

We Need Bodhicitta

Lama Yeshe

I think it is absolutely essential for us to have loving kindness towards others. There is no doubt about this. Loving kindness is the essence of bodhicitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific or psychological disagreement with this. With bodhicitta, there's no East-West conflict. This path is the most comfortable, most perfect, one hundred percent uncomplicated one, free of any danger of leading people to extremes. Without bodhicitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realizations don't come.

Why is bodhicitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have a good meditation but don't have bodhicitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss: "Me, me; I want more, I want more." Then the good experience disappears completely. Grasping is the greatest distraction to experiencing single-pointed intensive awareness in meditation. And with it, we are always dedicated to our own happiness: "Me, me I'm miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I'll meditate." It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results – peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss – just don't come.

Also, without bodhicitta it is very difficult to collect merits. You create them and immediately destroy them; by afternoon, the morning's merits have gone. It's like cleaning a room and an hour later making it dirty again. You make your mind clean, then right away you mess it up – not a very profitable business. If you want to succeed in the business of collecting merits, you must have bodhicitta. With bodhicitta you become so precious – like gold, like diamonds; you become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

From the Western, materialistic point of view, we'd think it was great if a rich person

said, "I want to make charity. I'm going to offer \$100 to everybody in the entire world." Even if that person gave with great sincerity, his or her merit would be nothing compared with just the thought, "I wish to actualize bodhicitta for the sake of sentient beings, and I'll practice the six perfections as much as I can." That's why I always say, actualization of bodhicitta is the most perfect path you can take. The best Dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhicitta.

Remember the story of the Kadampa geshe who saw a man circumambulating a stupa? He said, "What are you doing?" and the man answered, "Circumambulating." So the geshe said, "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?" Next time the geshe saw the man he was prostrating, and when he again asked what he was doing, the man replied, "One hundred thousand prostrations." "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?" asked the geshe. Anyway, the story goes on, but the point is that just doing religious-looking actions like circumambulation and prostration isn't necessarily practicing dharma. What we have to do is transform our attachment and self-cherishing, and if we haven't changed our mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke. Even if you try to practice tantric meditations, unless you've changed within, you won't succeed. Dharma means a complete change of attitude – that's what really brings you inner happiness, that is the true Dharma, not the words you say.

Bodhicitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation, the most comfortable path, the most substantial path – definite, not wishy-washy. Sometimes your meditation is not solid; you just space out. Bodhicitta meditation means you really want to change your mind and actions and transform your whole life.

We are all involved in human relationships with each other. Why do we sometimes say, "I love you," and sometimes, "I hate you?" Where does this up-and-down mind come from? From the self-cherishing

thought – a complete lack of bodhicitta. What we are saying is, “I hate you because I’m not getting any satisfaction from you. You hurt me; you don’t give me pleasure. That’s the whole thing: I – my ego, my attachment – am not getting satisfaction from you, therefore I hate you. What a joke! All the difficulties in inter-personal relationships come from not having bodhicitta, from not having changed our minds.

So, you see, just meditating is not enough. If that Kadampa geshe saw you sitting in meditation he’d say, “What are you doing? Wouldn’t it be better if you practiced dharma?” Circumambulating isn’t dharma, prostrating isn’t dharma, meditating isn’t dharma. My goodness, what is dharma, then? This is what happened to the man in the story. He couldn’t think of anything else to do. Well, the best dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhicitta.

You can prove scientifically that bodhicitta is the best practice to do. Our self-cherishing thought is the root of all human problems. It makes our lives difficult and miserable. The solution to self-cherishing, its antidote, is the mind that is its complete opposite – bodhicitta. The self-cherishing mind is worried about only me, me – the self-existent I. Bodhicitta substitutes others for self.

It creates space in your mind. Then even if your dearest friend forgets to give you a Christmas present, you don’t mind. “Ah, well. This year she didn’t give me my chocolate. It doesn’t matter.” Anyway, your human relationships are not for chocolate, not for sensory pleasures. Something much deeper can come from our being together, working together.

With bodhicitta you become so precious – like gold, like diamonds. You become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

If you want to be really, really happy, it isn’t enough just to space out in meditation. Many people who have spent years alone in meditation have finished up the worse for it.

Coming back into society, they have freaked out. They haven’t been able to take contact with other people again, because the peaceful environment they created was an artificial condition, still a relative phenomenon without solidity. With bodhicitta, no matter where you go, you will never freak out. The more you are involved with people the more pleasure you get. People become the resource of your pleasure. You are living for people. Even though some still try to take advantage of you, you understand: “Well, in the past I took advantage of them many times too.” So it doesn’t bother you.

Thus bodhicitta is the most perfect way to practice dharma, especially in our twentieth-century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhicitta you will definitely grow.

If you take a proper look deep into your heart you will see that one of the main causes of your dissatisfaction is the fact that you are not helping others as best you can. When you realize this you’ll be able to say to yourself, “I must develop myself so that I can help others satisfactorily. By improving myself I can definitely help.” Thus you have more strength and energy to meditate, to keep pure morality and do other good things. You have energy, “Because I want to help others.” That is why Lama Tsongkhapa said that bodhicitta is the foundation of all enlightened realizations.

Also, bodhicitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech and mind – your entire life into positivity and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. I think this is definitely true. You can see, it’s not difficult. For example look at other people’s faces. Some people, no matter what problems and suffering they are enduring, when they go out they always try to appear happy and show a positive aspect to others. Have you noticed this or not? But other people always go about miserable, and angry. What do you think about that? I honestly think that it indicates a fundamental difference in the way these two kinds of people think. Human beings are actually very simple. Some are a disaster within and it shows on their faces

and makes those whom they meet feel sick. Others, even though they are suffering intensely, always put on a brave face because they are considerate of the way others feel.

I believe this is very important. What's the use of putting out a miserable vibration? Just because you feel miserable, why make others unhappy too? It doesn't help. You should try to control your emotions, speak evenly and so forth. Sometimes when people are suffering they close off from others, but you can still feel their miserable vibration. This doesn't help – others with even momentary happiness forget about leading them to enlightenment. To help the people around you, you have to maintain a happy, peaceful vibration. This is very practical, very worthwhile. Sometimes we talk too much about enlightenment and things like that. We have a long way to go to such realizations. Forget about enlightenment, I don't care about buddhahood – just be practical. If you can't help others, at least don't give them any harm, stay neutral.

Anyway, what I'm supposed to be telling you here is that bodhicitta is like atomic energy to transform your mind. This is absolutely, scientifically true, and not something that you have to believe with blind religious faith. Everybody nowadays is afraid of nuclear war, but if we all had bodhicitta, wouldn't we all be completely secure? Of course we would. With bodhicitta you control all desire to defeat or kill others. And, as Lama Je Tsongkhapa said, when you have bodhicitta all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and pour down upon you like rain. At present all we attract is misfortune because all we have is the self-cherishing thought. But with bodhicitta we'll attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said recently, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow! What did His Holiness mean! He was saying that, in a way, bodhicitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present,

usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure, and what we have is easily lost. With "great selfishness" you help others and you help yourself; with small it's always me, me, me and it is easy to lose everything.

Remember, Atisha had over 150 teachers? He respected them all, but when he heard the name of one – Lama Dharmarakshita – he would come out in goose-bumps. He explained this by saying, "I received many teachings from many, many great gurus, but for me, Lama Dharmarakshita, who gave me the bodhicitta ordination and teachings on the method and wisdom of bodhicitta and the six paramitas, was the most helpful for my life." This is very true. Sometimes techniques of deity meditation are extremely difficult, but bodhicitta meditation is so simple, so incredibly profound and real. That's why Atisha would shake when he heard the name of his main teacher of bodhicitta.

The main point, then, is that when you contact Buddhadharma you should conquer the mad elephant of your self-cherishing mind. If the dharma you hear helps you diminish your self-cherishing even a little, it has been worthwhile. But if the teachings you have taken have had no effect on your selfishness, then from the Mahayana point of view, even if you can talk intellectually on the entire lam-rim, they have not been must use at all.

Do you recall the story of Shantideva and how people used to put him down? They used to call him *Du-she-sum-pa*, which means one who knows how to do only three things: eating, sleeping and excreting. This was a very bad thing to call someone, especially a monk. But that's all that people could see him doing. However, he had bodhicitta, so whatever he did, even ordinary things, was of greatest benefit to others. Lying down, peacefully, he would meditate with great concern for the welfare of all living beings, and many times, out of compassion, he would cry for them. Westerners need that kind of practice. Fundamentally we are lazy. Well, maybe not lazy, but when we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left. So, when you come home from

work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhicitta. This is most worthwhile. Much better than rushing in speedily, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space. It is much better to have a quiet, blissful cup of coffee, and don't pressure yourself either; that too is very bad. Don't punish yourself when you are too tired to meditate: "I should be meditating; I am very bad." You destroy yourself like this. Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself you will become gentle with others so don't push. Pushing doesn't work for me, that's why I tell others not to force themselves. We are dealing with the mind, not rocks and concrete; it is something organic.

In a way, bodhicitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise.

The Western environment offers lots of suffering conditions that act as causes for our actualizing bodhicitta, so life there can be very worthwhile. For example, it is much better to subdue an adversary with bodhicitta than with a knife or gun. When attacked, you can practice loving kindness. We could also do this in the monasteries of Tibet, where there were often horrible monks. Don't think that Tibet was full of only holy people – we had unbelievably wild monks there that nobody in authority could subdue! If you would try to control them wrathfully they would get only more aggressive. But arya bodhisattva monks, people who had completely given themselves up for others, would treat them with loving kindness, and the wild monks would calm down completely. They would feel, "This man loves me; he has great compassion. He has given up everything for others and has

nothing to lose." In that way aggressive people would be subdued, without authority but with bodhicitta. There are many stories about this kind of thing, but I'm not going to tell them now. Perhaps you think they're funny, but it's true – you can conquer your enemies, both internal and external, with loving kindness and bodhicitta. It is most worthwhile and there's no contradiction bodhicitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment.

In his text Lama Choepa, the Panchen Lama says, "Self-cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, and holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore bless me to change self-cherishing into concern for all others." This is not some deep philosophical theory but a very simple statement. You know from your own life's experiences without needing a Tibetan text's explanations that your self-cherishing thought is the cause of all your confusion and frustration. This evolution of suffering is found not only in Tibetan culture but in yours as well.

And the Panchen Lama goes on to say that we should look at what the Buddha did. He gave up his self-attachment and attained all the sublime realizations. But look at us we are obsessed with me, me, me and have realized nothing but unending misery. This is very clear isn't it? Therefore you should know clean clear how this works. Get rid of the false concept of self-cherishing and you'll be free of all misery and dissatisfaction. Concern yourself for the welfare of all others and wish for them to attain the highest realizations such as bodhicitta and you'll find all happiness and satisfaction.

Bodhicitta is the most perfect way to practise dharma, especially in our twentieth century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhicitta you will definitely grow.

You people are young, intelligent and not satisfied with what you have in your own countries. That's why you are seeking further

afield. And now you have found that most worthwhile of all things, bodhicitta.

But it is not an easy thing. Easy things bore you quickly. It is quite difficult, but there's no way you'll get bored practicing it. People need to be most intelligent to actualize bodhicitta, some, though, have no room for it. "Forget about yourself and have a little concern for others?" they'll ask. "That's not my culture." It is very difficult to change holding yourself dear into holding others dear instead – the most difficult task you can undertake. But it is the most worthwhile and brings the greatest satisfaction.

After practicing some meditations, such as impermanence and death, for a month you'll say, "I'm tired of that meditation." But you'll never get tired of meditating on bodhicitta. It is so deep; a universal meditation. You'll never get tired of bodhicitta.

You have heard of many deities that you can meditate on, many deities to be initiated into – Chenrezig and the rest. What are they all for? I'll tell you – for gaining bodhicitta. As a matter of fact, all tantric meditations are for the development of strong bodhicitta. That is the purpose of your consciousness manifesting as a being with 1000 arms so that you can lend a hand to a thousand suffering beings. If you don't like to manifest yourself this way you can relate the meditation to your own culture and see yourself as Jesus. Avalokiteshvara and Jesus are the same: completely selfless and completely devoted to serving others.

Remember what happened the first time that Avalokiteshvara took the bodhisattva ordination? He vowed to guide all universal living beings to enlightenment from behind, like a shepherd. "I do not want to realize enlightenment until first I have led all mother sentient beings there first. That will be my satisfaction." He worked for years and years, leading thousands of beings to enlightenment, but when he checked to see what was happening he found there were still countless more. So again he worked for years and years and again when he checked there were still so many left, and this cycle was repeated until finally he was fed up and

thought to himself, "For aeons and aeons I have struggled to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment but there are still so many left. I think it is impossible to fulfil my vow." And because of the intensity of his emotion his head split into eleven pieces. Then Amitabha Buddha came and offered to help, and blessed him to be successful.

So I'm sure some of you people can be like Chenrezig. The main thing is to have strong motivation. Even if it comes strongly only once, it is extremely powerful. It is very rare to have this kind of thought. A mere flash is so worthwhile; to have it for a minute for a day...

How to Destroy Self-cherishing

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

EXCHANGING SELF FOR OTHERS

The thought of bodhichitta is unbelievable. It makes everything other than working for sentient beings boring and unsatisfying. There is no real interest or enjoyment in life apart from this. Anything else is meaningless, empty, essenceless.

Real happiness and satisfaction start when you live your life for others. You retreat for others, practice Dharma for others, study for others, work in the office for others, cook for others. When your attitude is transformed so that you do everything for others, to pacify their suffering and obtain their happiness, there is real satisfaction and peace in your heart.

When you are cherishing yourself, thinking only of yourself – “How can I be happy? How can I be free of problems?” – there is no happiness in your heart, only worry and fear. You see only problems, and your mind is not relaxed. But in the next moment, when you change your object of concern to another sentient being – even if it is only one other sentient being – suddenly your heart is released from self-cherishing, like limbs released from chains.

As soon as your object of concern changes from yourself to someone else, your heart is released from the bondage of self-cherishing thought. As soon as you change the object of your cherishing, there is suddenly peace in the very depths of your heart. Right in the very moment that your mind changes from self-cherishing to cherishing others, there is liberation, freedom from the tight bondage of the selfish mind.

Realizing that miserable conditions come from the superstitions of their own unsubdued minds, Dharma practitioners use these conditions to destroy their own superstitions. You don't have to accept what self-cherishing thought gives you. You can take the sufferings and problems of others

upon yourself. Instead of blaming someone else so that you can feel happy and comfortable, instead of letting someone else experience the suffering, loss, unhappiness, hardships, bad reputation, criticism, punishment or whatever, you take all these difficulties upon yourself and give the victory to the other person. This is the very practical Mahayana teaching of exchanging self for others, renouncing the self and cherishing others.

Here, you give all the problems given to you by your self-cherishing thought back to the self-cherishing thought. Like this, you use your problems to destroy the origin of your sufferings, your own delusions and superstitions. As it says in *Lama Chöpa*: “Please bless me to see that this chronic disease of cherishing myself is the door to all sufferings, and bless me to put all the blame on the self-cherishing thought in order to destroy the great demon of self-cherishing.” Self-cherishing is the source of all undesirable experiences and obstacles: disease or failure in business, education or Dharma practice. Following self-cherishing thought brings only problems and failure. Instead of blaming some outside condition or harboring in your heart all the harms given by the self-cherishing thought, use them “to destroy the great demon of self-cherishing.” Not only do you put all the blame on the self-cherishing thought, but on top of that you even give the problems back to it, using them as the medicine to cure the chronic disease of self-cherishing, superstitions and delusions.

USING PROBLEMS TO DESTROY SELF-CHERISING

In order to achieve ultimate happiness, we must destroy our delusions. The Dharma, the path, the Buddha, the guru, for example: all these are meant to destroy your delusions, to hurt your self-cherishing thought and to subdue your mind.

Receiving criticism, disrespect or bad treatment also hurts your self-cherishing thought, your thought of worldly dharma. This is not bad, but good. Therefore, hurting your self-cherishing thought and worldly concern is Dharma practice.

Normally in our daily life we interpret someone treating us badly as negative, but actually it is positive. It becomes a remedy for our selfish mind and worldly concern. The person who treats us badly is helping us to destroy our delusions, our self-cherishing thought, worldly concern and desire, just like the Dharma does. By doing something opposite to our wish, the person interferes with the comfort we are seeking out of worldly concern, so they harm our worldly concern. This is exactly the same as Dharma. Their action becomes the real medicine to cure the real inner disease that we have had from beginningless time – the chronic disease of the three poisonous minds.

It is the same with any problem or miserable condition that you experience, such as having cancer or AIDS, which is the result of having followed self-cherishing thought and the three poisonous minds in this life or in previous lives. These diseases are not wanted by the self-cherishing thought; again they are like medicine, the path, the Dharma.

Seeing as negative the people who badly treat you or miserable conditions such as disease doesn't help you at all; this only harms you and others. Look at them as positive, as purification. This helps you to exhaust now the heavy negative karma that would otherwise mean your experiencing sufferings in the hells for many hundreds of lifetimes.

Instead of seeing anything that harms your self-cherishing thought and worldly concern as negative, look at it as positive. Use it to destroy your delusions and to achieve liberation and enlightenment. In this way, whether there is a cure for your problem or not and especially if there is no cure – you can make your problem worthwhile while you are experiencing it.

As mentioned in one thought transformation teaching, "Suffering is the broom that cleans away negative karma and obscurations." Your experiencing problems is the broom, the vacuum cleaner, that cleans away negative karmas, that cleans away the cause of problems.

The teaching also says, "Disease is also the broom that cleans away negative karma and

obscurations." Disease is just used as an example – this can apply to any problem. Life's problems can become the teaching of the Buddha. If you look at problems as positive, you can use them to destroy your self-cherishing thought.

In the practice of *chöd*, you purposely create a terrifying situation and invoke terrifying spirits in order to slay the ego. For the highly realized practitioners who are successful at *chöd*, it is very easy in such a situation to see clearly the object to be refuted, the truly existent I. The more quickly you recognize it, the more quickly you are able to realize the ultimate nature, the emptiness, of the I, the aggregates and so forth.

However, you don't have to depend upon *chöd* to create a situation in which you can try to realize emptiness. Any miserable situation – being ill, being criticized or harmed by someone – is exactly the same. The people who bother you in your everyday life are the same as the spirits you ask to disturb you when you are practicing *chöd*. Instead of using these difficult people to develop your anger or jealousy and create negative karma, you can use them to recognize the object to be refuted and realize emptiness. You can use the everyday situations that you are already experiencing to realize emptiness and to practice bodhichitta, which means destroying self-cherishing.

Since people who bother you destroy your self-cherishing and other delusions, just as the Dharma, the Buddha and the guru do, they are actually not harming but helping you. Like a mirror, they show you your mistakes and thus help you in the most essential way. By showing you your delusions and helping you to eliminate them, by destroying your delusions and worldly concern in this way, they are giving you ultimate happiness.

By destroying your self-cherishing, these people give you enlightenment, because the main obstacle to achieving enlightenment is self-cherishing thought. And the main obstacle to achieving liberation is desire, which ties you to samsara. In terms of

subduing your mind, the person who destroys your worldly concern is as great and as precious a teacher as Buddha. Through causing you to generate the path within your mind, they make it possible for you to achieve enlightenment. This person is as precious as Buddha, as Dharma.

To be precious and kind like this, the person doesn't have to have a motivation to benefit you. For example, your wisdom realizing emptiness helps stop your delusions, but this wisdom doesn't have any motivation to help you. Medicine is also precious because it cures disease, but it doesn't have any motivation to help.

You do not cherish yourself because you are kind to yourself. That is not your reason. Therefore, cherishing someone else doesn't have to involve their being kind to you either. Why not cherish others in the same way you cherish yourself? Why not cherish your enemy, who helps you to practice Dharma, generate the path and achieve enlightenment? This person is unbelievably precious, just like guru, Buddha and Dharma. There are infinite reasons why you should cherish such a person.

OTHERS ARE NUMBERLESS

You are just one person. Even if you are reborn in the hells, you are just one person – nothing much to be depressed about. Even if you achieve liberation from samsara, you are just one person – nothing much to be excited about. All of the numberless sentient beings – those who are called “others” – are just like you in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. Their wishes are exactly the same as yours, and they are numberless. Each one is as important and as precious as you think you are; and these others who are so important and so precious are numberless. You, just one person, are completely insignificant. You are nothing when compared to the numberless others who are so precious and so important. You are nothing precious, nothing important.

If there are two people in addition to you, those two people are greater in number than you and thus more important. It is like the difference between one rupee and two

rupees: two rupees is more valuable than one rupee. And 100 rupees is more valuable than one rupee; 1000 rupees is much more valuable than one rupee. Given the choice between taking one rupee or two rupees, you would choose two rupees. If the choice is between one rupee and 100 rupees, of course you would take the 100 rupees. If you had a choice, it would be silly to take the one rupee. You would naturally choose the larger amount. Like this, when you compare yourself with one hundred or one thousand or one million people, or numberless sentient beings, you are nothing precious, nothing important.

Compared to all other human beings, who are uncountable, you are insignificant and unimportant. Also, each of the god, demi-god, animal, preta and hell realms contains an uncountable number of beings. The number of ants alone is uncountable. So, between you and them, they are more important. In one dark room – even in one corner – there are so many mosquitoes; they are more precious, more important. Think in detail of each realm, of each type of creature. There are so many beings just in the animal realm: butterflies, worms, flies. If you think in detail, it is incredible. Just on this earth, even in one country, there are so many.

Just like you, all these beings want happiness and do not want suffering. There is nothing more important in your life than working for sentient beings, pacifying their suffering and giving them happiness. There is nothing more important than this. Anything other than living your life for other sentient beings is meaningless, empty.

What we call “I” is completely insignificant when compared to the numberless human beings, the numberless animals and the numberless other sentient beings. Each time that we generate bodhichitta, thinking “I am going to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings,” this includes all those beings, all the mosquitoes and ants. Think of how many suffering creatures, such as worms and flies, there are on one mountain; the bodhichitta we generate includes all of them. It includes all the fish, and all the animals that eat the fish.

It includes every single one of the numberless creatures in the water, big and small, that eat each other. Each time that we generate bodhichitta, the altruistic wish to obtain happiness for others, it encompasses without discrimination all the different human races, every type of creature in the water, on the ground, in the air. Without discrimination, it encompasses every living being.

This altruistic thought to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings is an incredible attitude. When you generate bodhichitta, you include everybody in your thought to benefit. No matter what problem they have, no matter where they are – the East, the West, the Middle East, another world – everybody is included. Not even one sentient being is left out.

WHY WE NEED OMNISCIENT MIND

Each sentient being has a different level of mind and different characteristics, and you have to know the exact method to fit each one. You should be able to say one word at the same time to millions of people and suit each one. Each one will hear something different according to their different level of mind, their different karma; but at the same time, according to their karma, what they hear should guide them on the right path, to liberation and to enlightenment.

However, right now we cannot see even one sentient being's level of mind, one sentient being's karma. To be able to guide all sentient beings perfectly, without the slightest mistake, and benefit them extensively, we need to know everything about each one's level of mind and characteristics.

Also, to lead even one sentient being gradually to enlightenment, we need the foundation of knowing the whole path. We cannot reveal just one method; one method cannot suit everyone. There have to be various methods in accordance with the levels of beings' minds. For example, by telling Makyeda, who had killed his father and mother, "Father and mother are objects to be killed," Guru Shakyamuni Buddha made him feel happy. In his depression and anxiety, it was helpful for Makyeda to hear

this. It actually helped him to realize the two selflessnesses, of persons and of aggregates, and to understand that the two ignorances were to be eliminated. These words became the cause for Makyeda to actualize emptiness. Instead of getting stuck on the literal meaning, Makyeda understood that the words meant that the two types of ignorance, apprehending the I and apprehending the aggregates as truly existent, were to be eliminated.

To say that everything is truly existent suits the minds of some people. Hearing this helps them to practice better and leads them to happiness. Though there is not even one atom of true existence, to that particular person with no capacity to understand that there is no true existence, one would teach that Buddha said there is true existence, because this instruction would become the means to lead that sentient being gradually to liberation and enlightenment.

To lead sentient beings gradually to happiness and enlightenment, one has to see every single karma, every level of mind and characteristic of every sentient being, and all the various methods that are suited to each of them. And that comes only with omniscient mind. Even arhats, who have infinite psychic powers, cannot see every single karma. Though free of disturbing-thought obscurations, arhats have still not removed the subtle obscurations to omniscience, so they cannot see subtle karma or the secret actions of the Buddhas. Arhats cannot perfectly guide sentient beings, even though they themselves are free of samsara.

Therefore, to work perfectly to benefit all sentient beings, one has to achieve the state of omniscient mind – no matter how many eons it takes, no matter how hard it is. There is no other method. Until one achieves omniscient mind, the realizations of one's own mind are not complete, and one cannot give sentient beings what they need, which is the highest, longest-lasting happiness. Achieving enlightenment is the most meaningful thing one can do to benefit oneself and to benefit other sentient beings.

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

You can understand the idea of highest happiness from an everyday example. Given a choice, even animals will choose the most delicious food and leave other food that is not so interesting. Even a dog does this. And when shopping or doing business, people try to get the most profitable deal they can by buying the best quality, longest-lasting goods. Even though they may not know that they can achieve such a thing as enlightenment, in their daily lives everyone wishes to get the best. Unless extremely poor, everyone tries to get the best of everything, to build the best, longest-lasting house. Even though there may be no knowledge of enlightenment, there is a concept of peerless happiness. It is only because of lacking the Dharma wisdom-eye that people are not aware that enlightenment is the main thing missing in their lives, and is what they need to achieve.

Just as you are always trying to get the most in terms of happiness, so too is every other sentient being. What everyone needs is the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, the state free of all obscurations and complete in all realizations.

Having received a perfect human rebirth, met a virtuous teacher to lead us on the path to liberation and enlightenment, and met the Buddhadharma – especially the Mahayana teachings – each of us has the opportunity to free all sentient beings from all obscurations and sufferings and lead them to the fully enlightened state. We have this opportunity to help because we have received all the necessary conditions to develop our mind, to generate the graduated path to enlightenment and to achieve omniscient mind, with great compassion for all sentient beings and the capacity to guide them. Therefore we are responsible for freeing all sentient beings from all suffering and its causes, the obscurations, and for leading them to the fully enlightened state.

I often use this example: If you saw a blind person walking towards a cliff, you would immediately grab them before they fell over the precipice. It wouldn't matter whether

they asked for help or not. If you have all the necessary conditions – eyes to see, limbs to grab, voice to call – then you are capable of helping the blind person. Simply by having these, you are responsible for helping the person who is in danger of falling off the cliff.

While having the capacity to help, if someone saw the situation and didn't help, this would be very cruel and shameful. Somehow it wouldn't fulfill the purpose of having eyes and limbs, which is to use them to help others. If such a thing happened, how pitiful it would be from the side of the blind person about to fall off the cliff, and how terrible from the side of the person who had all the conditions necessary to help, but didn't.

How very cruel and harmful it would be, if now while we have all the necessary conditions, we don't practice bodhichitta, the essence of Buddha's teachings, especially the Mahayana teachings; if we don't develop this ultimate good heart; if we don't develop the capacity to guide sentient beings; if we don't achieve enlightenment in order to work perfectly for sentient beings, but always live our life with self-cherishing, thinking of nothing other than our own happiness. How selfish and cruel this would be. In reality, we are completely responsible for leading all sentient beings to enlightenment.

SACRIFICING YOURSELF

Concern for other sentient beings brings a natural wish to give them happiness and not harm them. You don't want to lead them to suffering. Remember the story of the bodhisattva captain who, by killing that one person who was planning to kill the five hundred traders, sacrificed himself completely. In order to save that person from creating negative karma, the bodhisattva captain was willing to be reborn in the hells. But instead of becoming negative karma and cause of rebirth in the lower realms, his action of killing shortened his time in samsara by 100,000 eons. By generating bodhichitta and cherishing this one sentient being, by exchanging himself for this one sentient being, the bodhisattva captain

accumulated incredible merit and came closer to enlightenment.

There is also a story about Asanga. For twelve years he tried to achieve Maitreya Buddha in his meditations, but for all those years he was unable to see Maitreya Buddha. One day when Asanga was returning to his cave, he saw a wounded dog full of maggots. He felt such unbearable compassion. First he cut flesh from his own leg and spread it out on the ground so that he could put the maggots from the dog's body onto it. And then, so as not to kill the maggots by removing them with his fingers, he bent down to pick them up with the tip of his tongue. As he leaned forward to do this, with his eyes closed, he found that he could not reach the dog. Asanga opened his eyes and saw Maitreya Buddha right there, instead of the dog. Sacrificing himself for what he saw as a wounded dog became powerful purification; only after this did Asanga see Maitreya Buddha.

There are many other stories like this. Sacrificing yourself to protect even one sentient being from suffering and to lead them to happiness is powerful purification. Not only does it purify many eons of negative karma, but it accumulates much merit, bringing you closer to enlightenment. The fact that you can achieve enlightenment quickly by sacrificing yourself for even one sentient being is one reason to cherish others. Cherishing yourself is an obstacle to the development of the mind, to the generation of realizations of the path. If you cherish yourself, there is no enlightenment, but if you cherish even one sentient being, there is enlightenment. Cherishing even one sentient being makes possible the achievement of enlightenment.

So, there is a big difference. With self-cherishing thought, there is no hope of enlightenment; but cherishing one sentient being, which purifies obscurations and accumulates extensive merit, leads you to enlightenment. From these stories and reasons, the conclusion is that even one sentient being is much more precious than you. Without considering how precious sentient beings are due to their great number,

you can see that even one sentient being is unbelievably precious. There is no way to finish explaining the value of this sentient being, all the benefits you can gain from this one sentient being.

What is called "I" is the object to be abandoned forever; what is called "others" – even one sentient being – is the object to be cherished forever. This is why living your life for others – dedicating your life to even one sentient being – gives the greatest enjoyment and the most interesting life. Real happiness in life starts when you cherish others. Living your life for others, cherishing them with loving kindness and compassion, is the door to happiness, the door to enlightenment.

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Door to Satisfaction, Wisdom Publications.

How to Exchange Self for Others: the Eight Verses of Thought Transformation

By His Holiness the Dalai

VERSE 1

Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit from all sentient beings,
Who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel,
I shall hold them most dear at all times.

We ourselves and all other beings want to be happy and completely free from suffering. In this we are all exactly equal. However, each of us is only one, while other beings are infinite in number.

Now, there are two attitudes to consider: that of selfishly cherishing ourselves and that of cherishing others. The self-cherishing attitude makes us very uptight; we think we are extremely important and our basic desire is for ourselves to be happy and for things to go well for us. Yet we don't know how to bring this about. In fact, acting out of self-cherishing can never make us happy.

Those who have the attitude of cherishing others regard all other beings as much more important than themselves and value helping others above all else. And, acting in this way, incidentally they themselves become very happy. For example, politicians who are genuinely concerned with helping or serving other people are recorded in history with respect, while those who are constantly exploiting and doing bad things to others go down as examples of bad people.

Leaving aside, for the moment, religion, the next life and nirvana, even within this life selfish people bring negative repercussions down upon themselves by their self-centered actions. On the other hand, people like Mother Teresa, who sincerely devote their

entire life and energy to selflessly serving the poor, needy and helpless, are always remembered for their noble work with respect; others don't have anything negative to say about them. This, then, is the result of cherishing others: whether you want it or not, even those who are not your relatives always like you, feel happy with you and have a warm feeling towards you. If you are the sort of person who always speaks nicely in front of others but badmouths them behind their back, of course, nobody will like you.

Thus, even in this life, if we try to help others as much as we can and have as few selfish thoughts as possible, we shall experience much happiness. Our life is not very long; one hundred years at most. If throughout its duration we try to be kind, warm-hearted, concerned for the welfare of others and less selfish and angry, that will be wonderful, excellent; that really is the cause of happiness. If we are selfish, always putting ourselves first and others second, the actual result will be that we ourselves will finish up last. Mentally putting ourselves last and others first is the way to come out ahead.

So don't worry about the next life or nirvana; these things will come gradually. If within this life you remain a good, warm-hearted, unselfish person, you will be a good citizen of the world. Whether you are a Buddhist, a Christian or a communist is irrelevant; the important thing is that as long as you are a human being you should be a good human being. That is the teaching of Buddhism; that is the message carried by all the world's religions.

However, the teachings of Buddhism contain every technique for eradicating selfishness and actualizing the attitude of cherishing others. Shantideva's marvelous text, the *Bodhicaryavatara* [*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*], for example, is very helpful for this. I myself practice according to that book; it is extremely useful. Our mind is very cunning, very difficult to control, but if we make constant effort, work tirelessly with logical reasoning and careful analysis, we shall be able to control it and change it for the better.

Some Western psychologists say that we should not repress our anger but express it – that we should practice anger! However, we must make an important distinction here between mental problems that should be expressed and those that should not. Sometimes you may be truly wronged and it is right for you to express your grievance instead of letting it fester inside you. But you should not express it with anger. If you foster disturbing negative minds such as anger they will become a part of your personality; each time you express anger it becomes easier to express it again. You do it more and more until you are simply a furious person completely out of control. Thus, in terms of mental problems, there are certainly some that are properly expressed but others that are not.

At first when you try to control disturbing negative minds it is difficult. The first day, the first week, the first month you cannot control them well. But with constant effort your negativities will gradually decrease. Progress in mental development does not come about through taking medicines or other chemical substances; it depends on controlling the mind.

Thus we can see that if we want to fulfill our wishes, be they temporal or ultimate, we should rely on other sentient beings much more than on wish-granting gems and always cherish them above all else.

Question. Is the whole purpose of this practice to improve our minds or actually to do something to help others? What is more important?

His Holiness. Both are important. First, if we do not have pure motivation, whatever we do may not be satisfactory. Therefore, the first thing we should do is cultivate pure motivation. But we do not have to wait until that motivation is fully developed before actually doing something to help others. Of course, to help others in the most effective way possible we have to be fully enlightened buddhas. Even to help others in vast and extensive ways we need to have attained one of the levels of a bodhisattva, that is, to have

had the experience of a direct, non-conceptual perception of the reality of emptiness and to have achieved the powers of extra-sensory perception.

Nonetheless, there are many levels of help we can offer others. Even before we have achieved these qualities we can try to act like bodhisattvas, but naturally our actions will be less effective than theirs. Therefore, without waiting until we are fully qualified, we can generate a good motivation and with that try to help others as best we can. This is a more balanced approach and better than simply staying somewhere in isolation doing some meditation and recitations. Of course, this depends very much on the individual. If we are confident that by staying in a remote place we can gain definite realizations within a certain period, that is different. Perhaps it is best to spend half our time in active work and the other half in the practice of meditation.

VERSE 2

When in the company of others,
I will always consider myself the
lowest of all,
And from the depths of my heart
Hold others most dear and supreme.

No matter who we are with, we often think things like, “I am stronger than him,” “I am more beautiful than her,” “I am more intelligent,” “I am wealthier,” “I am much better qualified” and so forth – we generate much pride. This is not good. Instead, we should always remain humble. Even when we are helping others and are engaged in charity work we should not regard ourselves in a haughty way as great protectors benefiting the weak. This, too, is pride. Rather, we should engage in such activities very humbly and think that we are offering our services up to the people.

When we compare ourselves with animals, for instance, we might think, “I have a human body” or “I’m an ordained person” and feel much higher than them. From one point of view we can say that we have human bodies and are practicing the

Buddha's teachings and are thus much better than insects. But from another, we can say that insects are very innocent and free from guile, whereas we often lie and misrepresent ourselves in devious ways in order to achieve our ends or better ourselves. From this point of view we have to say that we are much worse than insects, which just go about their business without pretending to be anything. This is one method of training in humility.

VERSE 3

Vigilant, the moment a delusion appears
in my mind,
Endangering myself and others,
I will confront and avert it without delay.

If we investigate our minds at times when we are very selfish and preoccupied with ourselves to the exclusion of others, we shall find that the disturbing negative minds are the root of this behavior. Since they greatly disturb our minds, the moment we notice that we are coming under their influence, we should apply some antidote to them. The general opponent to all the disturbing negative minds is meditation on emptiness, but there are also antidotes to specific ones that we, as beginners, can apply. Thus, for attachment, we meditate on ugliness; for anger, on love; for closed-minded ignorance, on dependent arising; for many disturbing thoughts, on the breath and energy winds.

Question. Which dependent arising?

His Holiness. The twelve links of dependent arising, or interdependent origination. They start from ignorance and go through to aging and death. On a more subtle level you can use dependent arising as a cause for establishing that things are empty of true existence.

Question. Why should we meditate on ugliness to overcome attachment?

His Holiness. We develop attachment to things because we see them as very attractive. Trying to view them as

unattractive, or ugly, counteracts that. For example, we might develop attachment to another person's body, seeing his or her figure as something very attractive. When you start to analyze this attachment you find that it is based on viewing merely the skin. However, the nature of this body that appears to us as beautiful is that of the flesh, blood, bones, skin and so forth, of which it is composed. Now let's analyze human skin: take your own, for example. If a piece of it comes off and you put it on your shelf for a few days it becomes really repulsive. This is the nature of skin. All parts of the body are the same. There is no beauty in a piece of human flesh; when you see blood you might feel afraid, not attached. Even a beautiful face: if it gets scratched there is nothing nice about it; wash off the paint – there is nothing left! Ugliness is the nature of the physical body. Human bones, the skeleton, are also repulsive; a skull-and-crossed-bones has a very negative connotation.

So that is the way to analyze something towards which you feel attachment, or love – using this word in the negative sense of desirous attachment. Think more of the object's ugly side; analyze the nature of the person or thing from that point of view. Even if this does not control your attachment completely, at least it will help subdue it a little. This is the purpose of meditating on or building up the habit of looking at the ugly aspect of things.

The other kind of love, or kindness, is not based on the reasoning that "such and such a person is beautiful, therefore, I shall show respect and kindness." The basis for pure love is, "This is a living being that wants happiness, does not want suffering and has the right to be happy. Therefore, I should feel love and compassion." This kind of love is entirely different from the first, which is based on ignorance and therefore totally unsound.

The reasons for loving kindness are sound. With the love that is simply attachment, the slightest change in the object, such as a tiny change of attitude, immediately causes you to change. This is because your emotion is based on something

very superficial. Take, for example, a new marriage. Often after a few weeks, months or years the couple become enemies and finish up getting divorced. They married deeply in love – nobody chooses to marry with hatred – but after a short time everything changed. Why? Because of the superficial basis of the relationship; a small change in one person causes a complete change of attitude in the other.

We should think, “The other person is a human being like me. Certainly I want happiness; therefore, she must want happiness, too. As a sentient being I have the right to happiness; for the same reason she, too, has the right to happiness.” This kind of sound reasoning gives rise to pure love and compassion. Then no matter how our view of that person changes – from good to bad to ugly – she is basically the same sentient being. Thus, since the main reason for showing loving kindness is always there, our feelings towards the other are perfectly stable.

The antidote to anger is meditation on love, because anger is a very rough, coarse mind that needs to be softened with love.

When we enjoy the objects to which we are attached, we do experience a certain pleasure but, as Nagarjuna has said, it is like having an itch and scratching it; it gives us some pleasure but we would be far better off if we did not have the itch in the first place. Similarly, when we get the things with which we are obsessed we feel happy, but we’d be far better off if we were free from the attachment that causes us to become obsessed with things.

VERSE 4

Whenever I see people who are evil in
nature
And overwhelmed by violent negative
actions and suffering,
I will hold such rare ones dear,
As if I had found a precious treasure.

If we run into somebody who is by nature very cruel, rough, nasty and unpleasant, our usual reaction is to avoid him. In such

situations our loving concern for others is liable to decrease. Instead of allowing our love for others to weaken by thinking what an evil person he is, we should see him as a special object of love and compassion and cherish that person as though we had come across a precious treasure, difficult to find.

VERSE 5

When, out of envy,
Others mistreat me with abuse, insults or
the like,
I will accept defeat
And offer the victory to them.

If somebody insults, abuses or criticizes us, saying that we are incompetent and don’t know how to do anything and so forth, we are likely to get very angry and contradict what the person has said. We should not react in this way; instead, with humility and tolerance, we should accept what has been said.

Where it says that we should accept defeat and offer the victory to others, we have to differentiate two kinds of situation. If, on the one hand, we are obsessed with our own welfare and very selfishly motivated, we should accept defeat and offer victory to the other, even if our life is at stake. But if, on the other hand, the situation is such that the welfare of others is at stake, we have to work very hard and fight for the rights of others, and not accept the loss at all.

One of the forty-six secondary vows of a bodhisattva refers to a situation in which somebody is doing something very harmful and you have to use forceful methods or whatever else is necessary to stop that person’s actions immediately – if you don’t, you have transgressed that commitment.

It might appear that this bodhisattva vow and the fifth stanza, which says that one must accept defeat and give the victory to the other, are contradictory but they are not. The bodhisattva precept deals with a situation in which one’s prime concern is the welfare of others: if somebody is doing something extremely harmful and dangerous it is wrong not to take strong measures to stop it if

necessary. Nowadays, in very competitive societies, strong defensive or similar actions are often required. The motivation for these should not be selfish concern but extensive feelings of kindness and compassion towards others. If we act out of such feelings to save others from creating negative karma this is entirely correct.

Question. It may sometimes be necessary to take strong action when we see something wrong, but whose judgment do we trust for such decisions? Can we rely on our own perception of the world?

His Holiness. That's complicated. When you consider taking the loss upon yourself you have to see whether giving the victory to the others is going to benefit them ultimately or only temporarily. You also have to consider the effect that taking the loss upon yourself will have on your power or ability to help others in the future. It is also possible that by doing something that is harmful to others now you create a great deal of merit that will enable you to do things vastly beneficial for others in the long run; this is another factor you have to take into account.

As it says in the *Bodhicaryavatara*, you have to examine, both superficially and deeply, whether the benefits of doing a prohibited action outweigh the shortcomings. At times when it is difficult to tell, you should check your motivation. In the *Shiksa-Samuccaya*, Shantideva says that the benefits of an action done with bodhicitta outweigh the negativities of doing it without such motivation. Although it is extremely important, it can sometimes be very difficult to see the dividing line between what to do and what not to do, therefore you should study the texts that explain about such things. In lower texts it will say that certain actions are prohibited while higher ones tell you that those same actions are allowed. The more you know about all of this the easier it will be to decide what to do in any situation.

VERSE 6

When somebody I have benefited
And in whom I have great hopes
Gives me terrible harm,
I will regard them as my holy guru.

Usually we expect people whom we have helped a great deal to be very grateful and if they react to us with ingratitude we are likely to get angry. In such situations we should not get upset but practice patience instead. Moreover, we should see such people as teachers testing our patience and therefore treat them with respect. This verse contains all the Bodhicaryavatara teachings on patience.

VERSE 7

In short, both directly and indirectly,
I offer every happiness and benefit to all
my mothers.
I will secretly take upon myself
All their harmful actions and suffering.

This refers to the practice of taking upon ourselves all the sufferings of others and giving away to them all our happiness, motivated by strong compassion and love. We ourselves want happiness and do not want suffering and can see that all other beings feel the same. We can see, too, that other beings are overwhelmed by suffering but do not know how to get rid of it. Thus, we should generate the intention of taking on all their suffering and negative karma and pray for it to ripen upon ourselves immediately. Likewise it is obvious that other beings are devoid of the happiness they seek and do not know how to find it. Thus, without a trace of miserliness, we should offer them all our happiness – our body, wealth and merits – and pray for it to ripen on them immediately.

Of course, it is most unlikely that we shall actually be able to take on the sufferings of others and give them our happiness. When such transference between beings does occur,

it is the result of some very strong unbroken karmic connection from the past. However, this meditation is a very powerful means of building up courage in our minds and is, therefore, a highly beneficial practice.

In the *Seven Point Thought Transformation* it says that we should alternate the practices of taking and giving and mount them on the breath. And here, Langri Tangpa says these should be done secretly. As it is explained in the *Bodhicaryavatara*, this practice does not suit the minds of beginner bodhisattvas – it is something for a select few practitioners. Therefore, it is called secret.

Question. In the *Bodhicaryavatara*, Shantideva says: "...if for the sake of others I cause harm to myself, I shall acquire all that is magnificent."⁹ On the other hand, Nagarjuna says that one should not mortify the body. So, in what way does Shantideva mean one should harm oneself?

His Holiness. This does not mean that you have to hit yourself on the head or something like that. Shantideva is saying that at times when strong, self-cherishing thoughts arise you have to argue very strongly with yourself and use forceful means to subdue them; in other words, you have to harm your self-cherishing mind. You have to distinguish clearly between the I that is completely obsessed with its own welfare and the I that is going to become enlightened: there is a big difference. And you have to see this verse of the *Bodhicaryavatara* in the context of the verses that precede and follow it. There are many different ways the I is discussed: the grasping at a true identity for the I, the self-cherishing I, the I that we join with in looking at things from the viewpoint of others and so forth. You have to see the discussion of the self in these different contexts.

If it really benefits others, if it benefits even one sentient being, it is appropriate for us to take upon ourselves the suffering of the three realms of existence or to go to one of the hells, and we should have the courage to do this. In order to reach enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings we should be happy and willing to spend countless eons in

the lowest hell, Avici. This is what is meant by taking the harms that afflict others upon ourselves.

Question. What would we have to do to get to the lowest hell?

His Holiness. The point is to develop the courage to be willing to go to one of the hells; it doesn't mean you actually have to go there. When the Kadampa geshe Chekawa was dying, he suddenly called in his disciples and asked them to make special offerings, ceremonies and prayers for him because his practice had been unsuccessful. The disciples were very upset because they thought something terrible was about to happen. However, the geshe explained that although all his life he had been praying to be born in the hells for the benefit of others, he was now receiving a pure vision of what was to follow – he was going to be reborn in a pure land instead of the hells – and that's why he was upset. In the same way, if we develop a strong, sincere wish to be reborn in the lower realms for the benefit of others, we accumulate a vast amount of merit that brings about the opposite result.

That's why I always say, if we are going to be selfish we should be wisely selfish. Real, or narrow, selfishness causes us to go down; wise selfishness brings us buddhahood. That's really wise! Unfortunately, what we usually do first is get attached to buddhahood. From the scriptures we understand that to attain buddhahood we need bodhicitta and that without it we can't become enlightened; thus we think, "I want buddhahood, therefore I have to practice bodhicitta." We are not so much concerned about bodhicitta as about buddhahood. This is absolutely wrong. We should do the opposite; forget the selfish motivation and think how really to help others.

If we go to hell we can help neither others nor ourselves. How can we help? Not just by giving them something or performing miracles, but by teaching Dharma. However, first we must be qualified to teach. At present we cannot explain the whole path – all the practices and experiences that one person has

to go through from the first stage up to the last, enlightenment. Perhaps we can explain some of the early stages through our own experience, but not much more than that. To be able to help others in the most extensive way by leading them along the entire path to enlightenment we must first enlighten ourselves. For this reason we should practice bodhicitta. This is entirely different from our usual way of thinking, where we are compelled to think of others and dedicate our heart to them because of selfish concern for our own enlightenment. This way of going about things is completely false, a sort of lie.

Question. I read in a book that just by practicing Dharma we prevent nine generations of our relatives from rebirth in hell. Is this true?

His Holiness. This is a little bit of advertising! In fact it is possible that something like this could happen, but in general it's not so simple. Take, for example, our reciting the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM and dedicating the merit of that to our rapidly attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. We can't say that just by reciting mantras we shall quickly attain enlightenment, but we can say that such practices act as contributory causes for enlightenment. Likewise, while our practicing Dharma will not itself protect our relatives from lower rebirths, it may act as a contributory cause for this.

If this were not the case, if our practice could act as the principal cause of a result experienced by others, it would contradict the law of karma, the relationship between cause and effect. Then we could simply sit back and relax and let all the buddhas and bodhisattvas do everything for us; we would not have to take any responsibility for our own welfare. However, the fully enlightened one said that all he can do is teach us the Dharma, the path to liberation from suffering, and then it's up to us to put it into practice – he washed his hands of that responsibility! As Buddhism teaches that there is no creator and that we create everything for ourselves, we are therefore

our own masters – within the limits of the law of cause and effect. And this law of karma teaches that if we do good things we shall experience good results and if we do bad things we shall experience unhappiness.

Question. How do we cultivate patience?

His Holiness. There are many methods. Knowledge of and faith in the law of karma themselves engender patience. You realize, "This suffering I'm experiencing is entirely my own fault, the result of actions I myself created in the past. Since I can't escape it I have to put up with it. However, if I want to avoid suffering in the future I can do so by cultivating virtues such as patience. Getting irritated or angry with this suffering will only create negative karma, the cause for future misfortune." This is one way of practicing patience.

Another thing you can do is meditate on the suffering nature of the body: "This body and mind are the basis for all kinds of suffering; it is natural and by no means unexpected that suffering should arise from them." This sort of realization is very helpful for the development of patience.

You can also recall what it says in the *Bodhicaryavatara*:

Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy about something if it cannot be remedied?

If there is a method of overcoming your suffering or an opportunity to do so, you have no need to worry. If there is absolutely nothing you can do about it, worrying cannot help you at all. This is both very simple and very clear.

Something else you can do is to contemplate the disadvantages of getting angry and the advantages of practicing patience. We are human beings – one of our better qualities is our ability to think and judge. If we lose patience and get angry, we lose our ability to make proper judgments and thereby lose one of the most powerful instruments we have for tackling problems: our human wisdom. This is something that animals do not have. If we lose patience and

get irritated we are damaging this precious instrument. We should remember this; it is far better to have courage and determination and face suffering with patience.

Question. How can we be humble yet at the same time realistic about the good qualities that we possess?

His Holiness. You have to differentiate between confidence in your abilities and pride. You should have confidence in whatever good qualities and skills you have and use them courageously, but you shouldn't feel arrogantly proud of them. Being humble doesn't mean feeling totally incompetent and helpless. Humility is cultivated as the opponent of pride, but we should use whatever good qualities we have to the full.

Ideally, you should have a great deal of courage and strength but not boast about or make a big show of it. Then, in times of need, you should rise to the occasion and fight bravely for what is right. This is perfect. If you have none of these good qualities but go around boasting how great you are and in times of need completely shrink back, you're just the opposite. The first person is very courageous but has no pride; the other is very proud but has no courage.

VERSE 8

Undefined by the stains of the
superstitions of the eight worldly
concerns,
May I, by perceiving all phenomena as
illusory,
Be released from the bondage of
attachment.

This verse deals with wisdom. All the preceding practices should not be defiled by the stains of the superstitions of the eight worldly dharmas. These eight can be referred to as white, black or mixed. I think it should be all right if I explain this verse from the point of view of the practices being done without their being stained by the wrong conception of clinging to true existence – the

superstition of the eight dharmas.

How does one avoid staining one's practice in this way? By recognizing all existence as illusory and not clinging to true existence. In this way, one is liberated from the bondage of this type of clinging.

To explain the meaning of "illusory" here: true existence appears in the aspect of various objects, wherever they are manifest, but in fact there is no true existence there. True existence appears, but there is none – it is an illusion. Even though everything that exists appears as truly existent, it is devoid of true existence. To see that objects are empty of true existence – that even though true existence appears there is none, it is illusory – one should have definite understanding of the meaning of emptiness: the emptiness of the manifest appearance.

First one should be certain that all phenomena are empty of true existence. Then later, when that which has absolute nature appears to be truly existent, one refutes the true existence by recalling one's previous ascertainment of the total absence of true existence. When one puts together these two – the appearance of true existence and its emptiness as previously experienced – one discovers the illusoriness of phenomena.

At this time there is no need for an explanation of the way things appear as illusory separate from that just given. This text explains up to the meditation on mere emptiness. In tantric teachings such as the Guhyasamaja tantra, that which is called illusory is completely separate; in this verse, that which is called illusory does not have to be shown separately. Thus, the true existence of that which has absolute nature is the object of refutation and should be refuted. When it has been, the illusory mode of appearance of things arises indirectly: they seem to be truly existent but they are not.

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