

An Overview of the Entire Mahayana Path to Enlightenment

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It's necessary to have an overview of Buddha's teachings. The various points have been nicely packaged by the Tibetans, in particular Lama Tsong Khapa's tradition, and is known as the *lam-rim*, based upon the elucidations of the eleventh-century Indian master Atisha.

In the lam-rim the essential points of Buddha's extensive explanations of psychology and philosophy are extracted and presented from A to Z in such a way that they can be internalized, experienced as something relevant to one's life – which is the point of all the teachings. As Lama Tsongkhapa, the fourteenth-century founder of the Gelug tradition, says in one of his poetic texts on the lam-rim, *Songs of Experience*, "All the teachings are to be taken as sound advice as there is no contradiction between scripture and practice."

It is easy to be captivated intellectually by Buddha's ideas about reality but to forget to taste them, as Lama Yeshe would put it. It's also easy to not know how to taste them. The type of meditation that one uses to internalize these ideas, advocated by Lama Tsongkhapa, is called analytical meditation.

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

In other words, by sitting still and thinking about Buddha's views again and again and from many angles in a clear and intelligent way with a finely focused mind – in other words, by analyzing them – we are compelled to reassess at ever deeper levels the fundamental assumptions that we hold as

truths and that Buddha has shown to be completely untrue.

Eventually, we undergo a paradigm shift in the way we perceive ourselves and the world. Buddha says that the extent to which these assumptions are out of sync with how things actually are is the extent to which we suffer and the extent to which, therefore, we harm others. Thus, a consequence of practice is the ending of suffering, nirvana – a psychological state, not some place like heaven.

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

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

THE PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS

1. NATURE OF MIND

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

According to Buddha, "mind" refers to the entire spectrum of our internal experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotions, tendencies, personality characteristics, unconscious, subconscious, intuition, spirit; all of this is known as mind, or consciousness. It is not the brain, it's not

physical. It does not come from anyone else, neither one's parents nor a superior being.

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

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

Each of these beings is actually a potential Buddha (in Sanskrit, "fully awake") in the sense that an acorn is a potential oak tree. That is the acorn's nature, what it really is. We have no choice but to give it the appropriate conditions to enable it to become what it really is, an oak tree. And so with sentient beings: we have no choice but to develop our innate potential for perfection.

That is to say, we can develop all our good qualities – such as love, compassion, generosity, wisdom, and so forth – to a state of perfection beyond which we can't develop them further. This state of perfection, Buddha says, is our natural state.

2. THE VIRTUOUS FRIEND

Recognizing that we have this innate potential, we need to find someone to show us how to develop it. There's nothing we

know that we haven't learned from others, so it goes without saying that to develop our perfection in the way that Buddha describes it, we need to find a qualified teacher.

Having found the teacher, we need to devote ourselves appropriately in order to get the maximum benefit from the relationship. In short, the heart of this practice is to see the guru as the Buddha.

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

3. THIS PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH

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

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

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

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

THE LOWEST SCOPE OF PRACTICE

4. DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE

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

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

5. THE SUFFERING OF THE LOWER REALMS

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

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

6. REFUGE IN BUDDHA, DHARMA, AND SANGHA

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

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

7. KARMA

Now we actually begin to practice: we apply Buddha’s instructions on how to avoid suffering. We learn to know what to practice and what to avoid. According to Buddha, everything we say, do, and think is a karma, an action, that will necessarily bring a reaction, a result, in the future. Every thought, word, and deed plants seeds in our minds that will necessarily ripen as fruit: negative actions ripen as suffering, positive actions ripen as happiness. There is nothing that living beings experience that isn’t the result of what they’ve done before. With karma, there is no one sitting in judgment, punishing or rewarding us. Actions bring

their own results; it just naturally happens, according to Buddha.

Given the simple logic that we want happiness and don't want suffering, we learn to abide by the laws of karma – natural laws, not created by anyone. What we are now is the result of what we have done, said, and thought before, and what we will be in the future is thus in our own hands. We are the boss. One might say that for the Buddha, karma is the creation principle. It is not enough, however, merely to refrain from creating negative karma; we need to take care of the karmic seeds already in our minds, planted there since beginningless time. Thus, we begin to “have great respect and esteem for the four opponent powers, which can fully purify us of having to experience the results of our negative karma in the future,” as Lama Tsongkhapa says in his *Songs of Experience*.

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

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

First, we need to regret the harm we've done in the past to others, because we do not want any more suffering in the future; we're fed up with suffering. Second, we need to rely upon the Buddha and his methods; we also rely upon the sentient beings whom we have harmed by developing compassion for them, aspiring to become a Buddha as quickly as possible, since only then can we really know how to benefit them. Third, we apply the antidote in the form of a purification practice. This is like taking the medicine for our karmic illness – and Buddhism has a medicine cabinet full of medicines. Finally, we make the promise, the

determination not to create these negative actions, not to do harm, again.

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

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

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

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

THE MIDDLE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

8. SUFFERING: THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

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

The **third noble truth** is Buddha's assertion that it is possible to be free of suffering. This is another way of stating, according to the Mahayana Buddhist approach, that we all possess the innate potential for buddhahood. So, if it's true that it's possible to be free of suffering – and

Buddha is not talking the way most religions talk, that this can only be achieved after we've died, in heaven with God; he's talking psychologically – then we need to discover precisely what suffering is (the **first noble truth**), we need to discover precisely what the causes of suffering are (the **second**), and then we need to know the way to stop suffering and its causes (the **fourth**). It's extremely practical.

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

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

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

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

The **root cause of our suffering** is the state of mind called ignorance (often known as self-grasping when it's related to oneself).

Effectively, however, attachment is the main source of our problems in day-to-day life. It's the default mode of the mind. Yet, when we hear Buddha say that we can't be happy unless we give up attachment, we panic and think, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, "You mean, I have to give up my heart, my happiness?" This is because we confuse attachment with love, happiness, pleasure, and so forth.

The main cause of the second kind of suffering, the suffering of change, is **attachment**. The experience of pleasure I get when I eat chocolate cake is, in fact, nothing other than suffering. Why?

First, the pleasure doesn't last: Attachment is completely convinced that it will, but the pleasure inexorably turns into suffering – the more cake I eat, the more disgusting it becomes.

Second, the pleasure I experience is nothing other than suffering because it's adulterated, not pure. The pleasure is dependent upon delusions: I need to get something in order to be happy. And third, the pleasure is actually suffering because, as our mothers told us, "The more you get, the more you want." I don't actually get satisfaction when I eat the cake, which is what my attachment expects. In fact, I get dissatisfaction instead, as my yearning to eat cake is even greater next time.

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

The pleasure we get by following attachment is the pleasure of the junkie: it doesn't last, it is contaminated, and it leads only to more craving. In our culture, it's the junkie who is said to have a problem with attachment while the rest of us are "normal."

According to Buddha's model of the mind, attachment and addiction are synonymous. Due to our attachment, in other words, we're all addicts – it is simply a question of degree.

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

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

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

They have now accomplished renunciation – having understood suffering and its causes and wanting to give it up – the first of the three principal aspects of the path, which is the culmination of practice of the first two scopes.

THE GREAT SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The accomplishment of renunciation is the sound basis for the development of love, compassion, and eventually, **bodhichitta, the second principal aspect of the path.**

Without being fed up with my own suffering (renunciation), based on the understanding of why I'm suffering (my past karma and present delusions), I cannot develop empathy for the suffering of others (compassion) based on the understanding of why they're suffering (their past karma and present delusions).

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

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

Great compassion comes from compassion: the finding of the suffering of others unbearable.

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

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

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

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

9. EQUANIMITY

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

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

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

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

We now meditate on the eleven techniques for developing bodhichitta.

10. ALL SENTIENT BEINGS HAVE BEEN MY MOTHER

Recognizing that our mind is beginningless, it follows that we've had countless previous lives in which we have been connected to all beings countless times. It's a matter of numbers. This contemplation is a practical way to expand our mind to encompass all others. In order to open my heart to these countless faceless beings, it helps to think about how they've all been my mother in the past. In the West, we might think this is meant to make us miserable, as we tend to think that our mothers are a main cause of our suffering. It's helpful, then, to contemplate the many ways in which our mother has been kind.

11a. CONTEMPLATING THE KINDNESS OF THE MOTHER

At the moment, with our deeply held wrong assumptions – that I didn't ask to get born, that who I am has nothing to do with me, that my mother and father made me, and so forth – it seems reasonable to blame our parents for our problems. Also, even our view of kindness is mistaken: we think of someone as kind only if they do what we want. However, if we understand that a

person is kind when they make the effort to help us, then it's clear our mother has been kind in a myriad of ways. Even if she gave me away at birth, her kindness in not aborting me is extraordinary.

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

11b. CONTEMPLATING THE KINDNESS OF ALL BEINGS

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

12. REPAYING THEIR KINDNESS

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

13. SEEING OTHERS AND MYSELF AS EQUAL

Because of my delusions, instinctively I see my views, my needs, as more important than the views and needs of others. But there is no logic to this at all. In reality, there is not a fraction of difference between me and others, in just the same way as there is no difference between friend, enemy, and stranger. Everyone else wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer, just like me. Just ask them; this fact is not hard to prove. Even if I have low self-esteem, I don't really see others as more important than me; actually, I resent them. Always, I'm full of an overriding sense of self.

14. THE DISADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING MYSELF MORE THAN OTHERS

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

All my problems with others, in my personal relationships or at work, are because of putting myself first. Even in a relationship with another person in 12 Becoming the Compassion Buddha which I feel like the victim, this too is due to my past negative karma toward that person, which I created out of self-cherishing.

15. THE ADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING OTHERS MORE THAN MYSELF

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

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

16. TAKING UPON MYSELF THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS: DEVELOPING COMPASSION

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

Pabongkha Rinpoche recommends that we start in the morning: after we rise, we visualize taking upon ourselves our own afternoon headache. Then we move on to taking on the sufferings of our dearest friends, then those of our enemies.

Eventually, we take on the sufferings of all living beings in the various realms. We imagine that this suffering comes into us and smashes the rock of self-cherishing at our heart; as a result, we imagine that all others are now free of their suffering.

17. GIVING MY HAPPINESS AND GOOD QUALITIES TO OTHERS: DEVELOPING LOVE

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

18. GREAT COMPASSION

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

19. BODHICHTTA

Bodhichitta is the spontaneous and heartfelt wish to become a Buddha as quickly as possible because only when we are enlightened will we be qualified to do the job of perfectly guiding others away from their suffering and to the perfection of their own buddhahood. One who has completely accomplished this sublime state of mind is a bodhisattva. One of the indications of having accomplished bodhichitta, of having become a bodhisattva, is that the thought of "I" no longer arises in the mind; thus, one exists only for the sake of others. It is said that even the breath of a bodhisattva is for the sake of others. With this realization of bodhichitta, we will have accomplished the second of the three principal aspects of the path.

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

20. GENEROSITY

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

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

A sign of having perfected generosity is, for example, the ability to effortlessly give our body to a starving animal (assuming, of course, that there's no other supply of food

available - bodhisattvas aren't trying to prove anything). In one of his previous lives, Lord Buddha happily gave his body to a starving mother tiger who was about to eat her babies. Right now, we're not even capable of giving, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said, "one tiny, tiny drop of blood to a mosquito."

21. MORALITY

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

22. PATIENCE

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

There are three types of patience. First, there's the patience of accepting the harm that people do to us. The main reason we get so upset is because of our deeply held wrong assumptions that it is unfair for others to harm me, that I don't deserve it, that it has nothing to do with me, and so forth – Lama Yeshe calls ego "the self-pity me." Buddha says it has everything to do with me: I

created the cause to experience it, so I have no choice but to accept it. By thinking in this way, I purify my negative karma as well as develop a brave and happy mind.

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

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

23. ENTHUSIASTIC PERSEVERANCE, OR JOYFUL EFFORT

Without enthusiasm, we can't succeed at anything in our lives, especially

buddhahood. The main obstacles are the three kinds of laziness.

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

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

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

24. MEDITATION

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

Single-pointed concentration is a subtle level of conscious awareness, during which the grosser levels of conceptual and sensory awareness have necessarily ceased. It is a state of mind not even recognized in Western

models of the mind, but one that Buddha says we can all access.

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

25. WISDOM

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

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

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

against our nature, Buddha says; we will always suffer, and we will cause suffering to others.

First, we need to comprehend the Buddha's explanations about the way ignorance and the other deluded emotions function and about the way the self and other things actually exist. Then, using the microscope of our mind, accessed in single-pointed meditation, we probe and analyze again and again in the second mode of meditation, called insight meditation, how this ignorance is a liar and a cheat: that it's been hallucinating the fantasy self all along. In the subtlety of concentrated meditation we deconstruct ignorance's fantasies, eventually discovering, experientially and irreversibly, the absence of the fantasy self. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, it's not as if we find the ego and then throw it out - it was never there in the first place. What we find is its absence. The discovery of this absence is the experience of emptiness.

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

So unbearable is the suffering of others, we will now happily embark upon the skillful practices of the Tantrayana, which will enable us to very quickly achieve our natural potential for Buddhahood.

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