual view.

Regarding our experience of the I now, right this minute: when we look at the I it appears that the I is existing from its own side, and that is what we cling to. That is the I which appears to us when we think of our real self, when we say “I”—“I do this,” or “I do that.” We see the I as separate from emptiness, separately from the reality of the I. Now we do not see the I as the same in essence as the reality of the I. So presently we have a dual view. I am not referring to some reality in space, but the reality of the I. We see them as if they are separate. In reality they are not separate, but that is how it appears to us, and that is what we cling to. Buddha does not have this dual view of the conventional truth I appearing as separate to the reality—the emptiness of the I—at all. It is only a buddha’s holy mind which sees both truths—sees the I while directly seeing the emptiness of the I; and likewise for every single existence. So a buddha’s wisdom, while abiding in the emptiness of all existence one-pointedly, like the oneness of water poured into water, inseparable from the emptiness and having completely cut off the dual view, manifests as the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya in billions of billions of various aspects to guide each and every sentient being. In this manner a buddha gives teachings and works for sentient beings with the holy body, the holy speech and the holy mind. Think about how a buddha sees all existence, but particularly remember that without having dual view a buddha directly sees both truths. That is a quality of a buddha’s holy mind which sentient beings, even tenth bhumi bodhisattvas, do not have.

In the *Heart Sutra* it says form is empty, emptiness is form. One can relate that to the I in a similar way: I is empty, emptiness is I. Check the I; is there an I separate from the aggregates in the hills, on the table, in the cupboard where you keep clothing, or in a box, or in the bank!? There is some doubt as to whether that meditation is analysis of emptiness. Other than the aggregates there is nothing which is the base of yourself, I, and Geshe Sopa Rinpoche used to say that just searching for the merely labeled I on these aggregates is analyzing emptiness, even without distinguishing between that and the truly existent I imputed on top of it. But I think some people might say that if you are not searching for the truly existent I, just the merely labeled I, it is not analysis of emptiness, because to be analysis for emptiness firstly you have to posit the truly existent I, that which is non-existent, and then analyze; as in reality the truly existent I cannot be found on these aggregates it does not exist, so that is an analysis of emptiness. It is absent right there where it is appearing as truly existent.

If someone asks, “Where are you?” why do we say, “I am in India, Dharamsala, at Tushita,” and specifically on this cushion—or on the floor if we do not have a cushion! Even if we do not have any experience of why we say we are at Tushita by understanding through meditation or intellectually, still our conviction of this is very strong. However, there is no reason at all to say that we are in Dharamsala, at Tushita, sitting on this cushion, other than that the aggregates are

here now. This association of body and mind, these aggregates, which is labeled a human being, is presently in India, in Dharamsala, at Tushita, on this cushion. So even if we cannot give another reason due to a lack of understanding or experience, the reason is simply because these aggregates are here right now sitting on this cushion. The I is merely labeled on these aggregates by thought, and as the aggregates are in India, at Tushita, on this cushion, so we say, “I am now in India, at Tushita, on this cushion.” In this way from morning until night we label “Now I’m getting up, now I’m meditating, now I’m washing, now I’m eating breakfast, now I’m going to the toilet,” and so on according to what the aggregates, the base, are doing—what the body is doing, or what the speech is doing or what the mind is doing. “Now I am exhausted; now I’m having dreams,” and so on. We label I on the aggregates depending on the action being done. So, the I exists by virtue of nothing more than each time being merely labeled on the aggregates by the thought; that is all.

An I which is anything in the slightest beyond that is what is non-existent; it is non-existent, and as it is non-existent we have to realize that emptiness. If we feel that there is something beyond being merely labeled, that is what is called the object of refutation. Therefore, the I is empty of existing without depending on the base and the thought which labels. Now we can see that such an I is non-existent; there is no such I at all, from the hair down to the feet. This I is empty of existing from its own side because it is merely labeled by thought. So, having realized that this I is empty of existing from its own side, no matter how much we may try to believe that I does not exist, without choice this realization is the cause for the resultant conviction that the I definitely exists on these aggregates under the control of name, or, in other words, under the control of mind. Without choice unshakable, definite understanding arises in our heart very powerfully that the I exists on these aggregates. Having realized that the I is empty of existing from its own side we will not cling to the view that the I exists from its own side, and with that awareness we will see the I as existing, but from the side of the mind.

Having realized emptiness, we then realize that the I is merely labeled on the aggregates by the thought, which is the conventional truth. So, firstly we realize the absolute truth and subsequently the conventional truth; realizing that the I is empty of existing from its own side being a cause, the result which arises from that experience is the realization that the I is merely labeled on these aggregates by thought; in other words, is a dependent arising. So, first we realize that the I is empty, and as a result of that, we subsequently realize that the emptiness is I. That I which we saw is empty of existing from its own side is not non-existent—it exists. How? By being merely labeled on the aggregates by thought—a dependent arising. So, when we have that subsequent realization of the conventional truth I, we realize that emptiness is I.

These words, “I is empty, emptiness is I; form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” indicate the middle way. They cut off the two extremes, which are nihilism—that I and forms are non-existent—and eternalism—that they exist from their own side. “I is empty” cuts off eternalism, and “emptiness is I” cuts off nihilism, so this indicates the middle way. A buddha’s holy mind sees the two truths—the absolute and the conventional truths—directly at the same time. Only a buddha has that holy mind.

The second line of the prostration stanza is: “The holy speech which expounds well becomes ear ornaments for the fortunate beings.”

Käl zang na wäi gyän gyur leg shä sung

Your holy speech, with its excellent explanations, is an ear ornament for those of good fortune.

“Fortunate beings” refers to bodhisattvas; they are the really fortunate beings because they have bodhicitta. So, Lama Tsongkhapa’s well-expounded teachings become the ear-ornament for even tenth bhumi bodhisattvas. Even they need to hear it. When we take an initiation, at the beginning the “guru action of vajra” comes out and asks the vajra disciples, who are seated at the eastern door on the central prong of the vajra, “Who are you and what do you wish for?” What that means is which race do you belong to and what is your wish? We should be of the Mahayana race, which means having bodhicitta, which depends on integrating the graduated paths of the beings of the three capabilities.

The base is the graduated path of the lower capability being which starts from guru devotion and the contemplation of the perfect human rebirth, which has three great possibilities which can be achieved and which will be difficult to find again. Death is definite and the exact time of death is uncertain, and if the mind is full of unpurified negative karma we will take an unfortunate rebirth of a suffering transmigrating being. The basic solution to that is refuge: relying upon the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and practicing the protection of karma, the basic Dharma that Buddha taught. That is the basic solution for protecting oneself from the true cause of suffering and the true sufferings. Then we develop renunciation, which is aversion to the whole of samsara, and then we generate bodhicitta on the basis of those realizations.

Then what we should be wishing for is the very essence of the Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra path, that which makes it possible to achieve the unified state of no-more-learning, the Vajradhara state, which is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, in this very brief lifetime. So one answers: “I am a fortunate one and would like the great bliss.” So “fortunate being” has the same meaning in these two instances.

Lama Tsongkhapa’s teaching is an ear-ornament even for the tenth bhumi bodhisattvas who are near to achieving enlightenment. Even they find Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings of interest.

The next line is: “The holy body is beautified with glorious fame.”

Drag päi päl gyi lham mer dze päi ku

Your holy body is radiantly beautiful with glory renowned.

I think this word *lham mer* means like an undisturbed butter lamp, very radiant and still. Buddha’s holy body is likened to a golden lamp; the flame itself or the reflection of the flame in a golden pot. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche used to say that it refers to the omniscient mind having taken a form like a calm, clear lamp. I think *lham mer* has the connotation of being very tranquil and magnificent. Even the tenth bhumi bodhisattvas have some aspect that is “uninteresting”—they still have *she drib* the obscurations which disturb the achievement of omniscience, which are uninteresting, which prevent them from having good fame, or a good reputation! The arhats, such as Sharipu and Maudgalyipu²⁹ and tenth bhumi bodhisattvas have something one can say is uninteresting, the *she drib*, the subtle obscurations, the four causes of an unknowing mind; they cannot completely see all the subtle karmas. Only a buddha’s holy omniscient mind can. So, being “beautified with glorious fame” is a quality only buddhas have. Lama Tsongkhapa’s fame is that of having finished all the uninteresting things, being without even a single stain.

Usually in prayers the admiration of the holy body comes first, that of the holy speech second, and that of the holy mind third; that is the tradition. But here in the *Ganden Lha Gyäma* practice

²⁹ Wyl: *mo’u gal gyi pu*; Skt: Maudgalyayana.

the particular advice is to first admire the holy mind. In regard to oneself accumulating merit through admiring Guru Lama Tsongkhapa's holy mind, holy speech and holy body, the purpose of doing it in this order is that Manjushri is the embodiment of the wisdom of all-understanding, the holy mind of all buddhas, and Guru Lama Tsongkhapa is an embodiment of Manjushri, in essence the all-understanding of the holy mind of all buddhas. Likewise in the practice of Vajrabhairava, offering the scented water to the heart comes after the offering of water for cleansing the feet; in other practices it comes after the light offering. The reason is the same: the all-understanding holy mind of all buddhas is embodied as the wrathful Manjushri. By firstly expressing and admiring the qualities of the holy mind of Guru Lama Tsongkhapa you receive the blessing of Lama Tsongkhapa's holy mind first. If you practice this, by the blessings of Lama Tsongkhapa's holy mind your Dharma wisdom will develop. Likewise by praising the holy speech, the blessing of Lama Tsongkhapa's holy speech will enter your speech and through that your speech will be blessed. You will gain courage and develop the wisdom that understands the meanings of the words; then you will be able to explain the meanings of the words of the Buddha's teachings without doubt or fear.

Similarly, by praising Guru Lama Tsongkhapa's holy body the blessing of his holy body will enter your own body. Then even in the midst of an ocean of realized and learned people you will be glorious and without any doubts, fear, or timidity. Like, for example, how His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives teachings, or how His Holiness Ling Rinpoche used to teach—glorious, and roaring the sound of the teachings, which means being able to explain the teachings powerfully. As Milarepa did. This is talking about the benefits to the practitioner from prostrating to Guru Lama Tsongkhapa and expressing the particular qualities of the holy mind, holy speech and holy body.

The last line of this verse is: "To you whom it is meaningful to see, hear and remember, I prostrate."

Thong thö drän pä dön dön la chag tshäl

To you who are meaningful to see, hear and remember, I prostrate.

The direct translation into English is a little strange, so I will elaborate. So, just from seeing the guru our obscurations get purified and the strong delusions stop arising. Like when we are in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, due to the blessing or the magnificence of the holy body our strong disturbing thoughts do not arise. So, it is meaningful in this way. Also, just by seeing the holy body we have the wish to become like that holy being. Generating the wish to be like that plants an incredible impression on our mind and creates the cause to become, relating it to Lama Tsongkhapa, Guru Lama Tsongkhapa. Just seeing the holy body gives great protection and accumulates much merit, and we receive blessings for devotion to arise and to see the qualities of the holy body.

Many people when they saw Lama Yeshe, or if they did not meet Lama, even from a photograph, felt his warmth and experienced happiness. People new to the Dharma, or who had not heard any Dharma, and also Tibetans, recognized Lama as somebody who cares for others and is very sincere.

When I first arrived in India I was at Buxa refugee camp. A Mrs. Beatty, who may have been the second Western woman to become a nun in the Tibetan tradition after Tibet was overtaken by the Chinese, was ordained by His Holiness Karmapa. The first woman to be ordained died in Darjeeling; I think she took refuge from, or was ordained by, Domo Geshe Rinpoche. Mrs Beatty started schools for young lamas of the four sects in Dalhousie and Delhi. I attended her

school in Delhi for six months, but I do not think I learnt anything! I do not remember much about it; we had English class for one hour, and then Hindi. But I put more effort into English—I do not know why! I would fill up my notebook in order to get a new one! After returning from class we would throw the books aside and in the evening would fill them up with big letters for homework because we enjoyed getting new ones.

Most of the time was spent sight-seeing in Delhi, which was sponsored by people from various Western countries who visited our school and then chose a group to take. On Saturdays and Sundays we played with the children of Western embassy people. Then I got TB and had to stay in a hospital. When I graduated from that school we were taken to meet Nehru. Domo Rinpoche and his brother and, I think, Mrs Beatty were there. One woman, who I think must have been Indira Gandhi, gave us presents. I think Nehru gave us pamphlets on Indian schools, which he had presented when he was visiting Western countries, and a pen each. Then we were given cold drinks. Before we were taken in to see Nehru we waited in a very tiny room, and then were taken into a courtyard or something. He was lying on a bed, already looking very old. After my stay in hospital I decided to go back to Buxa to continue my studies—only I did not study!

Mrs Beatty found sponsors for everyone who asked, lay or ordained; she was unbelievably kind. She took care of the sick and the poor people of all classes. She found a sponsor for me, one old mother who was, I think, over eighty years old. She took care of me for the seven years I spent at Buxa, paying for my medicine and milk while I was in hospital and at school. I think all the expenses were covered by her. I only found out later. After staying with Geshe Rabten I stayed with another teacher called Yeshe, who passed away. After that I met Lama Yeshe and took teachings from him. She took complete care of me as if I were her child; I do not think she had any children—maybe she was a widow. I used to write her letters by myself, just whatever came to mind, and ask her to correct them and send them back so I could get some practice at English. Then, I think to make me happy because she thought I was so worried about my English, she wrote to me saying that nobody in London speaks correct English! There was really no other way to learn. Sometimes I went to the Indian offices after their lunch, when they usually sleep or rest for two or three hours, to learn some English! I think I took up their rest time. His Holiness Ling Rinpoche's secretary had given me a book on business practices, how to buy things or something like that, which I used to take to the offices.

The main point is that I sent a picture of Lama to the cousin, who is still living. In the picture Lama was with a group of other monks and people, so she did not know which one was Lama, but later she said that she got a very warm feeling from the one who was Lama. So that is what “meaningful to see” means.

Regarding being meaningful to hear, just think of Lama Tsongkhapa's lamrim teachings and his text on the five stages, the commentary on which we received from His Holiness the Dalai Lama—those are Lama Tsongkhapa's holy speech. Whether we are able to generate those realizations in this life or not, incredible seeds are planted, so it is meaningful to hear them. It is an incredible preparation for achieving the five stages. His Holiness, and our present gurus from whom we receive teachings, are the embodiment of Lama Tsongkhapa, so it is meaningful to hear their holy speech. It was similar in the case of Lama Yeshe: each time you saw Lama and Lama spoke to you your mind was so happy; you left Lama with a very happy mind, feeling very satisfied. The dissatisfied mind became satisfied through just seeing Lama and exchanging a few words. It is all one: Lama is the embodiment of Lama Tsongkhapa. You can think of that when you say this prayer. Even though we did not see that manifestation of Lama Tsongkhapa in Tibet, we can read Lama Tsongkhapa's holy speech every day, in the lamrim and other scriptures. The teachings that Lama Tsongkhapa taught and composed are well-examined,

without the slightest mistake. They are all based on reliable sources, the great yogis and pandits who gave the most reliable teachings, and are also well-examined, in other words, given through his own experience. So they are very clear. His teachings are not only a scholastic reference to the pandits' texts but are validated by his own experience. Therefore it is very meaningful to read Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings. Even if you cannot practice, just by hearing them a seed is planted which definitely leads to enlightenment.

Even to recall Lama Tsongkhapa is meaningful. Why? It protects one from the dangers of samsara and from being bound to the lower nirvana, the blissful state of peace. Leaving aside other problems, even at the most critical time—when death happens—if we are able to remember Guru Lama Tsongkhapa with devotion it saves one from being reborn in the lower realms. As it is mentioned in the teachings, remembering the guru is the best powa, the transference of the consciousness to a pure realm; if one can do that it is impossible to be born in a lower realm. In that way it is meaningful to remember.

It is meaningful to see a holy body such as that holy body, to hear holy speech such as that, and to remember the qualities of the holy mind. You can also relate all three to each one. It says in the section on prostration in the elaborate *Ganden Lha Gyäma* prayer:

In order to achieve the three vajras, I prostrate respectfully
with body, speech and mind whilst recalling the three secreties.

The three secreties refers to the secret qualities of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind which are qualities only of buddhas, such as the eighteen unmixed dharmas which are qualities of the holy mind of dharmakaya.

OFFERINGS

*Yi ong chö yön na tsbog me tog dang
Dri zhim dug pö nang säl dri chab sog
Ngö sham yi trül chö trin gya tsho di
Sö nam zhing chog khye la chö par büil*

Pleasing drinking water, various flowers,
Fragrant incenses, lights, scented waters, and so forth,
Oceans of cloud-like offerings, both actually arranged and mentally emanated,
I offer to you, the supreme field of merit.

“I am offering beautiful drinking water and various flowers, incense, light and scented water, both actually performed and mentally transformed oceans of offering clouds.” Clouds indicate space, and ocean is an expression of infinity—the entire space filled with offerings. *Chö trin gya tsho di*— “to you the supreme field of merit.”

As at the beginning of the lamrim prayer in *Lama Chöpa* [LC 84]: *Zhing chog dam pa je tsün la ma la*—“the guru is the highest, or best, field of merit.” The most supreme. Why? Because the greatest merit, which is what we want to accumulate, is received by performing virtuous actions with respect to the guru; hence he is the supreme field of merit.

So, you yourself are the deity, and according to this particular practice I am explaining, you are Yamantaka, father and mother embracing. There are both actually performed offerings and

mentally transformed offerings. So, you yourself are bliss and voidness and your bliss and voidness manifests in the form of the various offerings carried by goddesses. Each offering is infinite. The drinking water offering carried by the relevant goddesses fills all of space. Likewise for each one. Also your bliss and voidness is manifest as the offering goddesses. Also the object of offering, the absolute guru, the dharmakaya, is bliss and voidness. Similarly, when you eat food or drink, yourself, the deity, and the guru are oneness. What you are is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss/voidness, so the food that you are offering is also the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss/voidness. Offering that increases your transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss/voidness. In other words, the food itself is the guru's holy mind, the transcendental wisdom, the great bliss. You are also that. From the meditation of blessing the food you can understand why the essence is the guru's holy mind, the great bliss inseparable from voidness. It is the same when you make offerings to the merit field. Your own transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness is transformed into the offerings.

You can do the transformation in a simple way, everything at once. If you are doing mudras you can think of each one separately. Transform all together if that helps your concentration, or makes it easier. Each time you make an offering with a mudra visualize clearly and think that it generates infinite bliss in the holy mind of the merit field. As each offering is finished absorb that into your heart. The most important thing to concentrate on in regard to offerings is having a clear visualization of the offerings and to imagine having generated infinite bliss in the holy mind of the merit field. The merit field cannot experience more or greater bliss, but through visualizing this the practitioner himself accumulates more merit and is able to quickly have the same experience of the complete pure transcendental wisdom of great bliss inseparable from voidness, dharmakaya. It creates the cause to experience that sooner within oneself.

I want to emphasize that it is your own transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness which is transformed into the various offerings. It is actually the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, but because it appears as various forms it receives various labels—this is drinking water, this is a flower, this is this and that, this is a goddess—merely labeled by the thought on those appearances. Similarly, yourself as the deity Yamantaka or whatever, as well as the object—the merit field or whatever—are imputed with different names. Have the awareness that each of these three are merely labeled; all three are one thing—the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. You are the guru, the merit field is the guru, the offerings are also bliss and voidness—they were transformed from your heart so they are of the same nature. In this way it is easy to feel that things are merely labeled, that they are dependent arisings. It is very important to concentrate on this because it is so helpful for realizing shunyata. It makes it easy to understand “merely labeled,” subtle dependent arising.

So do it very slowly. This is very important when you chant the prayers as the purpose of chanting is to give us time to meditate. The chanting itself becomes an offering, the accumulation of merit with speech. Especially if the chanting is melodious! In this way we are making offerings of the body, speech and mind: your mind transforms and makes extraordinary offerings, your body makes offerings with mudras, and your speech by chanting mantras or offering prayers.

I find it very effective to perform offerings in this way: whatever offering you have, whether it is just one bowl of water, or one flower, or incense stick or whatever, first offer it to all the holy objects in the east—to all the statues which are in the east, then to all buddhas and bodhisattvas in the east. Think this generates great bliss in their holy minds. Then offer to all the holy objects in the north, the numberless statues and also the living buddhas and bodhisattvas, which generates great bliss. Then offer to all the holy objects in the west, the images and all the living

merit field, the buddhas and bodhisattvas, which generates great bliss. Then to the south, and then in all directions including up and down. If, for example, you have a mug of tea, offer it to all the statues and beings of the merit field, all the holy objects, and all the living merit field in the ten directions, which generates great bliss in their holy minds.

As I mentioned earlier, just by thinking of Buddha and making an offering by throwing a flower or something has inconceivable merit. Making one offering to one buddha has ten benefits when summarized. But here we are making offerings to all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, all holy objects in the ten directions. So even if you do not go to Bodhgaya to make offerings and accumulate merit because of the fear you might get sick or something—fearing to go to the East thinking, I might get diarrhea or “happy-titis”!—if you make offerings in this manner from the room where you are sitting it is the same. Of course, there is more merit accumulated if you bear all the hardships of going to a holy place. As His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to often mention, it is purification. If it rained heavily and you became wet, and the car broke down and you had a lot of difficulties, Rinpoche used to say, “Oh, this is very worthwhile, this is very good.” Rinpoche used to look at it in a positive way and say it is very good because when one goes on pilgrimage and a lot of troubles come and one has to bear a lot of hardships while traveling it is great purification. Rinpoche used to use the situation positively, as a practice, rather than condemn it. Making an offering to one buddha has unbelievable merit, but with this method offering just one small container of water or one mug of tea, or one stick of incense, or one light, has greater merit because the object to whom we offer includes all the statues in India and Tibet, all those on this earth and even in other realms, all the holy objects in the ten directions.

Also, each person has an altar, which means many holy objects, so you are making offerings to each of them using this method. So even if you are not at Bodhgaya or in Lhasa you are still making offerings to all the holy objects in these places, which has unbelievable merit. Making offerings in your room by-the-way as you move about in your break-times by just simply thinking, “I’m offering this to all these holy objects,” is meritorious. Especially if you think each of them is the embodiment of all gurus, buddhas, Dharma and Sangha, it has more merit. Then having many pictures and statues of the merit field in the house becomes meaningful. The purpose of keeping thangkas and such things is for you to purify and accumulate merit. So if you make offerings as often as possible, just in passing, with every bit of time you find, having an altar and keeping thousands and thousands of pictures filling your entire room becomes worthwhile!

Of course, before you offer you should generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta. Also, when you generate bodhicitta and make offerings instead of thinking of them as “my offerings” it is very good to think, These offerings which I have received belong to, came from, the sentient beings, so I’m offering them for the sake of the sentient beings. I think that is very important. If you think, These are mine, if you feel you possess them, it breaks the bodhisattva vows. So generate bodhicitta at the beginning in that way. It helps one to be aware that the reason one has this incredible opportunity to make offerings is due to the kindness of sentient beings.

The following is the elaborate way of making the four types of offerings related to the four types of initiation.

Outer offerings

There are higher offerings and highest offerings: *lana yöpäi chöpa* and *lana mepäi chöpa*³⁰ mean “peerless offering” and “highest offering,” which is all our virtue transformed into various offerings and offered to the merit field, as in *Lama Chöpa*. Memorizing the words of the holy Dharma, putting the teachings into practice, generating and practicing bodhicitta, is the highest offering.

In the elaborate *Ganden Lha Gyäma* it says:

The positive, or white, action of study and practice,
The realizations of the three higher trainings and of the two stages
And all the merit accumulated by me and by all others,
Is immaculately transformed into beautiful clouds of offerings:
Please accept these and bless them to be unceasing.

In other words, the realizations of the three higher trainings that we have are transformed into various offerings and offered to the merit field.

But if we are not practicing any of the three higher trainings and do not have lamrim realization, there is nothing to transform into offerings. In that case if we think of the meaning while saying the prayer it makes us kind-of sad. There is nothing to transform. We should transform the offerings then offer them to the merit field, while examining the meaning of the prayer in our mind.

Inner offering

The holy ingredients, whose natures are the five dhyani buddhas and the four mothers,
Are purified and transformed and increased by the beams of the three vajras emitting and absorbing.
By being offered this ocean of nectar
May you be highly satisfied and pleased.

Secret offering

Having transformed the mudras of *z'bing kye*, *ngag kye* and *lhän kye*
And absorbed them into the mother of Vajradhara
Through the enjoyment of the bliss of embrace
May all the surrounding beings be satisfied by the bliss without regression.

You may know of these three types of mudras from the Vajrayogini or Chakrasamvara practices: those who have generation stage realizations, those who have the realization of clear light and simultaneously-born bliss, and those who have realized unification. The “bliss without regression” means without delusion.

Absolute offering

Whilst the simultaneously-born great bliss, the holy mind unified with the holy body,

³⁰ Wyl: *bla na yod pa'i mchod pa* and *la na med pa'i mchod pa*.

Is abiding in the emptiness of all existence, like the sky,
It manifests like a rainbow in manifold forms;
May you be pleased by this offering of the vajra enlightenment.

Offering is specifically a remedy for miserliness. The result is to have control over sense enjoyments, as Lama Tsongkhapa had, so that sense enjoyments cannot disturb us. We will receive whatever we are seeking. During initiations when offerings are made to the vajra disciple, particularly during the preparation, it is to be understood that from that time on any sense enjoyments can be utilized to develop bliss and voidness within ourselves without them becoming a cause of suffering, without the mind being stained by samsara. That means without the sense enjoyments becoming the cause for craving to arise; rather, becoming the skillful means to generate bliss and voidness, and so to quickly cut off the dual view. Similarly, when we make offerings to the Triple Gem especially in Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra practice, they are made with the pure appearance of them having the nature of bliss and voidness. That becomes a method to quickly complete the two types of merit and become enlightened, after which all sense objects have a pure appearance, nothing appears as ugly or undesirable. Any form is beautiful, any sound interesting, any taste in the nature of great bliss. Anything that appears, appears in purity. Doing the offering practice in this way becomes the cause of achieving that result.

When performing offerings, you can offer to the merit field not only those you have made at the altar and those mentally transformed, but you can offer all the beautiful flowers, lakes, parks, the sun and moon—all the beautiful things which are your own karmic appearance, the various sense objects you see in your view. You can think of all those. When you offer light you need not necessarily think only of the one or two butter-lamps you have lit, but however many lights you have on in your room. The clearer and brighter the light is, the better the offering. If it dispels more darkness the effect is greater. The external effect is greater so the inner effect of dispelling ignorance and developing wisdom is greater.

When I travel, especially when I stay in hotels, I think it is a waste to not use all the lights! Especially if the place is cold it helps in keeping warm. Anyway you have to pay for however many days one stays, so this is a way to make great business in accumulating inconceivable merit for much temporal and ultimate happiness. You can offer as many lights as you can see in the rooms.

Make offerings to every single holy object and every actual living bodhisattva and buddha in the ten directions. That also includes the many holy objects such as pictures and statues found in every practitioner's room. Firstly, making one offering to one buddha has unbelievable merit. And secondly, as I explained before, the internal phenomenon of karma is much more expandable in comparison to external things. I gave the example of how from one small bodhi tree seed thousands of branches and thousands of thousands of seeds come, but that is nothing compared to how karma expands. So each time you make an offering of even one tiny flower, or one incense stick, think that you are making an offering to every single holy object and actual living holy beings in all ten directions.

When making offerings to the Triple Gem you can think like this: as you are generally performing the practice of offering in relation to tantra, specifically Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra, you yourself are the deity in the nature of the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. The light or whatever you are offering is purified in shunyata, becomes emptiness, and becomes a pure offering having three qualities, which you may remember from the explanations on offering in Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra. I think the three qualities are similar in kriya tantra. Anyway, that can be understood from the prayer. You can think that the light, which is the

transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, dispels all sentient beings' wrong conceptions and darkness of ignorance, and eliminates their two obscurations and generates the whole path in their minds. Similarly with incense: the incense becomes emptiness and then you see it as a pure offering—the incense of transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. Its scent purifies the sentient beings' two obscurations and generates the whole path and enlightens them in the essence of the deity that we are practicing. That is in relation to the sentient beings. Regarding the holy objects, it generates infinite bliss in their holy minds.

10. Ganden Lha Gyäma: Part 2

CONFESSION

Nying nä gyö pa drag pö so sor shag

I confess each and every one with fervent regret from my heart.

“I’m confessing individually with strong repentance from the heart.” Individually, or separately, means that the downfalls or vices or negative karma received through degenerating the pratimoksha vows, those received by degenerating the bodhisattva vows and those received by degenerating the tantra vows are purified by recalling each. It also means that there are different methods of purifying the vices—those one has received by degenerating pratimoksha vows have their specific methods of purification. The negative karmas accumulated by degenerating bodhisattva vows can be purified by doing the bodhisattvas’ techniques of confession such as prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. They can be purified easily by performing the ceremony of taking the bodhisattva vows. Tantra has its own methods such as Vajrasattva, self-initiation, and tsog offering. So this word implies recalling all those. “From the heart” means not just doing an imitation of confession, not just saying the words, but doing it from the heart. Not just with the mouth, but from the heart. And that with strong repentance.

The other lines say that what we are confessing is any nonvirtue that has been accumulated by oneself from time without beginning, from beginningless samsaric rebirths. The negative karma accumulated with the body, speech and mind from time without beginning. Particularly the actions opposite to the three vows—the vices, negative karmas, of having degenerated the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantra vows.

In Lama Tsongkhapa’s tradition the main emphasis is to properly practice, or cherish most, or pay all attention to, the three vows. To protect them as one would protect one’s heart or eyes. Also, among Lama Tsongkhapa’s actions the most important was his clarification of the details of the three levels of vows and spreading of this knowledge. Basically, living in these three vows is protecting oneself by abstaining from creating those specific negative karmas, which are an interference to having happiness in this life, an interference to happiness in future lives and an interference to the achievement of liberation for oneself and the achievement of enlightenment for all the sentient beings.

Why is Lama Tsongkhapa’s main emphasis not the four hundred thousand *ngondro*³¹ practices but on protecting karma by living in the three vows? Because if one lives purely in as many vows as one has one creates less negative karma, less interference to oneself achieving enlightenment for the sake for sentient beings. That in itself becomes a purification which purifies the past negative karmas as well. It not only stops one creating any more negative karmas, it purifies those created

³¹ Preliminary practices.

in the past. In this way one does not need to do that much preliminary practice. How much preliminary practice one needs to do depends on how many obstacle there are to generating the realizations of lamrim and attaining enlightenment. If the vows, the essential method for achievement of enlightenment, are not taken care of and one continuously creates negative karma by doing the opposite, that creates the need to continuously do many preliminary practices in every life. As long as one continues to create the negative karmas through actions opposite to the three vows the preliminary practices have no end.

Lama Tsongkhapa's emphasis has great wisdom. If much emphasis is placed on practices other than keeping the three levels of vows, and the three vows are regarded as secondary, we have to do the preliminary practices endlessly. The reasoning is the same as for doing the guru yoga practice: we do not want a loss, one wants a profit—we do not want suffering, we want happiness. If our effort is put into living in the three vows more purely, we accumulate that much less negative karma and so the need to do preliminary practices is less. Not only that, but it is easier and there are less obstacles to quickly generate the lamrim realizations and to achieve enlightenment. That is why being a gelong is regarded as the best basis for practicing tantra as we are then living in the highest number of vows. This was explained by Lama Tsongkhapa in the *Lamrim Chenmo*.

So this confession prayer in *Ganden Lha Gyäma* contains great, practical advice. In other words, if protecting karma, which is the most important thing, is not taken care of, and instead some other things are emphasized, such as the particular retreats that each tradition has, it is unskillful. Especially if done just to get them under our belt and be able to say that we had such and such an experience. If such practices are regarded as important but the important practice for gaining all success—protecting karma—is not practiced, it is not skillful because those various retreats and so on are for purifying negative karma and the obscurations. So, how quickly we can finish practicing Dharma is dependent on how well we protect karma.

I think it was Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo who said: “It was said by Kyabgön Dorje Chang:...”—I think one of his root gurus—“It is Lama Tsongkhapa's (Ganden) tradition that the moral conduct that one has vowed is to be regarded as the essential, main practice.”

Lama Tsongkhapa said in *The Foundation of All Qualities* [*Yöntän Zhir Gyurma*]:

Led by this pure thought,
Mindfulness, alertness, and great caution arise.
The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha vows:
Please bless me to accomplish this essential practice.

“Please bless me to be able to hold the root of the teachings—the liberation for self—derived from the pure attitude, as my main practice, with strong recall and awareness.” Here the pure attitude means renunciation of samsara.

How well we are able to live purely in the vows depends on one's renunciation and bodhicitta. The awareness of impermanence and death, particularly the uncertainty of the time of death—how even today, even this hour, even this minute there is great uncertainty—is the strongest method to generate renunciation. The other factor—compassion, the thought of loving kindness toward others, feeling that it is unbearable that others are suffering—becomes a reason for us to practice and live purely in the three vows, since this is the essential path for the achievement of enlightenment. So it also depends how much we cherish other sentient beings. The thought of loving kindness and compassion, that the other sentient beings are suffering and devoid of

happiness, becomes the reason for putting effort into this. We are ashamed to degenerate the three vows that we have taken for the sake of sentient beings. Also, we can see how the sentient beings have an incredible need of our help to free them from obscurations and lead them to enlightenment through developing our own mind. That development of the mind comes from living in the three vows.

This quote is, I think, from Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings:

If we have degenerated the moral conduct we have vowed
There's no other Dharma practice left to do;
It is like putting water in a pot
Which has a broken bottom.

However much water we put in a pot with no bottom, it does not remain. Then it says:

It is not enough to just be courageous in accepting the vows to be followed,
If they are degenerated, they should be immediately separately confessed.
That we have done this is something that pleases the learned ones
Who know the very essential points of practicing Dharma.

“The essential points of practicing Dharma” does not refer to the reasons why we should practice Dharma, it means the important points of Dharma practice.

Just think about the Theravadin monks. There must be many bodhisattvas who are Theravadins and so have not met the profound Paramitayana and tantra teachings. But even though they do not have such an extensive knowledge of Dharma, they practice the basic Dharma well and live a very satisfied life. They have few problems and whenever death comes they are happy or satisfied, because they have lived a most worthwhile and enjoyable life. Even though they have not heard teachings on shunyata as subtle as Madhyamaka, their lives are so satisfied, and they experience real happiness.

Lamas say:

Look at this body to know what was done in the past life; what the future life will be is dependent on the actions of the present life.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said:

Actually, we can tell without the need to make *mos*³² what our future life will be by looking at our own lifestyle.

To do perfect confession the most important thing is the four remedial powers. If we do Samayavajra or Vajrasattva or confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas and if we think of the meaning of the prayer, the confession becomes perfect, having the four remedial powers. These four powers are:

The power of the object

³² A system of divination often used by Tibetan lamas.

We create negative karma in relation to the holy object, so that needs to be purified. That is why in the Yamantaka sadhana even though it begins with refuge, again in the middle, before starting Vajrasattva purification, refuge comes again. Likewise in the Thirty-five Buddhas purification there is refuge. *Tengyi tob*³³ means the power of the object—purifying negative karma accumulated in relationship to the holy object. And the negative karmas that are accumulated in relationship to the sentient beings are purified by generating bodhicitta—in dependence on the sentient beings. As when you fall down onto the ground you get up by depending on the ground. You do not get up from the ground by depending on space. So it is similar here. The power of the object—generating refuge and bodhicitta.

The power of the remedy

*Nyenpo kuntu chopäi tob*³⁴—the power of always enjoying the remedy is the literal translation. Generally in lamrim there are six main remedies given: reciting the buddhas' holy names, such as those of the Thirty-five Buddhas; reciting the sutras; meditating on emptiness; making offerings; making statues or paintings; reciting the Chenrezig mantra OM MANI PADME HUM or other mantras. Any of these can be done for purification. The most powerful purification is to put into practice what the guru advises, such as those difficult services which Lama advised us to do. Any work done to spread Dharma such as the hard work of running centers, and anything done to benefit other sentient beings, are the most powerful purifications.

If we did not confess the negative karma accumulated with respect to our guru while the guru was alive and they have passed away, one way to purify is to explain and confess to the nearest disciple of that guru. With great repentance we should make offerings and apologize and confess.

The power of repentance

*Nampar sun jinpäi tob*³⁵ *Sun jinpäi* means blaming, so this is the power of blaming the shortcomings: “I have created so much negative karma, so the result will be this and this. I will have to experience all these obstacles and sufferings.” This is thinking about the result, the shortcomings of creating negative karma. That in itself is repentance because when you think of all the shortcomings of negative karma you feel repentance. As you do not want experience those results and suffer, repentance comes.

That you have not generated, or are unable to generate, the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment, or have generated them and had some experience of the path but that this has disappeared or degenerated, is due to negative karma and obscurations. That you experience so much non-success, so many undesirable things one after another, shows that you have not purified. Experiencing the result shows that you did not purify the cause.

If you have accumulated heavy karma such as the five uninterrupted karmas, according to the Vaibhashika school that cannot be purified and you will definitely experience the result. However, according to the Prasangika school even if you accumulate such heavy karmas as killing powerful objects such as parents, taking the lives of arhats or causing disunity among the Sangha, these can be purified. For example, it is mentioned in Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, that Tongden, a Brahmin I think, killed his mother, but confessed very powerfully and generated the right-seeing path, the path directly perceiving shunyata, and became an arhat. Also, Angulimala,

³³ Wyl: *rten gyi stobs*.

³⁴ Wyl: *gnyen po kun tu spyod pa'i stobs*.

³⁵ Wyl: *mam par sun 'byin pa'i stobs*.

the one who killed nine hundred and ninety-nine human beings, by generating strong repentance and doing powerful confession he achieved the right-seeing path and became an arhat in that same life. Also Magyedra, who took the life of his father generated strong repentance at having created that negative karma and generated the right-seeing path and became an arhat in that life. Then there is the example of Milarepa who in the early part of his life killed many people using black magic but became enlightened in that very brief lifetime by generating strong repentance and going to seek a guru, and meeting Marpa.

For powerful purification through perfect confession the most important thing is repentance. The stronger the repentance we generate the thinner the negative karma becomes. It is explained in the teachings:

The wise person's negative karma, even if great, becomes small.
The foolish person's negative karma, even if small, becomes great.

This has great meaning. A wise person knows how to do powerful, perfect purification, so even if the negative karma they have created is incredibly heavy, they can make it very light, very thin. But foolish persons do not know how to do powerful and perfect purification, nor even the methods of purification, therefore even if the negative karma they have accumulated is very light it becomes heavier and heavier because it increases. Therefore it is so important to generate very strong repentance.

It is very good to remember Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's method of generating repentance. At the beginning comes the expression of sadness—*Kyema* or Oh!

Kyema!

I have accumulated multitudes of negative karma since beginningless samsara
Which is like a king's store-house—
It appears to me that I have attempted only to create each of the negative karmas for
hundreds of millions of eons.
Even though in this life I am trying to practice virtue and renounce negative karma,
But day and night without a break I receive rainfalls of negative karma and moral
downfalls
And I have no capability to completely purify them without anything remaining.
The enemy, the owner (lord) of death, comes unexpectedly.

Kyema!

Won't I fall down into the narak now?
My companions and friends are presently being cooked in the fires of the naraks;
By this time next year won't I also be cooking in the fires of the narak?

This refers to friends or parents of this life, people that we knew, with whom we traveled, with whom we studied Dharma, with whom we took initiations, with whom we went to school, worked in the office, who have already died; also friends, companions, parents, husbands, wives and so on of past lives are already suffering in the narak. Remember that and think, "Won't I fall down, won't I be suffering there in the same realm by this time tomorrow?" Then at the end:

Please Savior, protect the evil one (me) with compassion!

This is very effective to think in order to generate strong repentance. So recall what I explained earlier whilst saying this supplication by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo. It is also important to go

over the eight shortcomings of having made mistakes in devoting to the virtuous friend, which you will find in *The Essence of Nectar*, whilst reciting.

For the number of moments we are angry toward the virtuous friend, the merits created in that many eons are destroyed, and we will suffer in the narak for that many eons. That refers to moments as defined by the Prasangika school: the duration of a youthful person's finger snap has 360 moments. I think scientists use even shorter moments, like, say, when we use a camera. So if anger lasts for the duration of a finger snap the merit we accumulated in 360 past eons is destroyed and we have to suffer in the narak for that many eons. Even if we practice tantra with much effort—which means with fasting, going without sleep, meditating—for many eons, we only achieve the narak.

Think: “Do I like even a small headache, or not? Do I like it or not? Can I bear it or not? Can I bear a small pain in the stomach, or not? Am I happy with that? Do I like it or not?” Question yourself. Of course, we do not want even a small problem for even a second. Compared to the suffering in the narak this is great pleasure, so how would we be able to bear the heaviest sufferings of the narak for that length of time? Thinking of our own present experience and comparing it to the narak is very, very effective. If we do not compare it with your aversion to our present suffering it seems like just a fairy tale, nothing serious at all. So when we see that we have created negative karmas for the experience of suffering in day to day life, which we do not want to have at all, the thought will arise, “I must do something to purify immediately.”

I asked Zimmey Rinpoche about this quote from the *Lamrim Chenmo*: “If we break a bodhisattva root vow we cannot become an arya being in this life.” Rinpoche said that means that you cannot become an arya being in this life if you don't purify the bodhisattva root downfalls. In answer to a similar question about the quote: “Even if we practice tantra we cannot achieve the sublime realizations,” Rinpoche said it is not that having made these mistakes we will never achieve enlightenment, which it sounds like it is saying; rather, it means if we do not confess and purify. If we confess and purify it changes it. So, the whole point is that if we change our attitude and confess and attempt to not make the mistake again, things change, but if we do not change our attitude and do not attempt to not repeat the mistake, no matter how much we practice tantra we can never achieve the sublime realization. I think this is very important to remember, especially if we know we have made these mistakes.

In *The Essence of Nectar* it says:

Even if we have accumulated all five uninterrupted negative karmas
We can achieve the sublime ocean of Vajrayana (which indicates that the Vajrayana is
extensive) in this life.
But one who from the heart criticizes the virtuous friend
Cannot achieve enlightenment even if they practice the ocean-like Vajrayana.

Actually, having killed a hundred or even a thousand people is not really so alarming. A butcher killing many thousands of goats or fish is not really alarming. According to these outlines, the negative karma accumulated by such butchers is almost nothing compared to these heavy negative karmas accumulated in regard to the virtuous friend. Those are easy to purify. Even having killed thousands of human beings is not really heavy karma in comparison. In the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*, which are teachings about the guru, it mentions the shortcomings of negative actions in connection with the guru, that the results are the heaviest and are experienced for an incredible length of time. So, I think killing many thousands of people is not really alarming, compared to this it is really very light karma.

There is a most important point. Perhaps we do powerful purification by confessing and the cause to be born in the narak is purified, but the other problem is that much merit has been destroyed, and therefore we are now so distant from the realizations. Because that much merit has been destroyed, all realizations, including enlightenment, are put off for as many eons as seconds that we got angry. So on top of having to purify we have to work on accumulating that much merit again. Also one important point is this: if we do not attempt to not make mistakes in regard to the guru again in this life, what happens is that because each complete karma, both virtuous and nonvirtuous, has four results and one of them is again creating a cause similar to the cause, because of the habit from the impression left on our consciousness, if we meet the virtuous guru in the next life we will again make the same mistakes. And so it will go on and on like this in future lives, and we will create the heaviest obstacles. Therefore it is so unbelievably important to devote ourselves correctly with all effort to the virtuous friend in this life. Repeating the same mistake again and again is a great obstacle even if we do not have to be born in the narak after this life because of having purified. Therefore it is very helpful to know these important points in regard to repentance.

In general any negative karma can be purified. Why? Because it is the nature of negative karma. It has no other good quality, but it does have this one. By doing powerful purification we can completely purify the negative karma and therefore not have to experience it. That is the best outcome. The middling we are that we experience some problem—perhaps sickness or a disaster—in this life, which depletes that karma and we do not need to experience it in the lower realms or in coming lives. The lesser outcome is that through doing purification even if we do get born in a lower realm and experience the suffering result, it will last for a shorter duration and be less intense.

The power of turning away from the negative karma

This means making a vow to not repeat it and knowing for sure that you will not. Thinking, “Oh yes, I’m not going to commit it again,” but in your heart knowing that you are, becomes telling lies in front of the merit field. It does not make sense to do that. Whether a person is Indian or Nepali or a Westerner is established by what is written in their passport. It is common recognition—it is not determined by what they actually are. But our sincerity is not determined by what we say, it is determined by our heart. So this last one of the powers is not put into effect by words, rather, it is up to what is in our heart. The method, making the vow, is done by promising, “I’m not going to commit the action today.” Of course, we can and should continue to abstain the next day and so on; it does not mean that because we made the vow to cover only today after today doing the negative action is alright! We make the vow to cover the duration of that day, or even one hour, and for the subtle actions even one minute. This way it is more sincere; we are able to make the vow from our heart and are able to make some determination.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo and other lamas used this example in the lamrim teachings: three people have taken poison. One person is already dead, another is in the process of dying and is experiencing incredible pain, and the last one has just taken the poison, but has not felt anything yet. That person sees the problems caused by the poison and so he immediately wants to do something. He cannot stand it that there is poison inside his body. So he has a very, very strong thought to not eat poison again and to do something immediately to get rid of the poison he has taken so it does not harm him. Similarly, oneself and sentient beings have taken the poison of negative karma. Many sentient beings, having taken the poison of negative karma, have already

left their human bodies and gone to the narak and are suffering there. And many sentient beings, having taken this poison of negative karma, are dying now. You are in the same position: you have also taken the poison of negative karma, so it will be the same for you. Whether death will occur right this minute is uncertain, but it can happen. This breath can stop all of a sudden, within this minute. Being aware of this you will not be able to stand having the poison of negative karma within yourself even for a second, and will have the strong intention to not take the poison of negative karma again.

In the Vajrasattva practice before saying, “Due to my ignorance...” you should use the power of vowing to not commit the actions again. Same for Samayavajra practice. And it comes in the prayer of confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas.

When you do Vajrasattva recitation it is good to go over the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantra vows, both root and branches, and while reciting the mantra recall how many of them and how many times each of them was broken, or degenerated. Similarly when doing Samayavajra practice or recitation of the holy names of the Thirty-five Buddhas. Also before *sojong* it is very good to read through all the vows; then doing *sojong* is very effective because the thought to purify is very strong. Otherwise it becomes just a custom.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in the commentary on the six-session yoga, as well as in his lamrim teaching: “Degenerating one bodhisattva vow...”—not a root downfall or *tsatung*,³⁶ but one of the forty-six secondary vows or *nyechā*³⁷—“...is a hundred thousand times heavier than breaking a pratimoksha root vow of a fully ordained monk.” For example, killing a human being, telling a big lie about having realizations. “Degenerating one tantra secondary vow, *bompo*, is a hundred thousand times heavier than breaking a root vow of the bodhisattva ordination.”³⁸

Remember this when you are going through the vows when reciting Vajrasattva or Samayavajra mantra or whatever. Remember that it is much, much heavier the higher the ordination is. Think of how many of them were broken and how many times each of them was degenerated. For example, each time we look at and cling to phenomena as ordinary we receive *bompo*, a tantra downfall. If we do not practice pure conception and pure appearance then however many objects we cling to as being ordinary in each minute, in such a short time, that many negative karmas are accumulated. And clinging to whatever possessions we have as “mine” and clinging to enjoyments with attachment breaks the bodhisattva wishing vow precepts. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche mentioned during the Yamantaka retreat advice that each time we who have taken Maha-anuttara Tantra initiation do not keep samaya, for example by not practicing pure appearance when drinking or eating by blessing or transforming the food into nectar, then [the negative karma of] taking each sip or spoonful is eighteen times heavier than a gelong breaking all four root vows. If having taken initiation we do not keep samaya then it is difficult even to confess, and we will start to experience the suffering results of that, results which are difficult to bear.

Think about the tantra root vows, the heaviest among all vows. The first one is to not give up the guru. The second we are to not be careless about all vows. That includes not only the vows of tantra, but also the bodhisattva and pratimoksha vows. Breaking this happens so easily and we receive a tantra root downfall. Even if the first one, giving up the guru, does not happen, the

³⁶ Wyl: *rtsa ltung*.

³⁷ Wyl: *nyes spyad*.

³⁸ Wyl: *sbom po*.

second one happens very easily. The third is to not criticize our vajra brothers, those who have received initiation from the same guru. “Brothers” here does not only refer to males! It is difficult to keep: you may insult or say something very harmful and feel happy that you were able to hurt the other person. The tantra vow of not giving up the thought of loving kindness does not need the four binding factors to be present to receive a downfall, unlike the other tantra vows. From most texts it seems that if we have the intention and that is not stopped by recognizing the attitude and changing it, it is a *kuntri*,³⁹ a root downfall—it is so easy to receive.

I asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama what is the definition of having received a root downfall in regard to the length of time that we need to maintain the intention. His Holiness said if our attitude has not changed within four hours we receive a tantra root downfall. A change in attitude means a change from the four binding factors, which are: not regarding it as a mistake; not changing the attitude of wanting to do (or repeat) it; feeling satisfied or happy at having done (or wanting to do) it; not feeling ashamed in our own or others’ eyes. In most scriptures, however, it says it only needs a short time, almost only a few seconds, of our attitude not changing through seeing it as a mistake, having shame, feeling unhappy about doing it and not wanting to do it. Also each time the mother tantra samaya, the left-sided conduct, is not followed we receive much heavy negative karma. So, we should remember this.

Regarding the first tantra root downfall, giving up the virtuous friend. I think in the term *nyeme*, *nye* means belittling and criticizing. I asked His Holiness Ling Rinpoche if it means just getting angry with the virtuous friend or if it means criticizing. I had asked the question by correspondence, and His Holiness Ling Rinpoche wrote back to Nepal saying that the term used for the first root downfall, *nyeme*, does not mean just simply getting angry with the virtuous friend; it means renouncing the guru as an object of respect. This may arise even for a minute or even a few seconds due to some condition such as being told to do something which you do not want to do, that is not according to your own ideas. At such times the virtuous friend may appear as negative and anger can arise for a moment. You may think, “What’s the use of this teacher? What’s the use of doing this?” and renounce the guru as an object of respect of body, speech and mind.

You can feel the effect of that heavy negative karma immediately in your heart. Your heart becomes kind-of dry. You feel that something went wrong, you cannot relax, that something has degenerated in your heart, like a place where a lake has dried up. The effect you feel when your samaya has degenerated is that the happiness in your heart is lost, it is just kind-of dry and uncomfortable. Like your heart has become an ugly, rocky, thorny place. There is a very unpleasant feeling in your heart. It can cause wind disease, or craziness, the mind going out of control. And due to that the protectors and spirits are displeased and bad signs appear, which affects the environment. You have many problems and concerns. Also you experience epidemic diseases and fever and can die from them, and have problems from *dön*, interferers, and contagious diseases and poison. You may be killed by the king, fire or poisonous snakes, and be robbed by robbers, dakinis or thieves. It says in the text that after that the ignorant person is killed and goes to the narak. For example, something that happened in Tibet: two disciples of Songtsen Gampo, the first Dharma king, were to definitely achieve the Vajradhara state, the unified state, in that life. They had incredible fortune, but because some heresy arose toward their virtuous teacher which they did not confess and purify, they died on the road after being badly beaten with stones by robbers.

³⁹ Wyl: *kun dkeris*.

So, we die in a terrible way, and even before that it is like having opened a door making it so easy to receive harm from the elements, from human beings and from spirits. So, mistakes in our devotion to the virtuous friend, degenerating or breaking samaya in relationship to the virtuous teacher, is like opening the door to harm and problems for ourselves. It is also very effective to feel this when making confession. Relating it to that same day: From this morning until now, how many actions were done out of ignorance; from this morning until now how many actions were done out of clinging to this life, out of anger? Any actions done out of disturbing thoughts are causes for being born in the lower realms. Out of the ten nonvirtues how many have been accumulated? Without talking about anger, it is hard to find any action done without attachment—any action we do: sitting, walking, sleeping, eating. Today, so many, and this month, this year, from our birth, in past lives, since beginningless rebirths.

Dromtonpa asked Lama Atisha, “What will be the results of these actions done out of disturbing thoughts?” Lama Atisha answered, “The results will be rebirth in the narak, animal and preta realms.” In one lamrim teaching it says: “Any actions done out of worldly concern...”—which means attachment to this life—“...become *digpa*.”⁴⁰ Exceptions are those actions like making offerings and doing prostrations to the merit field. Any action done out of these disturbing thoughts becomes negative karma—which is almost every single action. Even washing! And it multiplies day by day, month by month, year by year. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in his lamrim: “Having killed one tiny bug, if it is not confessed before the end of the day after fifteen days the negative karma becomes the same as that of having killed one human being. Then, after eighteen days it becomes 131,072 times greater.”

If you have not accumulated negative karma, even if a poisonous snake bites you, even if you are eaten by a tiger, killed in an earthquake, are in an airplane crash or car accident, or even if somebody kills you, you have no cause to be born a lower realm, even though you died in such circumstances. Even if you eat poison and die there is no danger that you will go to a lower realm. Therefore nonvirtuous karma is much more harmful than poison. The harm from poison and the harm from negative karma cannot be compared. The harm from poison is nothing. The greatest harm it can do is separate your consciousness from your body. But if you have created negative karma, even if you do not die in such circumstances, even if you do not eat poison, you will fall into the depthless lower realm. That means that once you are in the lower realm, because of continuously creating negative karma, you will repeatedly wander there. Thinking in this way is also very effective during Vajrasattva and Samayavajra recitation, and during the prostrations. Think about it before starting the session and even during it.

The most powerful method of stopping the multiplication of negative karmas is the Vajrasattva practice, as mentioned in the root tantra text *Sangwäi Chigyü*.⁴¹ Even by reciting just twenty-one Vajrasattva mantras any moral downfalls and any vices that you have received will not increase daily. If you recite twenty-one long, or twenty-eight short (OM VAJRASATTVA HUM) Vajrasattva mantras before that twenty-four-hour day ends, even if you have received root downfalls of tantra vows or have degenerated the secondary vows, the karma will not have increased by the following day. So if you continuously do this practice until your death your life becomes highly meaningful, even if you do no other practice. It not only stops the negative karma from increasing, it also purifies what you have accumulated. This is referring to Vajrasattva of the Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra aspect, where the father Vajrasattva embraces the mother Vajra Nyema Karmo.⁴² Reciting mantra with the Kriya Tantra Vajrasattva, without the

⁴⁰ Wyl: *sdig pa*.

⁴¹ Wyl: *gsang ba'i phyi rgyud*.

⁴² Wyl: *rdo rje snyems ma dkar mo*; Skt: Vajragarvī.

wisdom mother, purifies only the degeneration of the pratimoksha and bodhisattva vows and the vices of having degenerated Kriya Tantra vows. The negative karmas from having degenerated Maha-anuttara Tantra vows can be purified only by the Maha-anuttara Tantra Vajrasattva. Once you have taken tantra vows you need to recite twenty-one long or twenty-eight short mantras every day.

The Vajrasattva mantra is in the form of a requesting prayer, so sometimes you should think of the meaning of the mantra and then recite it. That can be done not only with Vajrasattva but during any retreat you do. Then your mind will not get occupied by disturbing thoughts, and so during that session you will not create negative karma. Otherwise there is a danger of creating negative karma even while you are reciting mantras during the session. If the mind is allowed to get under the control of the superstitions, the disturbing thoughts such as ill will, heresy, avarice, attachment, then even during the session you create negative karma. Your mouth is reciting mantra, but the mind is creating negative karma.

It is very good to sometimes recite the mantra with one-pointed concentration on mindfulness of dependent arising of the I, the aggregates, as well as the deity. That is very effective, very powerful.

The meaning of Vajrasattva's mantra when the meanings of the separate phrases are integrated is:

You, Vajrasattva, have generated bodhicitta; as per your samaya you are qualified with the power of effortlessly performing the spontaneous action of liberating the migratory beings from samsara.

“As per your samaya” refers to when the Vajrasattva were training in the bodhisattvas' path they generated this particular bodhicitta to become enlightened specifically in order to be able to purify the negative karma of sentient beings; as the buddha of wisdom's action is to particularly grant wisdom. So it means as you have promised, according to your vow made at the beginning when you were following the path. “Migratory beings” refers to the living beings who, because of being under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts, migrate continuously from one of the six realms to another and experience the suffering of death and rebirth, etc. In other words, you made this vow and you have the power. Then follows:

Whether I am happy or miserable in life, without giving me up and with a pleasing mind
please guide me and stabilize the happiness of the upper realms,
And generate the general and sublime realizations, and cause the magnificence of the five
transcendental wisdoms to abide in my heart.

In other words, “Please cause these realizations to happen in my heart.” That is the integrated meaning of the long mantra.

I do not remember completely what the short one OM VAJRASATTVA HUM means, however, it contains the essence of the meaning of the long mantra: “You, Vajrasattva, please do not pass away from your pledge and generate all the realizations in my heart.” HUM is to persuade the holy mind of Vajrasattva to grant what you are requesting.

If you are going to do Vajrasattva practice at this stage of the *Ganden Lha Gyäma*, the Vajradhara that you have visualized at Lama Tsongkhapa's heart is transformed into Vajrasattva. I think it is

the same for *Lama Chöpa*. Then a replica of that descends onto your crown and other sentient beings' crowns and you are purified by descending nectars.

REJOICING

Your, the Savior's, great action is like a powerful wave;
You have listened extensively and attempted many practices
And have made your body qualified with freedom and richness meaningful
By having abandoned the eight worldly dharmas in this degenerated time;
At your great action we (the sentient beings) rejoice from the heart.

His action is like a very powerful wave that cannot be stopped. "Degenerated time" means this time of flourishing of the five degenerations: the degeneration of delusion; degeneration of views; degeneration of sentient beings; degeneration of life; and degeneration of time. Degenerated time gives the idea of it being a time when it is not easy to practice Dharma as there are so many obstacles, unlike the past fortunate times when human lives were thousands of years long. The time of quarreling is even more degenerate than the degenerate time. It becomes more and more degenerate year by year.

Having listened extensively means having had teachings and read all the sutra and tantra root texts and commentaries many times. Similarly for reflection and meditation practice. I heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has read Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* seventy-two times. Four geshes did the three-year Yamantaka retreat here sponsored by the Tibetan government. I think there are two still living and two have already passed away. The government sponsored them because they need qualified meditators to perform certain wrathful rituals. One of the geshes, Losang Rinchen from Shartse, had to go to the palace sometimes to fill statues or do some other activities. So one day His Holiness came along and asked him, "How many times have you read Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*?" The geshe said he had read it four times. His Holiness then said, "Oh, only four times. I have read it seventy-two times!"

I have one teacher, Yeshe, the teacher who I had before Lama Yeshe. He passed away many years ago. Gen Yeshe is the one from whom I received the meditation on the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* practice, which is in Geshe Rabten Rinpoche's notebook, which we used to regard as so precious. I think that was my first teaching about sentient beings having been our mother and so kind—the seven techniques of cause and effect. There was no text, but Gen Yeshe taught it and I wrote it down. I had not learned the letters yet, but I just did my own way of writing, which did not have any rules! Not the *u cän*,⁴³ but the other one. Geshe Sonam Rinchen, who was in the same class as Gen Yeshe, was telling me how Yeshe left Buxa and used to live in the Bhutanese houses on the mountains and lead an ascetic life. Then he left to wander around India and just live at any place suitable for practice. They met, and Gen Yeshe said, "I have read the lamrim many times..."—I forget how many—and when I examine I find I know the subjects, so I have the material, I have enough to meditate on." So he does not need to go to somebody.

In Dalhousie there is a group of retreaters guided by one very high ascetic lama, Trehor Kyorpen, who is a Geshe Lharampa. He and Serkong Dorje Chang, who passed away in Nepal, did their geshe examination together in Tibet. After the geshe examination this lama went to one very, very high mountain to live an ascetic life. He and one of his nearest disciples, a geshe who was also very learned and a good practitioner, carried the robes that a monk should keep, and the *Lamrim Chenmo*. This Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche always carries the *Lamrim Chenmo* wherever he

⁴³ Wyl: dbu can.

travels. They were looking for caves. When Gen Jampa Wangdu was telling me it sounded to me like it was a huge mountain that was always foggy on top. It did not sound like a very pleasant mountain! Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche could not see anything, but somebody was throwing stones. He followed the falling stones and after some time saw a cave which stones were being thrown at. He went inside and saw a skeleton sitting in meditation position. Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche suddenly sat down and offered a mandala to the skeleton, and after he had finished the skeleton collapsed. He then decided to do his practices and generate the realizations of the path in that cave. There were some of his disciples around, but not very close by.

Anyway, there is a group at Dalhousie guided by this lama. So Geshe Sonam Rinchen and other people told my teacher Gen Yeshe, “You can go there to practice and live an ascetic life,” but Gen Yeshe said, “Oh, I have studied enough, and when I examine I know I have enough subjects to think about, so I don’t need to go to some group.”

From Lama Tsongkhapa’s biography we can see the inconceivable amount of listening and reflecting on all the scriptures that he did.

You made your body qualified with freedom and richness meaningful by avoiding the eight worldly dharmas.

Regarding that point, at one time Lama Tsongkhapa was giving teaching to one hundred and eight learned monks, who were *denö dzinpa*,⁴⁴ which means holders of the three baskets of teachings, in the place called Toelung. While Lama Tsongkhapa was granting them the happiness of Dharma, Manjushri sent him a message through Pawo Dorje.⁴⁵ The message was that Lama Tsongkhapa should go to a solitary place to practice. But because Lama Tsongkhapa was giving teachings to so many sentient beings, Pawo Dorje felt uncomfortable about passing on this message. In other words, he had doubt. So he said to Manjushri, “Chöje Lotsawa...”—which refers to Lama Tsongkhapa—“...is doing great activities for the teachings, and if I tell him to stop teaching and go to a solitary place to practice I will be criticized by the people who are taking teachings.” He then asked Manjushri to be excused from giving this message to Lama Tsongkhapa. Then Manjushri said, “How can you tell? How do you know whether what Lama Tsongkhapa is doing now is benefiting the teachings or not? This way of giving explanations, just from the mouth, will not benefit at all. If it continues like this, after Lama Tsongkhapa has passed away there will be nothing to benefit the teachings. Just this cannot benefit. You have to consider all sentient beings equaling space.” In other words, Manjushri said that just caring about the number of sentient beings there was not enough, and Lama Tsongkhapa should go to a solitary place and practice while thinking of the sentient beings equaling space. In other words, even if they are upset because the teaching is stopped in the middle, he has to think to benefit the sentient beings equaling infinite space.

When Lama Tsongkhapa received this message he immediately, even though in the middle of the teaching, stopped it, and taking only eight disciples with him and without any possessions other than eight coins or something, went to a solitary place to live an ascetic life. He did many hundreds of thousands of mandala offerings, prostrations and other preliminaries, and generated not only the general path, but the two uncommon Maha-anuttara Tantra stages. Lama Tsongkhapa made his holy body, qualified with freedoms and riches, highly meaningful by renouncing the eight worldly dharmas and performing extensive perfect preliminary practices.

⁴⁴ Wyl: *sde snod 'dzin pa*.

⁴⁵ Wyl: *dpa' bo rdo rje*.

What can be understood from Manjushri's advice to Lama Tsongkhapa is that even arhats, the higher bodhisattvas and even the tenth bhumi bodhisattvas cannot work for the sentient beings perfectly. Without achieving the state of omniscient mind we cannot work for the sentient beings equaling infinite space perfectly. What actually benefits every single sentient being equaling infinite space is generating the lamrim realizations: renunciation, bodhicitta and shunyata, and then tantra. Those are of actual benefit to all the sentient beings. Until we attain the three principal paths there is no way to achieve enlightenment, so no way to really benefit all the sentient beings. Therefore this is the most important, the very first thing we need to succeed in.

Each day we are able to bring our mind closer to the lamrim path and generate the lamrim realizations within our mind, especially bodhicitta, makes our life most meaningful. It is good to teach Dharma, and it is good to do all those other things such as educating others, giving medicine to others, building hospitals or schools or doing many of these things which help society, but doing these things is not the greatest purpose of human life. However, if we can do both—develop our mind in lamrim practice as well as those other activities to benefit others—it is the most courageous, without question. But if we do not get to live an ascetic life in a solitary place, do not generate the lamrim path nor even do those other activities such as teaching Dharma, helping with education or giving medicine—those temporary benefits—there is no benefit at all to other sentient beings. Compared with giving those temporal benefits it is much better to teach other sentient beings whatever Dharma we know so they can accumulate as much merit as possible. But giving just those temporal benefits is better than doing nothing. Otherwise our life will be empty, of no benefit to others or oneself. Our life will be completely depressing if we do not give help to others with our mind and speech or even physically.

During one of my Heruka retreats at Kopan one of my realizations was discovering that all this appearance of giving teachings, with many people coming to listen and saying, “Oh, good!” is not the path; that it is kind-of cheating myself. But this is Lama's great wish. During Lama's time he did not always emphasize that I should teach, but though I rejected the idea of going to the West and so on, Lama said there is a need to go to the West. He gave that advice many times. Thinking this is Lama's main wish, and particularly from now until Lama's incarnation is able to give teachings, and we have the karma to again receive teachings from him, teaching becomes some sort of offering. Thinking of that point is something which makes the mind happy. Also, by listening to the teachings, others accumulate some merit. However, the whole thing comes down to karma.

If you practice rejoicing while thinking of the meaning of Lama Tsongkhapa's biography and wish for yourself to become like Lama Tsongkhapa, that is a preparation to sooner or later become like him—having all attainments and being able to extensively benefit the teachings and sentient beings.

Confession is a remedy for all three poisonous minds and enables the achievement of non-abiding nirvana, the complete cessation of both obscurations. Rejoicing is the remedy for jealousy. This is what you should practice in everyday life if, out of all the delusions, jealousy is the biggest problem. The result is a holy body without flaws or any ugliness. Anybody who sees Buddha's holy body sees it as perfect, without ugliness, and however often they see it they always want to see it again. It is how we feel about His Holiness. Another result is that we will turn the Dharma wheel.

I will make some clarification about rejoicing in Lama Tsongkhapa's biography. In Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's elaborate *Ganden Lha Gyäma* prayer it says:

Who can guess at Manjushri's unique three secrecies?

This means that only the buddhas themselves can comprehend the secret qualities of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind of Manjushri, or Lama Tsongkhapa.

Even in the general view he has in his holy mind
All the teachings and commentaries on the view of the teaching..

This refers to the teachings of Buddha and the commentaries by the pandits and yogis such as Nagarjuna and Asanga which explain the meaning of the Buddha's teachings on the extensive path and the teachings on the profound path.

...Which appeared as advice, and has practiced and gone to the highest state;
At your deeds, Lama Tsongkhapa, I rejoice!

That stanza refers to the specific qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa which appear to the general view.

Then related to the previous verse about having renounced the eight worldly dharmas, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo says:

Leave aside the eight black worldly dharmas and eight mixed dharmas,
He is even unstained by the eight white dharmas.
He made the complete teaching of Buddha pure, like refined gold,
With hundreds of quotations and reasonings.
At your biography, Lama Tsongkhapa, I rejoice!

The eight black worldly dharmas are those Nagarjuna explained: liking comfort and disliking discomfort; wishing for a good reputation, disliking a bad, or no, reputation; wanting praise, disliking criticism; wanting to receive materials, not liking not receiving material things. So when we have what we like, we cling; when there is attachment-clinging to comfort, there is dislike for discomfort, and similarly with the rest. All actions done out of these worldly concerns are one of the black eight worldly dharmas except some particular actions which become virtuous due to the power of a holy object. How much dislike there is for discomfort, criticism, a bad reputation and for not receiving materials depends on whether there is any clinging to comfort, reputation, praise and receiving materials. Actions done out of the worldly concern to have comfort in this life, or to prevent discomfort in this life, and so on, except those particular actions mentioned above, are the eight black dharmas. Worldly concern means concern for only the happiness of this life.

The eight mixed dharmas are actions done out of the self-cherishing thought. Even if an action is not done out of worldly concern but is done out of self-cherishing, it is a mixed worldly dharma.

Even if one does not have the self-cherishing thought, if an action is done with the wrong conception of clinging to things as truly existent, it is one of the eight white worldly dharmas. In Lama Tsongkhapa's biography all his actions in each twenty-four hours, besides being unstained

by black and mixed eight worldly dharmas, are unstained even by the eight white worldly dharmas.

The next stanza by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo praises the even more specific qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa:

The previous learned ones were hallucinating regarding the meaning of the profundity;
All the Tibetans were lost in a maze in the darkness of wrong views;
Only the pure wisdom sun gave breath through the illumination of dependent arising;
In your teachings, Lama Tsongkhapa, I rejoice!

“Profundity” means shunyata, emptiness, or dependent arising. In other words, Lama Tsongkhapa’s teaching, like the sun illuminating the darkness of the earth, dispels all the darkness of the ignorance of sentient beings. There are so many teachings, but just the light of his teachings on dependent arising alone gives breath to the sentient beings. As at the end of the tantra vows, this can be related to the sufferings of the lower realms or to karma and delusion, the true sufferings. Thus “gave breath” can mean liberating from the lower realms those who are suffocated by the sufferings of those realms; and also, liberating those with the body of a happy transmigratory being in the upper realms who are suffocated by karma and disturbing thoughts, the true sufferings. So “gave breath” to them means liberating them from suffering and the true cause of suffering. He is using the simile of somebody suffocating, for example, in a gas-filled room and because of not being able to breathe it is difficult to survive. There are so many incredible clarifications of the most difficult points of sutra and tantra in Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings, which other learned ones could not understand. They had wrong ways of thinking due to not understanding the correct meaning of Buddha’s teachings. Even one teaching on dependent arising, gives breath, or liberation, to sentient beings.

If a being like you, Manjushri, had not come to Tibet,
The view, meditation and conduct, and the entire sutra and tantra teachings
Would have become only a reflection of Buddha’s teaching,
(Not real, only a reflection)
And all the Tibetan people would have taken refuge in just that reflection.
Therefore, I especially remember your kindness, and rejoice.

These three verses embody all of Lama Tsongkhapa’s biography.

Lama Tsongkhapa said:

The virtuous action which requires little effort but with which we are able to accumulate great merit is rejoicing.

Rejoicing is a virtue that we can practice with the mind alone without the need for any particular activity of the body or speech—while we are walking down the road, while we are talking, while we are eating, while we are lying down at the beach! It needs no particular activities or great effort, and if practiced it accumulates infinite merit. One king asked the Buddha, “I have to work for the populace so I have no time to study or meditate and so on; is there any suitable practice that I can do?” Buddha gave the king these three practices: rejoicing, bodhicitta and dedication. As these are just mental activities the king was able to accumulate unbelievable merit in a very short time.

Through feeling happy about your own three times' merit, the merit increases greatly. By practicing rejoicing in other sentient beings who have a lower level of mind, less realizations than yourself, you receive more merit than the other person who put the effort into accumulating it. Then, if the other person has a higher level of mind than you, you gain merit equal to half the merit you are rejoicing in. For example, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo in his notes on lamrim said one of his root gurus, Dagpo Rinpoche, said:

If you are not a bodhisattva, by rejoicing for just a second at the merit accumulated by a bodhisattva in one day you receive the equivalent of half that amount of merit. To accumulate that merit without practicing rejoicing requires being born as a human being and accumulating merit for fifteen thousand years.

This gives you an idea of the incredible length of time it takes to accumulate such merit. Rejoicing is thinking something like, "How wonderful it is that this bodhisattva accumulated this merit in one day." Now, this is in regard to one bodhisattva, but there are numberless bodhisattvas, so you can rejoice in the merit they all accumulate in one day. This is without considering each bodhisattva's three times' merit—that created by him in the past, present and future.

When practicing rejoicing, first rejoice at your own three times' merit. Just as a mother in a poor family would feel so happy if her beloved child found a diamond or a thousand rupees or something in the garbage. Or like parents who feel happy when their children find a good job, or get a certificate or degree. Then rejoice at all sentient beings' three times' merits and at the temporal and ultimate happiness that will result. And then at the bodhisattvas' three times' merits, and all the incredible results of temporal and ultimate happiness. Then at all the buddhas' merits. Being aware of this, think, "How wonderful it is!"

Generating happiness is the means of practicing rejoicing. This is a bodhisattva's action. Not only at a time when you are practicing the seven limbs specifically, this can be practiced in everyday life, whenever you see other sentient beings enjoying good things; whenever you hear about other people having had a good retreat, having had a good time, much experience; when you see that other people have more Dharma knowledge than you; even at others having a good body and wealth and whatever good things they have. Feel happiness in your heart all the time: "How good it is!" Even about the helpers around you—about any good thing you see others having. Just as a mother feels happy about her children when they do something good or when they get something valuable. Then jealousy or the other disturbing thoughts which make you unhappy will not arise.

It is good to do this in a place like Dharamsala, for example. First think that the people of Dharamsala accumulate so much merit—it is one of the main places where people can accumulate much merit. So first start with the people here knowing that they accumulate so much merit, and feel happiness. Then extend it to all sentient beings.

DEDICATION

Dedication is of your own merit and the merit accumulated by others, all together, for all sentient beings and for the teachings to develop, particularly the essence of Lama Tsongkhapa's teaching. So, with a strong wish dedicate like this, and say this prayer:

May whatever merit I have accumulated be beneficial for all the teachings and for all the sentient beings;

Particularly for the essence of the teachings of Jetsun Losang Dragpa to last a long time,
And be clarified in my mind and in the minds of all sentient beings.

It does not say there “in the minds of all sentient beings,” but you can add this.

Dedication is a method to prevent merits being destroyed by anger. It is said in the sutra teaching *Request by the Wisdom Ocean*.⁴⁶

However many drops of water fall into the great ocean,
Until the ocean is dried up the drops are not finished.
Like that the virtue that is completely dedicated for enlightenment
Doesn't get destroyed until one achieves enlightenment.

If you dedicate every single merit you accumulate for the achievement of enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings, immediately, before anger disturbs it, there is an incredible advantage. Lamas use this simile: if you have a little *tsampa* and another person has a little and you mix them together, as it is now mixed both of you can eat until the *tsampa* runs out. Now, without something to dedicate it is just a prayer asking for something to happen. But if you have something to dedicate, either material things that are offered or accumulated virtue, you can dedicate. But without something to dedicate, the request is a prayer. The *semjung sempa*, the secondary thought—not the principal thought—transforms the merit into a cause of enlightenment, and is possessed by the wish for the merit to be unceasing. That is the characteristic of, the meaning of, dedication.

I often say during the dedication: “Due to all the merit accumulated by oneself and by all other sentient beings...” This has great importance. It is like you and your friends collecting your money and putting it together, the more people's money that is put together the more there will be and whatever you wish to do can be actualized. Buying or building a house, a Dharma center, or whatever, can be quickly actualized. Similarly, when you are dedicating your own three times' merits, then dedicate the three-time merits of all sentient beings.

Or you can say, “all others”—this includes all sentient beings and buddhas.

Due to all this merit, may bodhicitta be quickly generated within my own mind
And within the minds of other sentient beings, without a delay of even one second;
And may that which has been already generated be developed,
In order to achieve enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to enlightenment as
quickly as possible.

This is the meaning of the dedication prayer *Ge wa di yi...* The prayer, *La ma sang gyä...* or whichever, has the same meaning.

Putting the merit all together is so powerful. As I mentioned above, because you are dedicating for enlightenment, the merit is unceasing until you achieve enlightenment. I gave the simile of the ocean. Also, the merit accumulated by buddhas and bodhisattvas does not have an owner: they do not think, “This is my merit,” as we do. It does not have a possessor, so you can dedicate it. As they have no clinging you can do anything with it. I'm joking! What is being dedicated is merit; to where it is being dedicated is for enlightenment. There are purposes for dedication. Actually, the main purpose is for the sentient beings. One purpose is to increase the

⁴⁶ Tib: *lodro gyatso zhubäi do*; Wyl: *blo gros rgya mtsho zhus pa'i mdo*.

merit, but the real purpose is for the sentient beings, and due to that the merit increases and is never depleted until you achieve enlightenment. The reason you need so much merit and have it increase continuously is for sentient beings. General dedication is for sentient beings to be happy and for the development of the teachings and for yourself to not be separated from the guru. That is a basic dedication. I think dedications are very important.

Another thing in regard to dedication is this: in mind training instructions it says that one of the samayas, or precepts, is to avoid poisonous food. That means the wrong conception clinging to true existence when we are making offerings and, of course, doing other actions. As mentioned in the mind training teachings, there are two actions—one at the beginning and one at the end. At the beginning is the motivation and at the end the dedication. So, yourself, the merit, enlightenment, sentient beings—the whole thing—should be sealed with emptiness, by being aware that they are subtle dependent arisings, that all three exist due to being merely labeled on the base by thought. In reality the way they are existing is by being merely labeled on the base by the thought. Emptiness means dependent arising, dependent arising means emptiness, so the effect in the mind from these two terms is the same. The words sound different, but there is one meaning, not two. What meaning you get in your heart is one. It is like knowing a person called David who has another name, perhaps Tibetan—Thubten blah, blah, blah. And he may have another name given to him at a monastery or somewhere, perhaps a nickname. However, one person may have several names but they refer to one person. As long as you know that this person has these different names, when other people talk about David and Thubten and so on you understand that they are referring to one person. So, to somebody who understands what dependent arising and emptiness mean, they mean just one thing.

While you are dedicating, one way to do it is to think of emptiness and watch your mind. Think about how these three things appear to your mind—as truly existent. Then think that these which appear to exist from their own side are empty of existing from their own side. Thinking this does not interfere with knowing the existence or dependent arising of the three. Think either this way, or think that they are existing by being merely labeled. This is being aware of their mode of existence. When you think this way, yourself, enlightenment and the merit, which appear to exist from their own side, become empty right there. You can experience that these things which appear to exist from their own side are empty of existing from their own side.

Then, if these methods do not make much sense, the way to do it is to think, “I’m dreaming that I’m dedicating merit.” It is as if you are recognizing a dream that you are dedicating merit as a dream. And when you recognize the dream as a dream you know that these things do not exist from their own side. You have that awareness. This is Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s advice of what to do in order to not cling to the object of refutation—that things truly exist or exist from their own side.

Then dedicate all the merit like this:

Please grant me blessings so heresy in regard to the biography of the guru
Does not arise even for one second.
To be able to see in purity whatever action is done
And with such devotion receive the blessings of the guru within my heart

“Biography” here means the actions of the guru. “Whatever action is done” means whatever action you think is mistaken, an ordinary action.

This is extremely important. Actually, all success up to the greatest, peerless happiness, enlightenment, is dependent on this. So pray like this and also put it into practice. I think the dedication prayer from the long six-session yoga is very effective for the mind. I like it very much. It includes recalling what the guru is, the kindness of the guru, and after that the dedication:

Every supreme and mundane attainment
Follows upon pure devotion to you, my protector.
Seeing this I forsake my body and even my life;
Bless me to practice what will only please you.

The association of body and mind is life; when the mind is separated from the body then there is no life; so, completely giving this up. The Tibetan *drubpa*⁴⁷ (achieve) can be related to *kbona*,⁴⁸ which means “only.” “To do only the actions which please you” means that from this second on up to enlightenment, may whatever actions we do with our body, speech and mind be pleasing to the guru, not disturbing. Especially the realizations, or attainments, arise in the mind only by pleasing the guru; there is no other way, no other door. Mental progress comes from only that.

You can think at the same time, “From now on, up to enlightenment, may my actions become only beneficial for sentient beings.” If something is pleasing to the virtuous friend then it is beneficial for sentient beings. However, you can think of them separately in order to develop bodhicitta, the thought to benefit others.

When doing these prayers, it is good to put all the merit together every time. Not only that, but in each prayer when you are dedicating for yourself, also dedicate for other sentient beings. Try to always remember that. Whenever you pray for something good to happen to yourself, also pray for it to happen to every sentient being. Dedicate for both together. Try to remember sentient beings at the same time, as much as possible. It is similar here to what I mentioned during the section on offering, during the part on the inner offering: in order to achieve enlightenment quicker and quicker for the sake of all the sentient beings, the offerings, which are received from sentient beings, are being offered for the benefit of sentient beings.

Then there is the prayer to meet Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings again:

Due to all this merit may I and all sentient beings
Immediately meet the teachings of the pure wisdom, the Victorious One,
Which is the pure biography and moral conduct.

“All sentient beings” is not there in the Tibetan, but it can be included. That means having a great heart to practice the bodhisattvas’ conduct and the yoga of the two stages of bliss and voidness. In other words: due to all this merit may I and all the sentient beings in all our lifetimes have Lama Tsongkhapa as our actual Mahayana guru, and not deviate even for a second from the pure path which pleases all the victorious ones.

Often His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to do this dedication at the end of *sojong*:

Due to all these merits may all the father/mother sentient beings have happiness

⁴⁷ Wyl: *sgrub pa*.

⁴⁸ Wyl: *kno na*.

And the evil migratory beings be empty forever.
Wherever there are bodhisattvas, may all their prayers be accomplished immediately
And may I cause that by myself alone.

Regarding the first line in the prayer, that is all it says, but you can think of all happiness, temporal and ultimate, and to cause that by yourself alone. “Evil transmigrators” refers to beings in the three realms, who only create negative karma or migrate due to creating evil deeds. Think also to cause that by yourself alone.

The supreme leader (Guru Shakyamuni Buddha) accumulated merit for three countless eons
And with much hardship practiced the path with the thought:
May I be able to spend this life practicing this path day and night,
And thinking about the means.

This could mean with what means the teaching can benefit sentient beings, or the method to develop this path within our mind and the minds of all sentient beings. It could mean one or the other; I think it might mean the method to develop the path.

Then there is the condensed prayer of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra: *Jam päl pa wö ji tar khyen pa dang...*⁴⁹ This prayer contains all the bodhisattvas’ prayers—ten times numberless times 100,000 bodhisattvas’ prayers! Say it at the end.

Dedication is a remedy for heresy. It purifies the negative karmas accumulated with heresy, and it helps for heresy to not arise. The results from dedicating are, I think, all the qualities of Buddha.

MANDALA OFFERING

If you know the most skillful way to practice mandala offering and you do it that way, then even if you offer only one mandala you are very satisfied. You have a comfortable thought that you have actually offered the mandala. This relates to how well you understand the important points of the practice, the most skillful way of practicing. It is the same for the other preliminary practices and even the lamrim, the three principal paths—it depends on how skillful you are with your mind and how much understanding you have. The more skillful you are the easier you are able to generate realization of the three principal paths as well as tantra. It is similar even in worldly activities. The more you understand and the more skills you have, the easier it is, the less problems there are. So, you should remember these points.

So, while there is this unbelievable opportunity to complete the work of accumulating merit in such a short time, if you do not do it, that is a great loss. It is the same with the refuge and Vajrasattva practices: even if you do only one thousand or one hundred, the negative karma you want to purify is already purified, without needing to complete one or four hundred thousand. It depends on your skill and knowing the important points of the meditation. I think I may have mentioned that reciting the Chenrezig or Vajrasattva mantra one time can purify all the heavy negative karma of having broken all four full monk’s root vows. It depends on the quality of the mind of the practitioner, on how perfectly it is done. It depends on how much bodhicitta there is, how much understanding of shunyata there is. So because I am not satisfied when I offer a mandala I spend ages! I think those of you who have done the Tara purification with me will

⁴⁹ “To Dedicate in the Same Way as All the Past Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.” See *FPMT Retreat Prayer Book*, 2016 edn, p. 323.

remember. In other words, if it is not well done, doing a large number is not really an achievement.

SPECIFIC REQUESTS

After the mandala it is good to say the prayer for oneself and all sentient beings to meet Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings, which I translated into English earlier. This arrangement of the practice is according to His Holiness Zong Rinpoche. I think a long time ago at Manjushri Institute His Holiness and I set up a *Ganden Lha Gyäma* practice together with *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*. Make that request, and then recite this prayer three times:

I am requesting the development of listening, and reflecting meditation;
I am requesting the development of the wisdoms of expounding Dharma, writing, and debating;
I am requesting you to grant the general and sublime realizations;
Please bless me to quickly become like you.

I am requesting to be able to generate the simultaneously-born bliss;
I am requesting to be able to remove the stains of the hallucinated mind clinging to true existence;
I am requesting you to cut off the two points of mind; (doubts)
Please grant me blessings to quickly become like you.

Migtsema

The common practice of *migtsema* consists of meditation on purifying and then receiving great wisdom, clear wisdom, quick wisdom and profound wisdom, and then the wisdoms of explaining, composing and debating.

Great wisdom

From Lama Tsongkhapa's and the two sons' hearts come white beams, hollow like pipes, which join into one and enter your crown. White nectar the color of milk flows down and washes away all the stains of disease, spirit harms and the various interferences called *dön*, negative karma and obscurations. Your body becomes calm and clear like crystal glass. Then recite one mala, or more if you wish, of the *migtsema* prayer.

Then the request: *lar yang che wäi khyen rab mar ser gyi/ du tsii nam...*

Great wisdom in the aspect of nectar flows down and fills your body. Each atom of the nectar is clarified—or you can say appears, whichever is more effective for your mind—as Jetsun Jampalyang (Manjushri). The atoms of the nectar appear in the aspect of Manjushri, more numerous than the pores of your body. It is like the brown mala made of stone which has many tiny golden-yellow sparkling flecks. It may be called goldstone or sunstone. I think His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to use this as an example. It is very helpful for visualization.

Beams are emitted which hook all the great wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is absorbed into oneself in the form of the deity's holy body and fills one's body. This means

beams are emitted from each holy body of Manjushri. The “deity’s holy body” means Manjushri’s holy body.

Please bless me to receive the great wisdom which has no resistance to understanding the meaning of the extensive scriptures.

The extensive scriptures are the five great treatises, the root tantras and commentaries and so forth. In which way are we to receive this wisdom? In the form of nectar which fills our body, the atoms of which become Manjushri; then beams are emitted which hook the great wisdom of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the form of the deity and which then absorbs into oneself. We recite however many migtsema we are going to recite, with this meditation.

“Great wisdom” is wisdom with which we can memorize many texts hundreds of thousands of pages long and we are able to comprehend the words as well as their meanings. Some people can memorize two or three pages of Tibetan texts within one hour— that is what is called great wisdom. One function of wisdom is speed, but another function is related to quantity, the ability to comprehend and to memorize many words.

Make a strong determination that you have received the great wisdom. Then recite: *Mig me tse wäi...*

Clear wisdom

Make this request: “Please bless me to receive clear wisdom, which can understand and explain the very subtle details of difficult points without confusion.” Such as, in regard to view, the difficult points like subtle dependent arising.

*Ka nä thra zhib ma dre je pa yi
She rab säi wa thob par jin gyi lob
Lar yang säi wäi khyen rab mar ser gyi
Dü tsii nam par jung wä rang lü gang*

Please bless me to achieve the clear wisdom
That is not confused about subtle and detailed difficult points.
Once again clear wisdom flows forth in
The form of orange nectar, filling my body.

At this time migtsema is not recited. The clear wisdom is received in the form of nectar which flows and fills one’s body. The atoms of the nectar are transformed into the mantra OM AH RA PA TSA NA DHI. As before, from the mantra syllables beams are emitted which hook the clear wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions in the form of the mantra. This is absorbed into oneself and it fills one’s body.

That is the meditation for achieving the clear wisdom.

Quick wisdom

*Ma tog log tog the tsbom nyur chö päi
She rab nyur wa thob par jin gyi lob*

Please bless me to achieve the quick wisdom
That quickly cuts through nonunderstanding, misunderstanding, and doubt.

“Please bless me to receive quick wisdom which quickly cuts off unknowing, wrong conceptions and doubts.” “Unknowing” is ignorance.

Again it is similar: the quick wisdom is received in the form of nectar flowing down and filling one’s body; the atoms of the nectar are transformed into the syllable DHI. Beams are emitted which hook the quick wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions in the form of DHIs, which are absorbed into oneself and fill one’s body.

Profound wisdom

Zhung dön je la tug pa me pa yi
Zab päi she rab thob par jin gyi lob

Please bless me to achieve the profound wisdom
That is unfathomable in discerning the meanings of the scriptures.

“Please bless me to receive the profound wisdom which has no resistance to understand the meanings of the scriptures.”

The profound wisdom, in the form of nectar, flows down and fills one’s body. The atoms of the nectar are transformed into swords and texts, the implements of Manjushri. Beams are emitted which hook the profound wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions in the form of swords and texts, which are absorbed into oneself, filling one’s body.

His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to say the clear wisdom is that which can see the very difficult, very detailed, subtle points; and the profound wisdom is that which can see many different aspects or meanings and can explain them in one or two words and in many different ways. The profound wisdom sees very profound meanings.

The wisdom of explaining

Tshig dön kün la nge pa chög ter wüi
Chä päi she rab thob par jin gyi lob

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of explaining
That gives supreme ascertainment regarding all the meanings of words.

“Please bless me to receive the wisdom of explaining, which gives the definite, correct understanding of all words and their meanings.”

The wisdom of explaining flows down in the form of nectar. The rest is the same as before. The atoms of nectar transform into texts—that is the only difference.

The wisdom of debating

Ma ngän pob pa meg me throg pa yi

Tsö päi she rab thob par jin gyi lob

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of debating
That thoroughly deprives evil propounders of their self-confidence.

“Please bless me to receive the courage for debate.” *Pob pa* means brave.

The wisdom of debating flows down in the form of nectar—the rest is the same. The atoms of nectar are transformed into the wheel of swords. The wheel has six swords, similar to what is described in the Manjushri meditation text.

The wisdom of composing

Dra dön phün tshog lo säl ga keye päi
Tsom päi she rab thob par jin gyi lob

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of composing
That gives rise to a joyous, clear understanding of the excellent actually signified meaning.

“Please bless me to receive the wisdom of composing which utilizes perfect grammar and gives the perfect sound and has the meaning of clear wisdom and gives happiness.” *Dra* includes all the requirements for composing scriptures such as good grammar and poetical style. “Sound” means the words. The wisdom of composing flows down as nectar. The rest is the same, but the atoms of nectar are texts and wheel of swords.

After this, recite *The Foundation of All Good Qualities* the requesting prayer to generate the lamrim path from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

We generate renunciation of samsara by meditating on the topics of the graduated path of the lower capable being: perfect human rebirth, impermanence, death, the sufferings of the lower realms, karma; then the graduated path of the middle capable being: the twelve links, which is the evolution of samsara—*kunjung khorwäi keyerim*,⁵⁰ all-arising, which means the true cause of suffering—the way we enter samsara. By meditating on true suffering and the true cause of suffering we will see the entire samsara as like being at the center of a fire. All aggregates are caused by karma and the contaminated seed of the disturbing thoughts—*zagchä nyerlen gyi phungpo*.⁵¹ The definition of renunciation of samsara is having aversion through seeing that the whole of samsara is completely in the nature of suffering; only in the nature of suffering. Not having the slightest attraction to samsara and to samsaric perfections or enjoyments, and the wish to achieve liberation arising spontaneously day and night. As it is mentioned in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*: without effort, in the same way that we naturally feel hunger without the need to think, “Now I am hungry for this reason.”

But having only renunciation is not sufficient; it cannot become the cause of enlightenment unless it is conjoined with bodhicitta. The definition of having bodhicitta is when you see any sentient being at all the thought to achieve enlightenment for the sake of that being naturally arises—for all the sentient beings as well as for that person—spontaneously, without the need

⁵⁰ Wyl: *kun 'byung 'khor ba'i bskyed rim*.

⁵¹ Wyl: *zag bcas nyer len gyi phung po*.

for effort. Like if a mother sees that her only beloved child has fallen in a fire, even if she is eating or talking or washing or whatever, she will have the spontaneous thought to jump into the fire and pluck out the child. She cannot stand it, she cannot wait, she is in an incredible rush, no matter what she is doing around the house. So, if you have the thought spontaneously, without effort, day and night—all the time, as with renunciation—to achieve enlightenment for each sentient being in the same way that a mother feels for her child, that is the definition of having bodhicitta. The definition of having the realization of shunyata is, as it is mentioned in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, that we are able to unify emptiness and dependent arising on one object. For example, seeing that while the I is empty (of existing) from its own side, at the same time it is a dependent arising; and while seeing that the I is a dependent arising, seeing that the I is empty (of existing) from its own side.

I have mentioned those points from *The Foundation of All Good Qualities* just for auspicious reasons.

After that one renews the vows for the two stages of tantra.

REQUEST TO ABIDE IN THE HEART

Then you request three times: “By abiding on the seat at my heart, please grant the realizations of your holy body, holy speech and holy mind.”

*Päl dän tsa wäi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Ku sung thug keyi ngö drub tsäl du söl*

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And grant me the realizations of your holy body, speech, and mind.

And the second request: “... please grant the general and sublime realizations.”

*Päl dän tsa wäi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Chog dang thün mong ngö drub tsäl du söl*

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And grant me the supreme and common realizations.

According to His Holiness Zong Rinpoche we should not say *dag gi chi wor...* for the first repetition but rather straight away say *Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la*. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche said if we say “come and take your lotus seat on my crown,” it is like asking the guru, “First sit here, then come down,” instead of asking him to come straight into our heart. It’s like saying that without sitting there first, you cannot come down. His Holiness did not say it exactly like this. But in Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s lamrim it says crown the first time, then the heart,

so that is why some people say “on my crown” the first time and “at my heart” the other two times.

Now comes the third requesting stanza: “Please abide in my heart until I achieve enlightenment.”

*Päl dän tsa wäi la ma rin po che
Dag gi nying khar pä möi teng shug la
Ka drin chen pöi go nä je zung te
Jang chub nying pöi bar du tän par shug*

Magnificent and precious root Guru,
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,
Guide me with your great kindness,
And remain steadfast until I attain the essence of enlightenment.

It is similar in the *Lama Chöpa* [LC 111]: “By you, the savior, abiding in the central channel, may I be able to actualize the clear light and illusory body in this life.” That and these three requesting stanzas have the same meaning and benefits.

I seek your blessings to actualize in this life the path uniting
Clear light and the illusory body, which arises
From placing your feet, my savior, on the eight petals of my heart
At the very center of my central channel.

Then the thrones of the disciples absorb into the lotus seats, and the two disciples absorb into Lama Tsongkhapa. Then similarly Lama Tsongkhapa’s throne absorbs into the lotus, and Lama Tsongkhapa seated on the lotus, sun and moon discs descends onto one’s crown. Then the lotus absorbs into the eight veins at one’s heart. With the eight veins as the principal cause and Lama Tsongkhapa’s lotus as the simultaneous condition, they transform into an eight-petaled lotus. Then the sun and moon discs descend and absorb into the indestructible seed in the central channel, which is half red and half white. With that as the principal cause and the sun and moon seats which were absorbed into it as the simultaneous condition, it transforms into sun and moon discs inside the lotus. Inside this indestructible seed there is the indestructible subtle mind and wind, so that is what is left. Now Lama Tsongkhapa descends through the central channel.

Similarly at the end of the *Lama Chöpa*, the guru descends and at your crown, beams are emitted which purify and bless your body, then he descends to your throat and blesses the speech, and similarly at your heart. You can think that the indestructible subtle mind and wind there are like a relic of the Buddha—tiny and radiant.

I think it must be similar to the practice of Tara entering the heart, except that during the initiation when Tara enters the heart there is a meditation on an upside-down begging bowl. So, Guru Tsongkhapa has absorbed into the indestructible wind and mind, which you can think is in the form of a subtle relic, a small radiant light.

With the indestructible subtle wind and mind as the principal cause and Lama Tsongkhapa’s holy body and mind which has been absorbed into it as the simultaneous condition, it manifests as Lama Tsongkhapa. Your subtle wind becomes the holy body and your subtle mind becomes the holy mind. Conjoined with those is a beam called *lung ösel ngapa*.

The five-beam wind has five beams. It might be the particular function of that wind, which becomes Guru Tsongkhapa's holy speech. So, your body, speech and mind are completely transformed into Guru Lama Tsongkhapa's vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind. Then you hold the divine pride: the guru's, the deity's and your own mind are in essence inseparable. In other words, one. That is the unification of the holy body and holy mind having the five definites.

That is talking about the qualities of the sambhogakaya as mentioned in the Seventy Topics: always surrounded by bodhisattvas, abiding until samsara ends and so on. So, the guru's, the deity's and your own mind are oneness; then there is the unification of the holy body and holy mind which is the resultant sambhogakaya having five definites. So you think that.

Think, "The inseparability or oneness of the guru's, the deity's and my own mind, and the unification of the holy body and holy mind is the actual resultant sambhogakaya which has the five definites—this is me; this is I."

You label "I" on that in the same way you label I on these present aggregates. Hold that divine pride.

Meditating by holding divine pride in this way is what is called the method of doing the meditation of arising the inner illusory body. From inside, arising the illusory body within your own body.

Now the lotus closes, and it is sealed by a half vajra on top.

This practice of sealing is found in some very secret meditations on Yamantaka for the development of quick wisdom. I do not recall it being explained in *Ganden Lha Gyäma* commentaries. There are five mudras or seals, and this is one of them. I think this is the guru's seal. Inside the vase of the vajra is a HUM, which is the guru, therefore it is sealed by the guru.

The lotus is bound up by the Lama Tsongkhapa mantra going clockwise: OM AH RA PA TSA NA DHIH GURU SUMATI KIRTI SHRI BHADRA SIDDHI ADHITRANA ADHITRITE KUBENTU, and the migtséma anticlockwise. Then again the mantra, then again migtséma.

Also you should not think it is dark inside the lotus; it is full of beams in the nature of great bliss and voidness. The way the mantra and beams bind the lotus is that the mantra itself is like a string of beads, and the light beams like the thread. Similarly, the central channel is also bound by the mantra and migtséma.

In the commentary on *Ganden Lha Gyäma* by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo it says, "Until the time of death do not remove the holy body of Lama Tsongkhapa." Until the time of death you should be aware of Lama Tsongkhapa abiding in your heart. When you transform into a deity, the Guru Lama Tsongkhapa who is in your heart is what transforms. He is always there.

Whenever you do the various sadhanas in which you transform into Guhyasamaja or Yamantaka or Chakrasamvara or whatever, do the practice in that way. Also, if you are having obstacles to your Dharma practice send beams in the nature of compassion and the thought of loving kindness from your heart guru's holy body. They go through your own body and radiate out to those who have evil thoughts which are disturbing your Dharma practice, and their bodies are completely filled with compassion and the thought of loving kindness toward all sentient beings. It is not specifically mentioned here, but there is no reason why you cannot do that.

What it says here is to send beams, which for the white-side devas—those who help you to practice Dharma—become a rainbow, but for the black-side interferers—those who disturb Dharma practice and oblige you to create negative karma—the beams are transformed into fire that completely surrounds and covers them and burns them up just as a feather is burnt up in a fire—in one second—and they become empty. That is non-objectifying, purifying them in shunyata. You can protect yourself or another person in this way. Also the beams you send become the vajra ground, vajra walls and vajra roof, like in a mandala. The beings who you want to protect are inside the vajra house, and all around it on the outside are the four elements one after the other—earth, fire, water like the oceans, and air like a cyclone, an incredibly strong wind that nobody can go through.

In general everything that you use, all the sense objects—clothing, food, everything—can be offered to the guru with the awareness that the guru is in your heart. Then the actions of everyday life should be done with the awareness that the guru is a witness. Then you will be as careful in everyday life as if the guru is there witnessing your actions. In other words, the guru is in your heart, so he sees what you are doing. Also any respect or gifts offered to you by other people you should think are being offering to the guru. Usually the lamas say that when you give blessings to others you should think that it is the guru living in your heart who is giving the blessing. You can also think in a similar way when you speak. If you are in a beautiful park, at the beach or in a beautiful restaurant or in some supermarket, wherever you are, all the beautiful things that you see or use or eat can be offered to the guru with this awareness. In that way everything you do with your body, speech and mind becomes meaningful by becoming a method to accumulate merit.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo says, “Whatever appears to the eye, to the mind, to the ear or nose or body sense should be regarded as a manifestation of the guru’s three secreties.” That means whatever form appears should be taken as the holy body; whatever thought comes into your mind is the guru’s holy mind, the dharmakaya; whatever sound is heard is the guru’s vajra holy speech. You should practice awareness of this.

There are many other practices, but this guru yoga should be kept as the heart of all your practice. *Sog* means the life, or heart. As the physical heart is regarded as an essential part of the body, on which the function of other organs depends, similarly this guru yoga should be kept as the very heart of your practice.

DEDICATION

Then come the dedications, the prayers which I mentioned earlier which His Holiness used to say: the prayer to meet Lama Tsongkhapa as your Mahayana teacher in future lives, and this prayer, which can be interpreted in two ways:

May I be able to take the biography to not corrupt Lama Tsongkhapa’s teaching,
Which is pure moral conduct,
By extensive listening, training my mind in bodhicitta,
And living in the pure view and conduct.

Or,

May we be able to live a life of pure morality, listen to many teachings,
Train in bodhicitta, and have pure view and conduct,

Without corrupting or polluting the teachings
Of Losang Dragpa, the second victorious one.

“By living in pure moral conduct, undertaking extensive listening, training my mind in bodhicitta, and living in the pure view and conduct.”

11. Mandala Offering

Mandala offering is a powerful method for accumulating extensive merit in a short time. The Tibetan word for mandala is *khyil khor*. *Khyil* is essence, *khor* is taking—taking the essence. The term means taking the essence on the base of offering a mandala, and what you get from this is merit—the cause. Therefore the essence you take is the generation of the whole path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, as well as the result, the unification of the dharmakaya and rupakaya. The cause is merit, the path; and the result is enlightenment. In other words, from this practice inconceivable temporal and ultimate happiness results. You are making unbelievable business with the merit field!

It is mentioned that the better the quality of the offerings that you can imagine, the more details and clarity, the more merit you accumulate. The offerings are explained in the commentaries on the mandala, but it is very good to recite the verse from *Lama Chöpa* when you offer the mandala alone, because you then have the leisure to visualize clearly. Doing it this way you dedicate the merit from each offering for the sentient beings as it is performed. It is very effective for the mind.

There are different types of mandala offerings. The mandala offering practice was taught by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, and is referred to in the Guhyasamaja root tantra, I think in the verses on offerings. That is the reference for mandala offering. It is not just a Tibetan tradition. There is the thirty-seven heap mandala offering according to Drogön Chogyal Phagpa, the great Tibetan Sakya yogi. Then there are the twenty-five and the twenty-three heap mandalas. According to Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition the twenty-three heap mandala is offered. The twenty-five heap mandala is derived from the one of thirty-seven heaps by leaving out the eight offering goddesses and the specific enjoyments of each continent. These are the jewel mountain, the wish-granting tree, the cow which gives milk unceasingly, and the uncultivated crops. These are visualized, but not mentioned in the recitation because each is the particular enjoyment of one of the four continents and the visualization of the continents includes these enjoyments. No heaps are placed for the eight offering goddesses nor the four enjoyments. We are supposed to visualize them but they are not mentioned separately. If the fence around the base and Mount Meru are not included it becomes the twenty-three heap mandala of Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition.

It is said that once a year, or every month, the mandala plate should be purified. There is a pill called the *pachung*, which I think the tantric college monks have as they need them for consecrations and other purposes such as fire pujas. The dung from cows which eat one special grass is used to make these pills. I think there are some other ingredients, not only that! You dissolve the pill in saffron water and dip your index finger into that and spread it around the mandala base. The main purpose is to purify the base with a scented smell in order to accumulate merit.

When performing the offering do not hold the base in an empty hand, but put some grain, or whatever, in your hand first. Then do the action of purifying all of your obscurations and

negative karma created by your body, speech and mind; and you can also think of all sentient beings. Put some grains on the base and wipe them off by circling the base three times in a clockwise direction with the outside of your wrist. It is said that there is a nerve in the outside of the wrist which has the function of clairvoyance and the idea is that because of this the purification is a cause for clairvoyance and a clear mind. Then put some grain on the base again and wipe it off three times in a counter-clockwise direction. Think that all the blessings—“blessing” means quality—of the entire merit field’s holy body, holy speech and holy mind enters you and all the sentient beings.

Then put some grain on the base. I think the reason is similar to what I mentioned elsewhere about Milarepa offering an empty pot. In the teachings it says that due to the dependent arising from offering something empty you get born in places where there is no buddha.

When you offer the mandala just as an offering you begin with the eastern side toward the merit field; when you are requesting for realizations—before the requesting prayer to the lineage lamas—you have east facing yourself and start with that heap. For requesting, in front of yourself; for offering, in front of the merit field. Geshe Sengye said that when you request the guru to have a long life you start from the side facing the guru.

OM VAJRA BHUMI AH HUM—bhumi means base
OM AH HUM is a blessing
WANG CHEN SER GYI SA ZHI—the golden ground
OM VAJRA REKHE AH HUM
CHI CHAG RI KHOR YUG GYI KOR WÄI Ü SU —the iron fence
RI GYÄL PO RI RAB—Mount Meru.

It is good to visualize Mount Meru as you are offering it. It is silver on the eastern side, very white and radiant like the rising sun; the western side is ruby-red and very radiant—so here in our continent we have a white sunrise and red sunset. In the south it is radiantly blue like lapis lazuli; the northern side is a golden-yellow radiance, very bright. This is so for all the four levels. Visualize this and offer it in your mind at the same time.

The main point in regard to the mandala is that the higher the quality of our visualization, the more merit. In the past in regard to Mount Meru I used to say that if we were able to see Mount Meru we should also be able to see the Realm of Thirty-three and all the asura and sura realms; we should be able to go there on tours! There would be crowds of airplanes landing there bringing tours. Anyway, if things did not depend on karma and the way things appear to us did not depend on our individual minds we would be able to see these different realms—if the appearance did not depend on the pure and impure mind, the virtuous and nonvirtuous thought.

For the same reason some people find precious treasures such as gold under the ground although there are many people living in that same area who do not find anything. Even in the same house some people find precious materials easily but some people do not, even though they are trying to, because somehow they cannot see them. Many people may be trying to find something valuable that you have lost, but somehow one person finds it easily. So even these small things are to do with karma. If there is some treasure under the ground or in water, some people who try cannot find it, while some people find it easily. It all depends on who has accumulated the merit to find it. That people can find treasures or receive enjoyments and wealth is due to their virtuous thoughts.

We can apply these commonplace occurrences to the question of whether we should be able to see Mount Meru or not. Some people have much difficulty in obtaining wealth, and some people receive it but somehow do not get time to use it or cannot use it for long. Even if they receive it, it is lost or other people steal it or confiscate it or the object gets broken or something. Somehow the person does not find the opportunity to use it for long. We have these different experiences in life. These are to do with not having created the merit, the cause, and having created nonvirtue which brings about the hindrances. Even if we do get a job, suddenly something happens and we lose it. Even if we do get money and earn thousands of dollars, suddenly it is lost or something happens to prevent its enjoyment or use. There are many occurrences like this. Some people cannot get even one hundred rupees during their life. Similarly, some people never see dollars in their lives. We can apply this to Mount Meru: dollars exist—we see them—but those people never see them in their lives. They may not believe that there is such a thing as a dollar, or a rocket, or TV! That makes other people who do see and have these things laugh. All these things are to do with karma. It is similar with Mount Meru.

A person who does not have even ten rupees, a beggar, may become extremely rich the next day. For example, let us say a beggar buys a lottery ticket for one rupee. Other more wealthy people do not win, but this beggar does. In one hour he becomes very rich and owns many thousands of rupees. The question is this: so many other people have bought tickets, so why is it this particular person who wins? Of course, somebody has to win. I'm not sure whether in lotteries someone has to win or not. However, this person has not chosen the numbers by clairvoyance. Likewise, thousands of other people do not have clairvoyance. But somehow, by luck, it worked and he chose the numbers which were drawn which made it possible to receive the money. He did not know the numbers which will be drawn. There were thousands of people who also chose some numbers. But the organizers drew those particular numbers and this winning person had chosen the same numbers. Actually, when people say it is by luck, that actually means karma—they do not know what they are talking about! They do not know the meaning of what they are saying. Luck means good karma. But common people who do not understand karma, who do not accept that happiness and suffering depend on a cause, generally talk of luck as having success without having created the cause. Something like that. They are saying something about karma, but it is not clear nor complete. Luck is right, but what they think in their mind is that it happened by chance, without the cause having been created.

Why did the beggar choose the same numbers that were drawn? Why this person? One reply could be, due to time. The beggar chose the numbers that they drew because of it being that precise time. But then, who determined the time for this beggar to choose exactly those numbers which the organizers drew? Who determined this time? There is no better explanation than because this person is luckier. Because there is no understanding of karma there is no explanation.

Similarly, one set of parents have some children, but while some have perfect organs another has imperfect organs. The reason could be given that the egg was imperfect. Why did this sentient being's consciousness take a fertilized egg which was imperfect? The reply could be because it was the wrong time. But who created, who determined the time? Why did it have to take conception in that particular fertilized egg at that time?

In Darjeeling each year they have horse races and lotteries. I also went once with my manager when I had TB in Buxa. I went on vacation to Darjeeling for many months. My manager took some monks from Domo Geshe's monastery. That was the first time I saw a lottery. I think my manager bought some tickets, I think one time. A woman from a very poor family won the lottery. She received a big pile of money in her lap which she wrapped in her sari. But the next

day she died. She did not have time to use and enjoy the money. I think she may have been too excited! The thing is, she did not have enough karma to be able use the money. She received it, but after she got it, she left!

In past courses I used to discuss the question, “Why in this continent do we have a blue sky? Why not a yellow or red sky? Why is it blue?” That question is to do with Mount Meru. I am sure those of you who attended those courses remember with pain in your ears! We are in the southern continent, and in the teachings it explains that the reason the sky is blue is because of the color of this side of Mount Meru, which is lapis lazuli. Also the blue sky reflects in water, so we see water as blue. In a similar way when a sunbeam hits the water we see white. There has to be some explanation of why the sky is blue. In the teachings it is explained like this. In the eastern continent the sky is white because that side of Mount Meru is silver; red in the northern continent.

Some people see spirits gathering and other things when they go to certain places at night or even in the daytime. Other people who go to those places see nothing. That is the appearance of karma, so it is similar. Some bodhisattvas see numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas, but people of an ordinary level such as myself cannot see even one buddha. What we see is just pictures. At Buxa there were some monks who saw spirits in the daytime and at night in the monasteries and in other places. When they went into a restaurant they saw spirits sitting with the people. And also when the monks were being offered food, spirits would sit there and also put out a bowl, but because the other people could not see them they never got food! These things were seen by those with the eye to see.

All these things are to do with karma. Some people went to a place called Ugyän Khadroling,⁵² the Land of Dakinis, but they saw only some sheep and a shepherd, and thornbushes. That is all—just barren land. But that location is where the land of dakinis of Ugyen, a pure realm, is supposed to be. But even though we arrive at the same location, we do not see it; we see something else. All these examples are similar. What we see is just pictures of buddhas and the teachings in the form of writing in scriptures, while at the same time many other beings see Lama Tsongkhapa, now, these days. We do not see Lama Tsongkhapa, we do not see the merit field and the deities, but at the same time there are bodhisattvas, great yogis, and even ordinary beings who have thinner obscurations who see Buddha, Tara, Lama Tsongkhapa or Manjushri. We just see the blue sky, that is all, and we know the way Guru Shakyamuni Buddha looks just from pictures and statues, and the teachings that the Buddha taught just from writings. According to our present level of mind that is all we see. It is similar with Mount Meru. All these examples are to do with karma.

SHAR LÜ PHAG PO
LHO DZAM BU LING
NUB BA LANG CHÖ
JANG DRA MI NYÄN

The southern continent is blue, the eastern white, western red, the northern gold. The shapes are given in *The Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*—the eastern, a half circle; the southern is like the shape of a rickshaw, which you may remember from Bodhgaya; the western is round; the northern, square.

LÜ DANG LÜ PHAG
NGA YAB DANG NGA YAB ZHÄN etc.

⁵² Wyl: *u rgyan mkha' 'gro gling*.

RIN PO CHE RI WO—many precious mountains
PAG SAM GYI SHING—many wish-granting trees
DÖ JÖI BA—the cow that unceasingly gives milk
MA MÖ PÄI YI LO TOG—unceasing crops.

KHOR LO RIN PO CHE—the precious wheel. The golden wheel is made from water, *dzam bu*, the name of our continent. It has one thousand spokes five hundred *paktse* long. It is high in the sky, and very radiant, like a second sun. It can carry four “multitudes” of people, which is to give an idea of how large it is. It can go through space to the four continents and to the realms of the devas very quickly. You can visualize numberless wheels, not just one, in space on the eastern side and offer them. Then dedicate: “By my offering this precious wheel may all sentient beings achieve control of the Dharma activity.” That means sentient beings receiving all the teachings, understanding the meanings of the words and having the realizations. It could also mean that through having an understanding of the meanings of the words and having the realizations being able to do Dharma activities to benefit other sentient beings. Saying “all sentient beings” also includes yourself, if you are a sentient being.

NOR BU RIN PO CHE—the wish-granting jewel, on the southern side. It is of lapis lazuli. It is described as having eight sides, and the beams which radiate from it reach hundreds of *paktse*. Even the night-time appears as day to the sentient beings. It gives coolness when the sentient beings are tormented by heat. It eliminates untimely death and disease. Its main quality is that whatever the sentient beings wish for they can receive immediately. I do not know whether there is such a wish-granting jewel in the treasure storehouses—I have not heard. However, there are many stories that in the past the bodhisattvas went to the oceans to get these wish-granting jewels. They had to be cleaned three times as they were completely covered by mud. After cleaning off the mud they were then cleaned another time, and the last cleaning was done with cotton. Then on special days they were placed on banners on the roof. By praying, whatever enjoyment the person wished for they received due to the power of the jewel. They are regarded as the most precious among materials. That is why they are used as a simile for sentient beings—to give an idea of how precious sentient beings are, because each is so kind. Actually, there is no material which can compare with how precious the sentient beings are. Even if entire space were filled with wish-granting jewels, and all the jewels which people consider most precious, it still cannot compare with the value of each sentient being to us, because each one is so kind to us. But in order to give some idea, the Kadam lamas used the wish-granting jewel as a simile because it is the most precious. Then dedicate: “Due to my offering the precious jewel may all the sentient beings accomplish the Dharma exactly as they wish.”

TSÜN MO RIN PO CHE—the princess, in the west. She is beautiful, extremely enchanting, with pleasant scents coming from her body and from her mouth. Any sentient being who touches her experiences bliss in the body and mind. She stops the sorrows and the hunger and thirst of the sentient beings who are in that continent. These are the benefits she gives others. She has abandoned the five mistakes of a woman—I think such as anger, jealousy and attachment. They are described in the *Lama Chöpa* commentary and in the mandala commentaries. I think they are dissatisfaction. She has the eight qualities which are opposite to the five mistakes, such as satisfaction or contentment—I do not remember each one. Think of the qualities, then offer, and dedicate: “Due to my offering this princess, may all sentient beings enjoy the happiness without fall.” Happiness without fall means the happiness that is uncontaminated by delusion.

LÖN PO RIN PO CHE—the precious minister, in the north. He does not harm other sentient beings; he has abandoned anything that is not Dharma; he is not upset about doing virtuous activities to benefit others; he expertly accomplishes whatever work the king has in mind without needing to be told; and he is expert in leading the armies. Offer, then dedicate: “Due to my offering this precious minister may all sentient beings be able to fulfill exactly the wishes of the buddhas.”

These are in space above each continent.

LANG PO RIN PO CHE—the precious elephant, in the south-east. It is white and as huge as a snow mountain, and has jeweled decorations on its forehead, as you see in India. It has seven limbs—I think this includes the trunk and so on. It has more power than thousands of elephants and can circumambulate the continents three times in one day. The elephant can be easily led, even with a tiny thread and without needing to hit it, because it is so intelligent. It does not harm others and moves in a very subdued way without disturbing the person riding on it. It can defeat enemies. Offer the elephant to the merit field and then dedicate: “Due to my offering this precious elephant may all the sentient beings ride the great vehicle and go to enlightenment.”

TA CHOG RIN PO CHE—the precious horse, in the south-west. Like the flower *kumuda*, it is extremely white, and is decorated in a similar way to the elephant. Its color and size are perfect. If we wish, it can circumambulate all the continents three times in one day. It has a very healthy body, free of disease. It is very glorious and never tires. “Due to my offering this precious horse may all sentient beings have the power of the four limbs of magical emanation.” The power of the four *dzutril*,⁵³ a quality of the buddhas.

MAG PÖN RIN PO CHE—the precious general, in the north-west. You can think his qualities are similar to those of the minister.

TER CHEN PÖI BUM PA—the wish-granting vase in the north-east. As I mentioned above, when you have the time, think of the quality of the offering, then offer numberless of them, then dedicate. Whatever sentient beings wish for, the wish-granting vase can grant.

GEG MA—the dancing goddess, in the east. Her body is in the aspect of a dancing movement, in an S-like shape.

All these goddesses can be visualized as explained in the *Heruka Lama Chöpa*, where it describes the beauty of their bodies. However, as we are the deity when doing the *Lama Chöpa* or other Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra practice, their nature is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. Each of these eight offering goddesses has the same nature as the sixteen offering goddesses. Each offering goddess is of a beautiful shape so is an offering to the eye-sense of the merit field; she has scents coming from her mouth and body, so is an offering to the nose-sense; she sings extremely sweet songs, so is an offering to their ear-sense; she has a nature of bliss and voidness so is an offering to the mental-sense. Thus, each goddess is an object of all the six senses. There are numberless of each one in space.

THRENG WA MA—the goddess offering a rosary, in the south.

LU MA—scent offering goddess, singing in space in the west.

GAR MA—the dancing goddess, dancing with her limbs, in the north. You can think in terms of Western dancing—it does not have to be Tibetan dancing!

⁵³ Wyl: *rdzu 'phrul*.

Geg ma through to *gar ma* are in the cardinal directions. *Me tog ma* through to *dri chab ma* are in the corners, the sub-directions.

ME TOG MA—flower offering goddess, in the south-east.
DUG PÖ MA—incense offering goddess, in the south-west.
NANG SÄL MA—light offering goddess, in the north-west.
DRI CHAB MA—scented water offering goddess, in the north-east.

These eight goddesses are higher up Mount Meru than the seven possessions of a king [wheel, jewel, etc].

Offering goddesses could have similar merit to offering a wisdom mother having sixty qualities in the mandala when you take the secret initiation and the wisdom initiation. It is a preparation for you to sooner or later have the experience of bliss and voidness, and then with a wisdom mother be able to cut off the dual view and achieve the unified state of no-more-learning.

NYI MA—the sun, for which you put a heap in the south.
DA WA—the moon, a heap in the north.

I think in some teachings it is explained that *nyi ma* and *da wa* are placed in the south-east and north-west respectively, but Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said they should be placed in the south and north. The sun, you should think, represents the wisdoms of all the paths: the wisdom of the Lesser Vehicle path, the wisdom of the Paramitayana path, the wisdom of tantra. The wisdom of tantra means the subtle mind directly realizing shunyata—the simultaneously-born bliss. So that is all wisdoms. There are numberless suns. The moon represents the methods of the Lesser Vehicle path, the Paramitayana path and of the tantra path. The moons are also numberless. Visualizing the sun and moon, the method and the wisdom of the whole path, creates the cause within your mind to generate the whole path of method and wisdom and achieve the rupakaya and dharmakaya.

RIN PO CHE DUG—the precious umbrella, in the west. It has one thousand golden radiant spokes. It has eight corners, on which are lapis-lazuli. On the top is a sapphire and around the edges are various jewels with hanging garlands of pearl, as Vajrayogini has on her crown and her holy body. This decoration is called *drava drachbe*.⁵⁴ From the pearls and jewels, nectars flow which liberate sentient beings from suffering. This umbrella protects sentient beings from the heat and other true sufferings, and it also protects them from the true cause of suffering by these purifying nectars. You should think that the essence of the umbrella is all the qualities of the cessations. The right-seeing uninterrupted path is the remedy to the delusions; the right-seeing path of abandonment liberates one from the delusions. That is one cessation. Then, the path of meditation ceases the obscurations of the Lesser Vehicle path, Paramita path and tantra path, which is the second cessation. So, the essence of the umbrella is the qualities of the cessation of both the obscurations.

CHOG LÄ NAM PAR GYÄL WÄI GYÄL TSHÄN—the banner which is victorious over all the directions, in the east. On the top of the handle is a jewel. The essence of the banner is the qualities of all the realizations. This is offered for auspicious reasons, maybe so you become a holder of the teachings and are able to do Dharma activities in the manner of Vajradhara.

⁵⁴ Wyl: *dra ba dra phyed*.

Ü SU LHA DANG MI YI...—this is for all the perfect enjoyments of the devas and human beings. According to Geshe Sengye you should put three heaps in the center representing the realizations of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind of the merit field. It is a preparation for receiving these three realizations.

After you finish setting up the mandala there are two ways to hold it: in order to eliminate obstacles you face the mandala toward the merit field, but in order to receive realizations you face it toward yourself.

My mandala has one more ring than they usually do, so I have to fill it. When I was offering mandalas during His Holiness Zong Rinpoche's teachings I was using this mandala, and His Holiness used to watch me. His Holiness was very concerned when I left some space empty in this ring. So His Holiness asked me to fill it up. I think it might be for the same reason as not offering empty water bowls. The same stories!

You can think that on each atom of the mandala there are numberless of you making a mandala offering to the merit field. If that is difficult, then think that beams are emitted from each atom of the mandala, and on the tip of each beam there is a mandala; and from those mandalas also beams are emitted according to the number of atoms in each. So in this way there become more and more mandalas and the entire space is completely filled with mandalas. Then you offer these. The whole point of why you do such elaborate visualization is so that even if you have not done a hundred thousand mandala offerings, if your visualization is clear and you can visualize that many, then you will accumulate the same merit as having offered a hundred thousand mandalas. So, within two or three days you can actually finish accumulating as much merit as from having separately offered a hundred thousand mandalas—only the number of times that the mandala has been set up and offered is not as great. Even within one minute you can accumulate that much merit. So the whole thing is dependent on the skill of the practitioner.

Now the whole point is, just talking about the mandala might be helpful, but actually visualizing the continents and so on and offering the mandala in this way is a skillful means of the buddhas and lineage lamas of the lamrim, those who have completed the lamrim realizations and reached the state of omniscient mind. It is a skillful means to quickly finish the work of accumulating merit in order to generate the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

The main endorsement of the extensive merit accumulated by the mandala offering practice is the story of King Ashoka—how as a child in a previous life he offered sand into Guru Shakyamuni's begging bowl while visualizing it as gold. There was not the slightest amount of gold, but by visualizing gold he received the merit equal to having actually offered gold. As a result, in his next life he was reborn as the Dharma king Ashoka and built many monasteries, made many offerings to the monks and built one million stupas. In Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's lamrim he says the king was able to build one million stupas in just one night and so accumulate inconceivable merit. That life story establishes the benefits of offering the mandala. If you visualize one mandala, in those few seconds you will receive the merit equal to having offered the entire Mount Meru and the continents and all the other things. And if you visualize a hundred thousand or however many, in that minute you receive merit equivalent to having actually offered that many universes—even though you do not own those things. So on this small base you can make an incredible profit.

The base should not be smaller than your own mug or cup. It is said that it should be one cubit wide, but at least it should not be smaller than your teacup. The best ones are made of silver or gold and so on, but you can use even a low-quality material like a wooden board or a flat stone—

like the ascetic lamas do. They use those purposely, to protect their gelong vows, and because valuable possessions can give rise to attachment. They use those things to which clinging does not arise. The materials you place on the base should be the best you can manage: the best are jewels, the middling are conch shells and grains, and the basest is sand. You can offer any of these.

By making many mandala offerings Gelongma Palmo was able to see and receive teachings from Chenrezig. Likewise for so many great yogis and pandits, including Lama Tsongkhapa. Lama Tsongkhapa did many hundreds of thousands of mandala offerings and realized the unmistakable view, shunyata, and then achieved enlightenment.

When you are counting thousands of mandala offerings you offer the short mandala. It is Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition to begin each mandala offering by reciting *sang gyä chö dang*...—the refuge and bodhicitta prayer. You put some grains on the base and wipe them off three times clockwise to purify and then put some more grains and wipe them off counter-clockwise three times to bring realizations; and then you place heaps for Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon—seven heaps. In general the short mandala is done with seven heaps, but that does not mean you cannot visualize the umbrella and banner. Even though there are only seven heaps, the visualization should be as extensive as you are capable of and include the features of the long offering. Also you should visualize as many mandalas as possible.

Then recite: *sa zhi pö kyä*...

Saying *sang gyä zhing la mig te ul wa yi*... is not proper because it means “offering to the merit field.” What you have just visualized is ordinary continents, an ordinary place, and you should not offer an impure place to the merit field. But *sang gyä zhing du mig te*... means “by visualizing this as a field of Buddha I'm offering...” So this is correct. If you are making the offering in conjunction with *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*, then you can visualize the continents as the Tushita pure realm, with Lama Tsongkhapa and Maitreya Buddha giving teachings and many sentient beings already enlightened, some about to be enlightened, and some half enlightened. I'm joking! If you are offering to Vajrayogini you can think of Vajrayogini's pure realm. You can relate it to the deity to whom you are offering the mandala; that creates the karma for you to be born in that pure realm.

I think *sa zhi pö kyä*... [“Short Mandala of Seven Heaps”] is the stanza the Bodhisattva Always Crying used when making mandala offerings to his guru Chöpa. And *sang gyä chö dang* ... [“Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta”] is a prayer Lama Atisha composed.

The most important aspects of the mandala offering are how clearly you can visualize a mandala, and how many. If these two points are done well, you can finish accumulating inconceivably extensive merit in a very short time. That is why in Lama Tsongkhapa's great commentary on the lamrim he does not explain the details of how to offer a mandala—wipe off this way three times, and three this way, and then put this and that. There are only a few words on the mandala: “Offer a mandala to the merit field by visualizing very clearly.” That is all it says. That is how Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings are—a few words. But the most skillful way of practicing mandala offering is mentioned. It is the same for the other preliminary practices. The most important parts, the most subtle and difficult subjects which even the learned ones could not realize correctly or even have a correct intellectual understanding of, Lama Tsongkhapa made very clear and extensive. The nature of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings is very deep and they contain all the important points. Each word has so much taste, and much power. It gives us deep understanding of deep meanings. As I mentioned before, if we just say the words and do not do

the visualization, we will not feel comfortable because that does not fulfill the meaning of the mandala offering practice.

I mentioned Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's advice: "If possible, many done perfectly; if not, fewer, but done perfectly." How much merit we accumulate does not depend simply on how many we do. We could perform all the actions of heaping the grains and saying the recitations, but if we do not do the meditation then even if we finish one hundred thousand it does not mean that we have gained the merits of having offered the whole universe one hundred thousand times. Receiving that merit does not depend on prayers, it depends on the visualization.

Once I saw somebody inside the temple at Bodhgaya offering the mandala. He was Tibetan, maybe a monk or maybe a lay person. He was holding a mala and the base, and was placing the grains and counting the *sa zhi pö kyi* ... [the short mandala.] But he was looking around at the people and counting very quickly. I am just talking about the external appearance; I cannot judge what he really is. But if that is what was happening mentally then maybe it was not so skillful. Of course, I do it in a similar way, so I cannot criticize. I cannot judge that person's mind, but that was just how it appeared. I am sure he does much more and better mandala offerings than I do! I just mentioned this episode as a joke.

As I mentioned, the important thing is clarity and a large number. If you can imagine a hundred thousand universal mandalas, either by transforming them from the first mandala, or visualized on that mandala, by doing the physical action of offering once you can accumulate merits equal to having actually offered one hundred thousand universes. That is so even though the universe that you are offering is visualized and among the grains there may not be the slightest amount of gold or diamond, not even a small part of the umbrella, the banner or the offering goddesses. If you can imagine more than a hundred thousand mandalas, of course, no question!

12. Prostration

Even placing the palms of your hands together respectfully in front of a holy object such as the merit field has eight good results. I think in the sutra teaching *The Sutra on Offering Butter Lamps*⁵⁵ it is explained that we receive a good body, which includes having perfect organs and a beautiful or handsome form, of high caste, which people respect and obey. Also we will have perfect surroundings and helpers; we will be able to live morally; we will have devotion, or faith, which is the main factor for completing the accumulation of merits (without which we are like a vehicle without fuel unable to function; or like everything not functioning and collapsing in cities if there is no electricity); also we will have a very brave mind for the practice of Dharma and working for other sentient beings. We will have a mind brave in facing up to the delusions. Also, we will be reborn as deva or a human being; we will achieve the arya path, and we will become enlightened.

When prostrating you should keep your feet together. The significance of the mudra of prostration is: the hollow between the palms signifies dharmakaya and the two thumbs inside that hollow signifies rupakaya. These are the two results from completing the two paths—wisdom and method—within our mind. That includes the method and wisdom of the Lesser Vehicle (Paramitayana) path as well as the method and wisdom of the path of the secret mantra

⁵⁵ *Tib: mareme bülwäi do; Wyl: mar me 'bul ba'i mdo.*

(the illusory body and clear light). By practicing the method and wisdom together we achieve the unification of dharmakaya and rupakaya.

Also keeping the two thumbs inside signifies offering a jewel, rather than prostrating with empty hands, with the palms flat, which is regarded as the prostration method of the anti-Buddhists, the followers of a path contradictory to Buddha's path. As the Buddhist mudra of prostration signifies method and wisdom that in itself creates the merit to realize the base (the two truths) and the true path (method and wisdom), and thus rupakaya and dharmakaya.

If you have not generated into the form of a deity and are prostrating with your ordinary body, it is good to visualize it as being as tall as possible—like a mountain. Of course, if you prostrate having generated into a deity, such as Thousand-arm Chenrezig, you create much more merit. Doing it that way is much more skillful. However, you do not have the necessary level of realization to actually transform many bodies with many limbs and with many mouths accumulating merits by saying the prayer of admiration as can high bodhisattvas, but you can visualize. It is explained in the teachings that you should visualize that all the numberless bodies that you have previously taken are around you, in either the deity or human forms, and that you are prostrating together, with all sentient beings around you either in human form or also in deity form, as during the tsog offering—in nature they are suffering but they have a pure appearance.

In Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's lamrim notes from when he was receiving teachings from gurus such as Dagpo Lama Rinpoche it says that rather than prostrating with just one body, if you visualize many bodies you accumulate much more merit. You may find that strange, but it is similar to accumulating merit by mentally transforming offerings, which in itself is offering respect to the merit field. If doubts arise it may be easier to understand if you use that example. As I mentioned earlier, even if while making offerings your attitude is not transformed into virtue and is nothing other than the attitude of seeking happiness in this life, such an action accumulates merit and becomes a cause of the highest, the ultimate happiness, enlightenment, because it is paying respect to the merit field—the Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This is a particular case. If, while there is this incredible chance you do not do this practice through lack of faith or some other reason, as I mentioned earlier, the opportunity and the merit will be lost.

Begin prostrations with this mantra:

OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE / NAMAH SUSHRIYE / NAMA UTAMA SHRIYE
SVAHA

His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche explained the meaning of the mantra to me, but I think at the time I was eating *kaka!* I did not write it down immediately so I have forgotten. I think it is quite uncommon for someone to know the meaning of these mantras. The full-length prostration is according to the tradition of Naropa. It is said in the teachings that if we do it with the recitation of this mantra three times we receive the same merit that we would receive by doing listening, reflecting and meditation practice on the Tripitaka, the three baskets of teachings. Also that if we do three full-length prostrations with this mantra each day we will receive the benefit of being able to achieve the right-seeing path—the wisdom directly perceiving shunyata—in this life. Also we will not be afflicted by disease, spirits or human beings. One of the main advantages of doing prostrations with this mantra is that it increases each prostration one thousand-fold. When we take the pratimoksha vows we do the five-limbed prostration which is according to Vinaya.

To begin with, generate the motivation of bodhicitta very strongly. In order to be able to work for sentient beings we need to achieve the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya—the rupakaya—

without which we cannot work for sentient beings. The main body which works for sentient beings by revealing teachings and guiding them to enlightenment by various means is the rupakaya. We need to achieve the aspect of having the holy signs and exemplifications, so we need to create the cause.

Placing your palms above your crown creates the cause to achieve the holy sign of a Buddha's crown protrusion. The palms at your forehead creates the cause to achieve the *zhalpu*,⁵⁶ the white hair between a buddha's eyebrow which is curled up clockwise and if pulled outwards springs back like rubber. That is one of the major signs. The inconceivable merit we need to accumulate just to receive this holy sign is explained in the lamrim. We have to create so much good karma for each single quality of a buddha's holy body. In the sutra teachings it explains the particular causes of each exemplification and holy sign.

Prostrating in this manner purifies all the obscurations and negative karmas created by actions of body, and the undesirable results and true sufferings which arise from these causes. You achieve the vajra holy body of the merit field which you are prostrating to—if it is Vajradhara, then the holy body of Vajradhara; if Guru Tsongkhapa, that holy body.

Similarly, the mudra at your throat purifies all the obscurations and negative karmas accumulated by speech, and all the results, the undesirable sufferings, get purified, and it is a cause for achieving the vajra holy speech of the merit field.

Placing your palms at your heart purifies all the obscurations and negative karmas accumulated by actions of the mind, and all the undesirable results, and is a cause for achieving the vajra holy mind of the merit field. Your own body, speech and mind get transformed into the merit field's or the guru's vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

As you do the prostrations, white nectar beams are emitted from the merit field. Think that they have purified all your obscurations, as well as those of all your past lives' bodies, and those of all sentient beings. At the time you are prone a replica of the merit field you are prostrating to is absorbed into you as well as into all sentient beings. Feel oneness. Whether you are doing the five-limb or full-length prostrations, your forehead must touch the ground. Then as soon as it touches you should stand up. Gen Jampa Wangdu often used to say that represents getting up from—that is, being released from—samsara. Therefore, you should get up very quickly.

When Geshe-la was living in a cave below His Holiness Ling Rinpoche's house a nun came. I think she may live in Nepal. I think her family is quite wealthy. She and Geshe-la are related, but not closely. She came with lots of offerings including big rounds of butter, to request teachings. What Gen Jampa Wangdu said was, "I don't know anything to teach; the only thing I know is how to do prostrations—I can teach you that." He said, "When you are prostrating, when you lie down you should get up very quickly; that signifies arising from samsara. That's all I know, so take the offerings and go away!" I think she might have insisted very much, but she had to leave anyway.

During his *Lama Chöpa* commentary His Holiness mentioned that it is explained in the lamrim teachings that when we prostrate we should not keep our body bent over, without really standing up; it creates the karma to be born as some type of being which has a bent-over body. It is a preta or something like that. And if we lie down and do not stand up quickly then it is the cause to be born as a snake or other animal without legs which has to get about by sliding the body

⁵⁶ Wyl: *zhal spu*.

along the ground. I am not sure about the cause to be born as a narak being which goes about upside down with its head on the ground, but it may be due to not touching the forehead to the ground. These things happen because such manners of prostrating are disrespectful and the object to whom we prostrate is very powerful.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said, and it is also in sutra teachings, that prostrating without straightening the body creates the karma to be reborn as an animal with a bent body because it is disrespectful to the merit field. His Holiness said that while we are doing prostrations we should do it correctly; “correctly” precludes all the main points which are disrespectful. Keep your fingers together, not separate like a chicken’s or duck’s, and not with fingers bent under into a fist which causes rebirth as an animal with hooves. This was said in sutra teachings as well as by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo.

When you are doing many prostrations sometimes it might be tiring and boring to use just one visualization all the time. Then it is very helpful for the mind to do different meditations during the session. It seems this is helpful for overcoming tiredness or feelings of difficulty because it maintains inspiration. It seems that how well we are able to practice the preliminary practices, such as the prostrations, depends so much on the mind, not so much the body. If it is something that the mind enjoys and wants to do then even if there is some physical difficulty the mind overwhirls that. But if the mind has no interest then even without the need for there to be any great pain in the body it can find something very easily and use that as an excuse.

In the teachings there is no specific advice to think such and such while prostrating, but I think the following will be beneficial for when you do many prostrations every day or when doing a certain number as a preliminary practice before the actual retreat. Begin with the visualization I mentioned above, then after some time think about every single negative karma and every single disturbing thought created that day, or from beginningless rebirths. Think that without having purified even just one negative karma or obscuration you cannot achieve the state of omniscient mind and thus cannot perfectly guide even one sentient being to enlightenment. Thus they will not receive any guidance or benefit from oneself. This one obscuration or disturbing thought is interfering with the achievement of all temporal and ultimate happiness and success for others.

You could start with your own family or the sentient beings who are around you or that it interferes in the welfare of the human beings of this continent. It is so unbearable that it is interfering in even one sentient being’s temporal and ultimate happiness. Then consider the uncountable numbers of human beings and devas and the suffering transmigratory beings whose success in temporal and ultimate happiness it is interfering with. Not only that, but it interferes with the successful attainment of your own temporal and ultimate happiness. Then the desire to purify immediately will be so strong. You will not want to live with the obscuration even for a second. To think that you are prostrating in order to purify that is extremely helpful.

Another thing you could do is meditate on the guru while you are doing prostrations, thinking, “This is the way the guru is guiding me. The gurus have manifested out of dharmakaya as Lama Tsongkhapa and the two disciples because of unbearable compassion for me, who is suffering and obscured.” If you are prostrating to the Thirty-five Buddhas think that they manifested as those buddhas in order to purify all the obscurations and the negative karmas accumulated due to ordinary and impure views and wrong conceptions toward the virtuous friend; the negative karmas and obscurations accumulated due to having worldly concern—seeking and clinging to samsaric perfections; obscurations and negative karmas accumulated due to attachment and the self-cherishing thought; with the ignorance grasping the I as truly existent; and due to ordinary

view and conception. This includes all wrong conceptions from wrong conceptions toward the guru up to the subtle dual view.

Think, “The gurus have manifested like this and are persuading me to do prostrations and in this way they are freeing me from these obstacles, and thus the path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, is being generated within my mind. The whole of the graduated path of the beings of the three capabilities thus gets generated within my mind due to their revealing this method for accumulating extensive merit and purifying the inconceivable obscurations, and persuading me to practice it. Thus they are guiding me to enlightenment. The guru exists to be the object for my accumulation of merit and to reveal these methods for purifying and accumulating merit. Each prostration purifies so many obscurations and negative karmas causing rebirth in the lower realms, as well as obscurations and negative karmas causing me to remain in samsara and to fall into the blissful state of peace, the lower nirvana.”

Prostrate with the awareness, “This is the way my virtuous friends are guiding me to enlightenment.” It is very effective. If you relate to Chenrezig in this way during *nyung nä* retreats it makes tears come without control. That itself is meditation on kindness. How kind the virtuous friends are! It brings it all together, so it is very effective. The guidance manifesting each time you do a prostration is unbelievable.

It is mentioned in the *Lankavatara Sutra* that each time you prostrate it creates the unbelievable merit to be born as a wheel-turning king the number of times equal to the number of atoms of the earth covered by your body from the surface to where the earth ends. In the teachings it says to the “golden base,” however, to wherever the earth finishes. It includes even the small parts of the body such as the hairs and nails. This does not mean that you must be reborn as a wheel-turning king—Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is giving us an idea of how much merit we accumulate because to be born even once as a wheel-turning king requires the accumulation of inconceivable merit. Actually many of the wheel-turning kings are bodhisattvas and during their lives they not only have great wealth and perfect surroundings and power, but they again accumulate unbelievable merit with respect to holy objects and sentient beings. So we should think like that.

Therefore, if you prostrate at the highest place it is better; there is unbelievable profit! Once when I was in my room at Kopan it occurred to me that there would be a big difference in doing prostrations on top of the hill, where Lama planned to build a stupa. Maybe you should build a house on the top of Mount Everest for practicing the preliminaries. Such knowledge is given by the guru, so each time you prostrate the inconceivable merit is given to you by the guru. The causes from guru devotion up to enlightenment are given to you by the guru. So you can think of this related to [the awareness of the kindness of the guru]. The second method is to think, “This is how the guru guides me,” and to remember his kindness.

The third thing is to remember, as in the above example, how much merit you accumulate with each prostration. After each prostration you should dedicate all this merit—the cause—and its result—happiness, including enlightenment—completely, to every sentient being. Sentient beings are infinite so the merit you create is doubled and tripled, as you can do with money. It makes the mind so unbelievably happy to be giving something to the sentient beings. If you relate to prostrating in this manner suddenly strong compassion will arise, such that you will cry extensively. You will see how extremely kind sentient beings are to you, that they are suffering so much and that you have not done anything to repay them because of your selfishness. Even if it has been difficult to prostrate, the tiredness will disappear and you will want to do more and do them faster.

When a very discouraged mind arises it is very useful to think, “Even I die right now because of prostrating it’s OK. I have died during so many lifetimes because of creating negative karma, not from practicing Dharma. So even if I die now through bearing the hardships of practicing Dharma by doing these preliminaries, it’s OK, as my death will be worthwhile. Anyway, death will definitely happen—it is sure—and I can die at any time. So if I die now by practicing Dharma it is very worthwhile.” Thinking in such ways does not allow space in the mind for laziness, for excuses.

While you are prostrating remember and be aware of the infinite merits from each prostration and then dedicate every single merit and every single good result—temporal and ultimate happiness—to each sentient being after each prostration.

BENEFITS OF THE PRAYER TO THE THIRTY-FIVE CONFSSIONAL BUDDHAS

It begins:

I whose name is (say your name) always go for refuge to the guru...

You mention your name where it says *da ming* in Tibetan. This causes some effect in the mind. In one way you could feel sad because you have created negative karma and are obscured. In another way you could feel happy because of having met a reliable object of refuge.

Reciting the first Buddha’s (Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s) name purifies 40,000 eons of negative karma. Sometimes it is said that 80,000 eons is purified.

Saying Buddha Dorje Nyingpö’s name, 10,000 eons of negative karma is purified.

RIN CHEN Ö THRÖ LA: 10,000 eons.

LU WANG GI GYÄL PO LA: 1,000 eons.

PA WÖI DE LA: 1,000.

PA PÄL GYE LA: 2,000. It is like inflation! Like the stock market! I’m joking.

RIN CHEN ME LA: 2,000.

RIN CHEN DA Ö LA: 8,000.

THONG WA DÖN YÖ LA: It is not clear here.

RIN CHEN DA WA LA: Purifies the five uninterrupted negative karmas

DRI MA ME PA LA: Purifies the negative karmas near to the uninterrupted ones. For example, stepping over monks robes or the shadow of, or animals belonging to, the guru. Also the shadows of stupas.

PÄL JIN LA: The negative karmas accumulated with anger.

TSHANG PA LA: The negative karmas accumulated with attachment.

TSHANG PÄ JIN LA: 10,000 eons.

CHU LHA LA: 1,000 eons.

CHU LHÄI LHA LA: 5,000 eons.

PÄL ZANG LA: 5,000 eons.

TSÄN DÄN PÄL LA: 7,000 eons.

ZI JI THA YÄ LA: 7,000 eons.

Ö PÄL LA: Immeasurable benefits.

NYA NGÄN ME PÄI PÄL LA: All negative karmas accumulated with ignorance.

SE ME KYI BU LA: The imprints of negative karma.

ME TOG PÄL LA: The negative karmas accumulated with the body.

SHANG PÄI Ö ZER NAM PAR RÖL PÄ NGÖN PAR KHYEN PA LA: The negative karmas accumulated with speech.

PÄ MÄI Ö ZER NAM PAR RÖL PÄ NGÖN PAR KHYEN PA LA: The negative karmas accumulated with the mind.
 NOR PÄL LA: The negative karmas accumulated with respect to the Sangha by the Sangha, and possibly by lay persons.
 DRÄN PÄI PÄL LA: The negative karmas accumulated by criticizing holy beings.
 TSHÄN PÄL SHIN TU YONG DRAG LA: The negative karmas accumulated with jealousy.
 WANG PÖI TOG GI GYÄL TSHÄN GYI GYÄL PO LA: The negative karmas accumulated with pride.
 SHIN TU NAM PAR NÖN PÄI PÄL LA: It says subtle vices, karmas, mainly slander.
 YÜL LÄ SHIN TU NAM PAR GYÄL WA LA: The negative karmas accumulated with all the delusions.
 NAM PAR NÖN PÄ SHEG PÄI PÄL LA: The negative karmas from causing others to create negative karma.
 KÜN NÄ NANG WA KÖ PÄI PÄL LA: The negative karmas accumulated by rejoicing in the negative karmas created by oneself and others.
 RIN CHEN PÄ MÄI NAM PAR NÖN PA LA: The negative karma of avoiding Dharma.
 DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ RIN PO CHE DANG PÄ MA LA RAB TU ZHUG PA RI WANG GI GYÄL PO LA: Purifies the negative karma from degenerating samaya by criticising the guru.

When you prostrate to the Thirty-five Buddhas, the visualization to use is that from the *Ganden Lha Gyäma* practice. In the *Lama Chöpa* merit field there are the sutra aspect buddhas visualized below the deities of the four classes of tantra. These include the thousand buddhas of this fortunate era, the seven Medicine Buddhas and the Thirty-five Buddhas. From Lama Tsongkhapa's heart, beams are emitted due to his unbearable compassion; on the tip of each beam is a throne decorated with pearls upraised up by an elephant. Pearls are white, and according to Lama's advice the purification is more powerful if white is visualized, due to a dependent arising. Here Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is at the heart of Lama Losang, so you do not have to visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha again.

In this instance in the first row there are six buddhas, then four rows of seven. So the first row will consist of six (or seven) buddhas in Akshobhya aspect—in the same position as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the right hand controlling the earth, the left in the mudra of concentration. They are blue, except Luwang Gyälpo whose face and neck are white, while the rest of his holy body is blue. The next seven are in Vairochana aspect, and white color. According to His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche, Vairochana's mudra is [two fists, one above the other, with index fingers pointing upwards, the upper fist holding the index finger of the lower.] Sometimes you may see old paintings in which the mudra is like this. The next seven are in the aspect of Ratnasambhava. The left hand is in the mudra of concentration, the right granting sublime realization. The next seven are like Amitabha, with both hands in the mudra of concentration. The next seven are in the mudra of giving protection, or refuge, or guidance. The beams emitting from Guru Lama Tsongkhapa do not radiate straight out, but downwards.

Since reciting the name of each buddha has incredible benefits such as many thousands of eons of negative karma being purified, as you prostrate to each one it is very good if you can recite his name as many times as possible. If you can do that it is an incredibly skillful way of purifying quickly. A replica of the first buddha is absorbed, and then as you get up start reciting the name of the second one, Dechen Nyingpo. If you prostrate to each one three times it adds up to more than one hundred prostrations. That way it is easy to count without having to concentrate on counting beads or something. Also, you make prostrations with the refuge formula *la ma la kyab su chi o...*

Visualizing the Thirty-five Buddhas in this way is the simplest method. Another visualization is that which appeared to Lama Tsongkhapa while he was doing one of his preliminary practices for accumulating merit and purify obscurations by prostrating to the Thirty-five Buddhas. I think he did twenty times one hundred thousand prostrations—I do not remember exactly—in the cave called Wolka Cholung in Tibet. In those aspects they are holding different implements and so on. If you can remember how the Thirty-five Buddhas manifested to Lama Tsongkhapa you can do it that way. If you cannot comprehend that then you can do in the simple way, the thirty-five divided into the five dhyani buddhas' aspects.

After you have finished reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas you can also recite the prayer to the seven Medicine Buddhas. In these degenerate times praying to the Medicine Buddhas causes our prayers to quickly succeed due to the pledge they made in the past when they were training in the bodhisattva's path. They made many prayers for sentient beings and promised to accomplish all prayers, therefore they grant blessings very quickly. During the session do however many prostrations you intend doing and at the end of each session recite the last part of the prayer. In that way the remedy of the four powers is done perfectly.

I think three points on preliminary practices which Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explained in the lamrim are particularly effective for the mind. Our mind is like rock or iron and so it's difficult to purify and difficult to subdue, difficult to fertilize. Therefore, it is difficult for the crops of realization of the graduated path to enlightenment to grow. Therefore, it is very useful for the mind to hear advice based on some of the points from Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's lamrim. He said: "In order to accumulate merit you should do each prostration correctly, not just very quickly in order to complete high numbers."

According to Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition when doing the preliminary practices, the totals such as one hundred thousand and so on are not regarded as the main thing. Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo advises that even if you don't do many, the few that are done should be done correctly. He goes on to say: "Some people say that they have done the preliminary practices after having done one hundred thousand prostrations, and they have taken it very easy." There are two ways of interpreting "taken it easy," but what he means is that they have not been aware of the correct manner of doing them, have not concentrated on the object of prostration, the merit field, and have not been aware of the motivation. He means they were done imperfectly. Perfect prostrations are not easily done. So, we should not do that. He is saying you should not be too concerned about the numbers: "Prostrations should be done correctly, and if possible, many should be done."

13. Water Bowl Offerings

His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche explained to us during the *Jorchö* commentary that when you clean the bowls you should use a clean towel. The significance of offering seven water bowls is to create the cause to achieve the seven limbs, aspects or qualities of the Vajradhara state—enlightenment. But that does not mean that you cannot offer more, thinking that offering more is some kind of interference.

If you do not have many water bowls it does not matter. The ascetic meditators used their own wooden food bowl. I think it was Je Drukhangpa, a lineage lama of lamrim, the guru of Phurcho Jangön Rinpoche, and who is regarded as an embodiment of Maitreya Buddha, lived

an ascetic life practicing in a cave. He did not own texts and the necessary robes—the *chögö* and *dingwa*—nor keep many material possessions. When he ate, he took his bowl from the altar and ate his food from that. Then he cleaned it well and filled it with water and offered it at the altar. For those living ascetic lives, not keeping many possessions has a great purpose. If we are not living a strictly ascetic life we should use our possessions to accumulate as much merit as possible; then we are taking the essence from that which is essenceless.

When cleaning the bowls what you should think is the same as when cleaning the room. I do not remember word for word what Rinpoche explained, however when you clean the room you should think that the broom represents method and wisdom, the whole path to enlightenment. Think the same in regard to the towel, and you can think that you are purifying the two obscurations of yourself as well as all sentient beings. If you have incense, light it and hold the bowls over it as a purification. Then stack the bowls.

Before putting the bowls on the altar, you should put some water in them. There is a reason for this. You may have read Milarepa's life-story. When Milarepa made an offering to Marpa of, I think, a big copper pot, he offered it empty. It is said that he had to live on only nettles and bear great hardships in regard to food and the necessities of life because of the dependent arising due to that inauspicious offering. Marpa, knowing that it was a little inauspicious, used a skillful method and asked Mila to fill the pot with butter and wax and make a light offering. That auspicious offering was the cause for Milarepa to be able to realize shunyata and generate the clear light and illusory body in that life. We can understand the purpose from stories like that; otherwise it looks like nothing more than just a rule saying we have to do this and this. So, you should not put empty containers in front of the altar; similarly, when you make offerings to the virtuous teachers put something in the container.

Fill one bowl with water, then pour most of it from that one into the next bowl, keeping a little in the first. Then again from the second one pour most into the third, keeping a little in the second. After you have put some water in the last bowl recite OM AH HUM three times to bless the water, the same as with the inner offering.

If you are a gelong and offering incense you should immediately remember: "I'm doing this for Dharma practice; I'm doing it for other sentient beings." The reason for remembering at the time is to get permission. Saying the relevant prayers in the morning is a tradition from Panchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen [the first Panchen Lama]. It is a method for somebody who forgets to seek permission at the actual time of the action to somehow receive fewer vices. In this way you get permission in the morning to do actions during the day such as to sing or touch and keep things in your house, to keep more food than is needed that day, to make fire and cook, to eat foods which have been gathered. I am not sure that if you have done the prayers in the morning but at the time of actually doing these things it is alright to have worldly concern and not think it is for the sake of other sentient beings, for Dharma reasons. I think that to remember at the actual time is the main thing: that is why it is called *du ten*—remembering at the time. So, when a monk lights incense, he should remember the gelong vow immediately, and think that it is for the sake of sentient beings, for Dharma practice. Then you will not degenerate the vows or receive vices.

When you light incense or a butter lamp or some light, just before you offer it recite OM AH HUM each time, then offer it. There are various interferers, three hundred and sixty or something different *dons*, who take the essence. Maybe that is like their enjoyments. If you offer without blessing you do receive the merit, but there is some interference in regard to the

offering—it affects the mind, making it unclear or unstable. In order for these things to not happen you recite the mantra OM AH HUM and bless the offerings.

You should cover your mouth in order to not pollute the offerings with a smelly breath. His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche said the scarf should be white. We see the servants of the high lamas such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama cover their mouths with a white cloth or scarf when serving tea and so on. Also the offerings are carried high. So when you make offerings in front of an altar you should not think, “I am just putting water in front of clay statues or pictures.” You should act as if you are in front of a king or high lama and serving him. Due to our karmic obscurations we do not see the images as real, but Chakrasamvara is there, Tara is there, all the buddhas are there. The whole merit field is there, but due to karmic obscurations we do not see them. The karma that we have at the moment is to see merely pictures and statues of the deities. This is explained in the lamrim teachings, as well as by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo, I think, and His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, His Holiness Ling Rinpoche, as well as Serkong Rinpoche.

The bowls should be placed not touching nor too far apart. If too far apart then due to that inauspiciousness or dependent arising, you will be distant from the virtuous teacher in the future. So do not place them far apart, but also not touching. I think due to the dependent arising from placing them too close you will have a dull mind, without sharp intelligence. You should place them the distance of one rice grain apart. In regard to pouring the water, His Holiness Zong Rinpoche used to advise to first pour slowly, then faster, and then again slowly. Doing it that way does not make a loud splashing noise. If you put too much water into the bowl and it overflows, you will have intelligence, but it will not be stable. You will easily forget or will not have a clear mind; things will get mixed up. You will not remember words or the meanings of things, or the meanings will get mixed up. Also it may affect your moral conduct so that it degenerates. Some bowls made in Nepal have lines to indicate how much water to offer in the bowl. About one grain-size of space should be left at the top, rather than filling it completely. That also makes it easier to not make a mess when you remove the bowls from the altar.

You can recite the mantra OM AH HUM again while you are offering, or the long mantra for blessing and multiplying the offerings [Offering Cloud Mantra]:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SARA PRAMARDANE TATHAGATAYA /
ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA OM VAJRE VAJRE /
MAHA VAJRE / MAHA TEJA VAJRE / MAHA VIDYA VAJRE / MAHA
BODHICITTA VAJRE / MAHA BODHI MANDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE /
SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SVAHA (3x)

The benefit of reciting this is that not only are the offerings blessed, but clouds of offerings are received in front of each of the beings in the merit field. You can think in this way even at the very beginning of the offering. Whether you have Chakrasamvara or Guru Shakyamuni or Vajrasattva or whatever as your field of merit, think that what they see is nectar. To you it is water, but what the buddhas see is nectar. For a preta it is blood and pus, for us it is water; even the devas see it as nectar, so without question it is nectar for the buddhas who have completed the merit of transcendental wisdom and method. Think, “I’m offering them the nectar which appears to them.” While you are offering think that whatever pictures or statues of guru-deities you have are the embodiment of all buddhas of the ten directions, the embodiment of the guru, of all three refuges, and that you are offering to all of them and that it generates infinite bliss in their minds. As explained in the section on making offerings, offer the water bowls to every single holy object and actual living buddha and bodhisattva in the ten directions. You can

concentrate on this while you are offering. As you are filling the bowls, with your mouth recite the mantra for blessing, and with your mind offer to all of them.

After you have finished a set of offerings you can do the same meditation of offering over again.

His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche used to advise that at the end you should dedicate the merit in this way: “May this merit from making offerings...”—and all the merit accumulated by me and all other sentient beings—“not be experienced by me but rather only by other sentient beings.”

Rinpoche’s specific advice is to pray that the merit and whatever resultant happiness comes from that will be received and experienced by other sentient beings, and that you will not experience it. You should think like that. Each time dedicate for the generation of bodhicitta with the prayer *jang chub sem chog rinpoche...* [“To Actualize Bodhicitta”] even if you do other dedications; then it becomes a practice of the five powers of thought training. Accumulating merit in order to generate bodhicitta is the practice of the power of the white seed. You should dedicate the merit to achieve enlightenment quickly and more quickly for the sake of all sentient beings in whatever way you know.

When you do a hundred thousand water bowl offerings offer them inside if it is easier, if not then at the beach! Fill the whole beach with bowls. Then maybe the next day you will be taken to an institution or a psychologist. If it is difficult to bring water repeatedly from some distance then go to a place having water such as a river and set up the bowls on a big board. That may be easier. When it rains it may be even easier as you will not have to pour water. You just put the bowls out! When you clean the bowls each day you should clean them well, not just patting them with the towel. You must clean them well, not leaving them damp. Not doing it just like giving them a sort of blessing. If there are any stains you should try to clean them with sand or other cleaning materials.

You can begin with the refuge and bodhicitta prayer *sang gyä chö dang...* Then on the basis of the *Lama Chöpa* or the elaborate *Ganden Lha Gyäma*, make the offerings by setting out the fifty or one hundred or more bowls at the offering section of the seven-limb practice. Then there is a dedication at the end. Then you pour out the water and rinse the bowls with water. Then you begin again with *sang gyä chö dang ...* and then do the offering section of the seven-limb practice and again do the meditation of offering. Then again the dedication, and then pour out the water. And perform the offering again. “Beautifully performed, without being crooked” could mean performing the external offering in a symmetrical way; but the main thing is to do it without having a crooked mind, which means you make the offering without being stained by worldly concern.

14. Dedication

Please put whatever has been explained into practice as much as possible. Please dedicate all the three times’ merits accumulated by you and all other sentient beings, especially the merits of having read this, to always finding a perfect human rebirth and finding a Mahayana virtuous friend who can show the complete path to enlightenment; and by correct devotion to the virtuous friend to quickly achieve the state of omniscient mind.

I think that is all. Besides that, I have nothing else to say. I rejoice in the effort you put into your practice to develop your mind and to benefit others. And I appreciate very much whatever you

can do with the capability of your body, speech and mind to benefit others at the same time. There is nothing to be depressed about because all the opportunities are there—it is just a matter of whether we make the determination or not. The whole thing depends on the decision; on one thing—determination. Whether we talk about sutra or tantra, the whole path to enlightenment, samsara and enlightenment, depends on your determination, which way you decide. All development depends on the decision. I find this word decision very powerful. If you do not make a determination in your mind, nothing happens; if you do make a determination, everything comes: progress and happiness. It depends on which you decide. There are opportunities, everything is available from your own side, from the body's side, from the side of the place. I myself cannot benefit you at all, but there are many other virtuous teachers, so we have incredible opportunities. The opportunities are all around you, rainfalls of them. So I do not see any point in being depressed. The only thing is which way you decide from your own side, that is all.

As I mentioned, there is no negative karma that cannot be purified. Firstly, as you have heard from the nine examples in *Uttaratantra* that the mind is not oneness with the delusions. So from that point of view there is nothing to be depressed about. And secondly, there are rainfalls of opportunities to purify the mind in order to not experience the results. So it is just a matter of whether you take the opportunities or not. Since there is no negative karma at all which cannot be purified, I do not think there is any reason to be really upset. If you do not decide and do not do it, that is cheating yourself; it is a loss for you because you are causing yourself a loss of happiness. You have great freedom, and the other sentient beings are giving you incredible freedom, and so many virtuous teachers are giving you clouds of opportunities, therefore you should be happy.

Please put whatever has been explained into practice as much as possible and dedicate the merits of reading this *Ganden Lha Gyäma* commentary, and reflecting and meditating on it, for the understanding of the complete teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa to arise within your mind, and for you to be able to spread them to the minds of all sentient beings by yourself. That covers everything in the prayer. And may that should come about without the delay of a year, a month, or even a day—right in this second.

A student who was at Kopan many years ago wrote from Canada saying that she has a crisis each year, and it turned out that the *Ganden Lha Gyäma* practice was very beneficial. Reciting many hundreds of thousands of *miḡtsemas* is very powerful for anyone who goes crazy or is harmed by spirits and so on, depending on how great the obstacle is. Also some people wanted to know the secret *miḡtsema* practice and many people want to do the preliminary practices as a preparation for the three-year retreat. So even though Dharamsala is full of lamas who could explain it well, there are difficulties such as not finding translators or if there are translators, they are not satisfactory. Seeing all these difficulties I felt it would be beneficial. I have done no practice and have no understanding myself, but I thought to say the few words which I have heard, and the few dry words that there are. So that is how it happened. Basically it was for the long term, as there will be many people who will do the preliminary practices and also some people plan to do a three-year retreat. So I hope it might be of benefit now and in the future for those who want to practice.