

Commentary on the *Rosary of Views*

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Day One

I will not be giving the transmission or empowerment for this teaching since in preparation for the Kalachakra in Toronto I had to do a great deal of chanting which was difficult for my lungs. Since you will not receive the empowerment ceremony and the blessing in that form, please do not feel that this is a great loss for you. In fact, it is more important to contemplate, reflect and meditate. Even if one may receive tens, hundreds or thousands of empowerment ceremonies, they will not be of much effect or benefit. So we will be spending two days on teaching the explanation of this text, giving an explanation of the Dharma which in a way is more important than receiving an empowerment blessing.

Of course in very exceptional cases, on the part of the disciple in that all of the karmic conditions have fully ripened and on the part of the teacher, they have a great affinity for the disciple with all of the prerequisites being in place. Under such a circumstance, it is possible/conceivable that by just receiving a simple blessing or an empowerment ceremony, a complete realization can take place in the disciple. But generally speaking, it is only through understanding and hardship that realizations grow.

For example if one looks at the life story of the great Milarepa, one reads that he had once come across a teacher who claimed to have a very special instruction which if practiced during the day, would give enlightenment during the day or if practices at night, would give rise to enlightenment at night. He claimed that it was such a unique transmission that one could in fact attain enlightenment without any meditative practice. He also heard that this practice was especially appropriate for a practitioner who was at a very high state of karmic maturity. Milarepa met this teacher and felt that he must qualify for this practice. He was very pleased and went to bed not practicing as he thought that he must be one of those practitioners who will attain enlightenment without any meditative practice. So the next morning the teacher asked him what sort of indications did he receive in his dreams. Milarepa replied that he did not have any positive dreams. The teacher replied in that case that Milarepa was not an appropriate disciple for that instruction. He told Milarepa to seek teachings from the great disciple of the Indian master Naropa, Marpa the Translator. Milarepa went to Marpa and of course we all know how much hardship Milarepa endured from Marpa. Milarepa's story testifies to the fact that it is through hardship and constant practice that eventually leads to realization, not through a simple blessing or being touched on the head by another's palm.

Note: All the quoted verses were added by the editor and were not part of the original.

The spelling of teachers' names and dates are from Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.

(His Holiness in English) As you know, I am one simple Buddhist monk; I am a human being. So basically we are all the same nature. Everyone wants to have a happy life, a successful life. I also have this desire and I think everyone else also has this desire. Certainly we all have the right to have a happy and successful life. Also I believe that each of us as a human being on this planet has a responsibility to think about humanity, about the world as a whole because our future depends on this. The world or humanity will be happier, more prosperous and have fewer troubles. Each individual part of this humanity will automatically get benefit if the world has fewer difficulties. Otherwise there will be more difficulties, more fear, more doubt and more confusion and all the individuals will suffer. This is the reality. Therefore taking care of the planet and humanity is not something holy but realistic.

So I think that a person who has some experience about the inner world or has had inner sorts of experiences, I feel that person has motivation and inner values or qualities and this is something very crucial for a successful life and the betterment of humanity. Therefore my number one commitment is promote human values. I think I may touch on something about this according to this text.

My second commitment is to promote religious harmony. Because I am a Buddhist, I am one of its believers. In today's world there are various religious traditions which I feel still have an important role for serving and helping humanity. Yet because of these different religious traditions there is sometimes the motivation for more conflict so the effort to promote a closer understanding among the different traditions is I think important and useful. So that is my second commitment. At this point also, I will explain more according to this text.

My third commitment concerns Tibet. I will not cover this in this program, only the first two, to promote human values and to promote religious harmony. With this will be an explanation of the Buddhadharma and its way of practice. Although I feel that I am a poor teacher. Perhaps as a student there is an exception but generally speaking, perhaps I am also a poor student! (Laughs) So the poor teacher, who is also a poor student, benefits no one (Laughs). Now I will speak in Tibetan.

Among the members of the audience here, many of you may already be familiar with my lectures and teachings from before. However quite a number of you may also be listening to me for the first time. So for those of you in the audience who are listening to me for the first time, can you raise your hands? In that case I will share some of my basic thoughts and opinions with you today and for those of you who have heard me teach before and are familiar with these ideas, please do not feel that I am repeating myself.

In a way, just as the Indian master Santideva stated at the beginning of his text, "There is nothing new that I am presenting here." The point is that from the point of view of spiritual practice, repetition in fact is necessary. It is not sufficient simply to hear

something once but rather that understanding needs to be repeatedly cultivated through familiarization. This is essential for spiritual practice.

Secondly, as it is stated in the sayings of the great Kadampa masters, “Although there is not anything that I have not heard before, there is always something new that I have not understood before that I understand now.” Because of this, even if I repeat myself perhaps there is no error in this, no disadvantages.

This being the first day and the first session, at the start we will perform some chants, particularly of the *Heart Sutra*. Tomorrow morning since there are some members of the Chinese Sangha, Buddhist community, it would be wonderful if we were to recite the *Heart Sutra* in Chinese.

The subject matter of the *Heart Sutra* is of course the teaching of emptiness. The *Heart Sutra* belongs to the category of Buddhist scriptures known as the Perfection of Wisdom and it is one of the shortest scriptures in that collection. It is in fact sometimes referred to as the *Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Stanzas*. The main subject matter is a presentation of the ultimate nature of reality, of all phenomena, including the aggregates, the constituents and so on. It also includes the stages of the path. All of these are presented as being devoid of any intrinsic existence. So this is the explicit subject matter of the *Heart Sutra*, which is the teaching of emptiness and the implicit subject matter is the stages of the path. The emptiness that is presented in the *Heart Sutra* is the understanding of emptiness in terms of dependent origination. The essence of the stages of the path is of course the cultivation of bodhicitta, the awakening mind by means of cultivating the thought that cherishes the wellbeing of others as being more important than one’s own welfare.

When we recite the Heart Sutra, those who are familiar with it should reflect upon its meaning and for those who are not familiar with it but are practicing Buddhists, they should utilize this occasion to contemplate on the enlightened qualities of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha, the Fully Enlightened One. Among the members of the audience who are not practicing Buddhists, those who follow other faiths as well as those who are non-believers, please take this opportunity to have a rest as we recite.

We will now recite the verses of salutation from Nagarjuna’s *Stanzas on the Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* and also the Maitreya *Abhisamayalamkara*, the *Ornament of Clear Realization*.

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,
The best of teachers, who taught that
Whatever is dependently arisen is
Unceasing, unborn,
Unannihilated, not permanent,
Not coming, not going,
Without distinction, without identity,
And free from conceptual construction.

And

I bow down to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

She is the one who – through the all-knowledge – guides the Hearers who search for peace to utter peace.

She is the one who – through the knowledge of the path – enables those who promote the benefit of beings to accomplish the welfare of the world.

Since they are perfectly endowed with Her, the Sages proclaim this variety endowed with all aspects.

I bow to her – the Mother of the Buddhas as well as the assemblies of hearers and bodhisattvas.

This finishes the preliminary prayers. We will not perform a mandala offering or so forth.

Next we will take refuge in the Three Jewels and generate the awakening mind of bodhicitta which will be done on the basis of the recitation of a single stanza. The first two lines of this stanza refer to going for refuge in the Three Jewels and the last two lines pertain to generating and reaffirming bodhicitta or the awakening mind. So in this context, since going for refuge is performed in conjunction with generating bodhicitta, the awakening mind then the form of refuge that we are taking in this particular context is of the unique Mahayana, the Great Vehicle approach. Partly because when one goes for refuge by reciting these lines, one states that “I shall go for refuge until the attainment of full enlightenment.” So one is specifying a time frame; one is expressing the wish to go for refuge in the Three Jewels until one attains full enlightenment. This is what makes it quite unique, a Mahayana form of taking refuge. This is followed by two lines where one says, “Through the power of the accumulations created by engaging in practices such as giving and so on, may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.” So these last two lines relate to the generation of the awakening mind.

In both instances there is reference to the person “I”, I shall go for refuge, May I ... When reflecting upon these lines, especially when reflecting upon the term ‘I’, it is important here to be aware of the emptiness of one’s own existence as presented in the *Heart Sutra* which we recited earlier. One should examine one’s own normal sense of selfhood where one tends to believe that there truly is something called “I” which is enduring within oneself; the experiencer of all of one’s subjective experiences. This seems to be the core of one’s being. One has the belief in some sort of enduring, eternal reality within oneself but as pointed out in the *Heart Sutra*, this is a false conception. The “I” that one perceives does not exist in the manner in which one perceives it. The “I” or one’s own existence is devoid of intrinsic existence, intrinsic reality. So reflect upon the emptiness of this “I”, then go for refuge in the Three Jewels and finally generate the altruistic awakening mind for the benefit of all beings. In this way, if one reflects upon the meaning of these lines, this constitutes the practice of the accumulation of both merit and wisdom. This is why in the last line that through the power of the accumulations created by engaging in practices such as generosity and so on, one says, “May I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.” So the accumulations here refer to both the accumulation of merit and of

wisdom and in this way one's practice of going for refuge and the generation of the awakening mind will be complete.

The text which is being used as the basis for my lecture series is *The Garland of Views* which was originally given as a series of instructions to the Tibetan monarch Songsten Gampo and his circle of attendants, royal family members and so on. Padmasambhava, the great Indian master who came to Tibet, gave a series of instructions to the king along with his circle. Before he left Tibet he placed these various instructions together in the form of a note. This is why in the title of the text there is an explicit reference to it as being a note that summarizes the different views. So this reference to the term note or kyer ja in Tibetan, indicates this and that this text was specifically composed by Ratnasambhava as a summary of the various instructions that he gave to King Trisong Detsen¹ and his attendants.

It was in the eighth century that the Tibetan monarch Trisong Detsen invited from India the great Nalanda master, one of the greatest scholars of his time, Santaraksita, who was not only a great established and highly respected Nalanda master but he was particularly expert in the fields of Buddhist epistemology and the Madhyamika philosophy of emptiness. This great master was invited along with the greatly realized tantric master Padmasambhava. Through the combined efforts of these two great Indian masters, Santaraksita and Padmasambhava, a complete form of Buddhism was established in Tibet. Not only fully established but also along with a powerful aspiration for its long-term survival. As a consequence of that, to this day, the complete form of Buddhism survives in the Tibetan tradition and this is due to the kindness of these two masters that we are able to see this.

From among the classical commentaries on this root text that is the basis for these teachings, *The Garland of Views*, the earliest is by Rongzom Pandita who was close to being a contemporary of the great Indian master Atisha so it has nearly been a thousand years since the time of Rongzom. He was a great scholar and his commentary is one of the earliest. Subsequently over a long period of time, it seems that the study and practice of this particular instructional text faded and almost disappeared. The great master Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) was responsible for reviving the teaching, study and practice of this text. One of the principal disciples of Jamyang Khyentse was Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (1813-1899) who wrote a very clear and explicit commentary on this text. Mipham Rinpoche also wrote a commentary. A student of Dundrop Jengme Pema (SP?) named Tsultrim Zangpo also composed a very short summary commentary that I have also read. Among these various commentaries the one that I will be using as the basis for my own explanation here is Jamgon Kongtrul's which is very explicit and clear.

As for the transmission of the teaching for this text, I once received a transmission of the commentary Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and I also later received the transmission of the root text itself from Tushi Rinpoche. So now I will start reading from the text with the English translation.

¹ Thupten Jinpa says Songtsen Gampo but it was his son Trisong Detsen who invited Santaraksita to Tibet.

The title of the text is *The Instruction on the Garland of Views*. The opening line states that it is: **A note summarizing the different views, vehicles and so on**. So a difference is made between the two terms 'views' and 'vehicles.' Here the term 'views' refers to philosophical views, the views that are part of the tenets of the various philosophical views. Generally when one uses the term 'grub mtha' or philosophical tenet, it refers to established standpoints of a philosophical school or tradition that have been arrived at through the process of reasoning and understanding certain scriptural authorities. So by the combination of scriptural authority and a reasoning process one arrives at certain standpoints. These standpoints are referred to as philosophical tenets so here in this text the term 'views' refers to these types of philosophical standpoints or views that a school or tradition has arrived at as a result of reasoning and an understanding of certain scriptural authorities.

The term 'vehicles' here refers to the vehicles of the path which are the vehicles of the disciples, hearers, the Self-Realized Ones or Pratyekabuddhas and the bodhisattvas. So in essence the different views are ways of understanding or different standpoints from the point of view of the wisdom aspect of the path and the different vehicles are to be understood from the point of view of the method or skillful means aspect of the path. So from the point of view of the wisdom aspect of the path, for example in the Buddhist tradition, one speaks of four schools of philosophical traditions, the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra or Mind-Only and the Middle Way or Madhyamika. From the point of view of the method aspect of the path, in Buddhism one speaks of the various vehicles, the Lesser Vehicle and the Greater Vehicle or Mahayana. Within the Lesser Vehicle there are the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas or self-realized ones. Within the Greater Vehicle or Mahayana, there is the Sutra Vehicle or Perfection Vehicle and the Vajrayana or Tantra Vehicle.

These distinctions or these differences in views or philosophical schools are to be understood on the basis of the philosophical views held by individuals. The differences between the vehicles are to be understood from the point of view of the courage or motivation of the practitioners. There can therefore be individuals whose philosophical inclination maybe that of say the Mahayana understanding of emptiness according to the Middle Way or Madhyamika but their primary spiritual motivation may be to attain liberation rather than Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. So these individuals from the point of view of vehicles, they are followers of the Lesser Vehicle but from the point of view of their philosophical tenets, they are followers of the Greater Vehicle. Similarly there can be individuals whose philosophical inclinations may be that of the Vaibhashika, which belongs to the Lesser Vehicle school of philosophy but from their courage and motivation they may belong to the Mahayana Vehicle where their spiritual motivation is to seek Buddhahood or full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings even though their philosophical views are within the Vaibhashika or the Sautrantika.

One therefore should have the understanding that the differences between the Greater and Lesser Vehicles in terms of their 'views' may not exactly correspond to their motivation in terms of the 'vehicles.' So in this regard of understanding the differences between

vehicles and views, it is important to keep in mind that because of the language of the different vehicles such Greater and Lesser and within those the subdivisions of hearers, self-realized ones and so on, there is sometimes a tendency on the part of some individuals to think of these as distinct and unrelated to each other. This is a completely incorrect understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

This is because if one looks at all of teachings of the vehicles one will see that all of the key teachings of the Pali tradition which were all established on the basis of the Buddhist councils which took place following the death of the Buddha. The main subject matter of these scriptures based on the Pali language is the Four Noble Truths, the Thirty-seven Aspects of the Path to Enlightenment, the Twelve Limbs of Dependent Origination. All of these teachings represent the basic structure and the framework for the Buddhist path to enlightenment. It is only on the basis of such a foundation that one can then speak about the relevance or validity of the teachings presented in the Mahayana or Great Vehicle scriptures such as the teachings on emptiness, the six or ten perfections and so on. So it is upon the foundation presented in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures that one can then add the other practices such as the six perfections and so on.

Similarly, it is on the basis of the foundational teachings of the Pali scriptures as well as the foundational teachings of the Sutra or Perfection Vehicle that one can then build on to those the uniqueness of the Vajrayana teachings and its practices such as deity yoga and so on. So without the foundational practices of the other teachings, there is simply no relevance or place for the teachings or the practices of the Vajrayana. So to have an understanding that somehow the Vajrayana is totally independent from the other vehicles or that the three vehicles are independent of each other is mistaken. Sometimes there is also a tendency on the part of some individuals to proclaim themselves as being a follower of the Great Vehicle or a tantric practitioner of the Vajrayana and then belittle the teachings of the ethical discipline found in the Pali scriptures or to dismiss them as only for the followers of the Lesser Vehicle. Also some practitioners of the Vajrayana dismiss the teachings of the Sutra Vehicle claiming that they apply only to the Sutra Vehicle and they are followers of the Vajrayana. There is also a tendency to belittle the practices of the Sutra Vehicle as unnecessary or irrelevant. Such an attitude is not only mistaken but it also reflects a fundamental flaw in their understanding of the Buddha's teachings. It reflects an ignorance on the part of those practitioners.

So it is important to understand that the teachings found in all of the various vehicles and the terminology used in all three vehicles is all found in the scriptures themselves. The Lesser Vehicle is divided into the hearer vehicle of the disciple or sravaka and the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha or self-realized ones. The Mahayana Vehicle is divided into the bodhisattva vehicle and the tantric vehicle. So this way of understanding the vehicles itself indicates that the Vajrayana is not independent of the Mahayana but rather it is a subset or subdivision of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Therefore it is important to understand the actual relationships between the vehicles.

Furthermore in terms of the attainment of the realizations presented in these scriptures, the realizations that are described in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures can be attained on the

basis of practicing and following the teachings found in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures. However in order to gain the realizations and experiences that are described in the Greater Vehicle, the Mahayana and Vajrayana, it is impossible to have such realizations without having the basis of the realizations as they are presented and described in the Greater Vehicle. Therefore to gain the realizations described in the Lesser Vehicle there is no need to rely upon the teachings described in the Greater Vehicle but in order to gain the realizations described in the Greater Vehicle, the foundation of the realizations described in the Greater Vehicle are indispensable.

The subtitle reads: **A note summarizing the different views, vehicles and so on.** The 'and so on' refers to possible further subdivisions such as within the Vajrayana, there are the various classes of tantra.

The text itself opens with a statement: **The countless erroneous views that exist in the realm of the world may be subsumed into four categories.** In the world of human beings, among the various individuals there are countless philosophical inclinations and points of view. Many of these points of view are erroneous and also many of them are based on a lack of understanding or ignorance. Therefore these various points of view, if they are subsumed, the text states that they can be subsumed into four categories. These are: **1. the unreflective** which refers to the persons who simply do not have an understanding. **2. The materialists** **3. The nihilists** **4. The extremists.**

The text then goes on to define the first type of erroneous view which is referred to as the ineffective. It reads: **The unreflective do not understand whether or not all things and events have causes and conditions. They are thoroughly ignorant.** So the text here does not refer to a simple understanding of everyday events as if one were to plant a seed that one would then expect a sprout to develop. This type of causal condition everyone can understand and everyone knows this. However what are referred to here in the text are persons who apart from everyday experience, they have no tendency to be reflective; they simply do not engage in contemplation of the ultimate origins of things. They are not interested in tracing back the chain of causation or wonder as to the beginning of the cosmos or life. The majority of people do not have the tendency to deeply reflect on the causes and conditions that give rise to everyday things and events. Also the text states that this type of person does not reflect as to whether or not there is a creator as the origin of the universe or whether there is life after death.

Although this particular type of standpoint is referred to as an erroneous view, strictly speaking, it is more accurately described as a form of ignorance; simply a lack of interest or reflection. In a sense this characterizes the standpoint and persuasion of many people who simply do not want to reflect on such issues.

The second view is that of the materialist and the text reads: **Materialists do not understand whether or not there exist previous or subsequent lives, and relying upon the words of mundane secrets, they acquire wealth and power only for this single life.** The Tibetan for materialist is rgyang 'phen which is the same term used for an Indian philosophical school called Charvaka but in this context here, it does not refer to

this particular Indian philosophical school but a general materialistic standpoint. These are persons whose main concern is the affairs and concerns of this life. They are reflective and are deeply concerned about their wellbeing in this particular life. They reject any notion of a pre-existing life or of future lives. However for the sake of this life, they rely upon what this text calls “mundane secrets” which probably refers to rituals of propitiation to spirits, nagas and so on, commonly believed to exist in early times. So these individuals rely upon these types of ritual propitiation, seeking the various ways in which their aspirations and concerns for this life can be fulfilled. Therefore this standpoint is described as a materialist standpoint.

This second view when compared with the first view is not so much an erroneous view but again more of a lack of reflection, an unwillingness to probe beyond a certain level. This view is more accurately described as a lack of understanding.

The third view is of the nihilist which is definitely a philosophical standpoint as it is commonly understood. The text reads: **The nihilist views all phenomena to be devoid of cause and effect and maintain that all elements of existence that have come about in this one life do so accidentally, thus it is called nihilism.** This refers to philosophical schools such as the Indian Charvaka School. This is not a matter of unwillingness to be reflective but is an active persuasion of rejecting any long-term causality to things and events. Rather through using philosophical analysis and reasoning, they come to the conclusion that all of the elements of existence that come about in this life, come about randomly, accidentally without any underlying deeper causes. So in this way they are said to follow a form of nihilism. This is from the Buddhist point of view an erroneous view.

In this context it is important to understand and relate these observations to one’s own personal views. Leaving aside any questions of rebirth, life after death, future existences and so on, even in the case of one’s own everyday experience of happiness and wellbeing in this life, there is a tendency on the part of many to believe that the conditions for happiness lay exclusively in external circumstances and conditions. These include the acquisition of wealth, property and so forth. Quite often people tend to believe that the sources of happiness really lay outside of themselves. On the basis of such a premise, they tend to expend their energies and dedicate themselves to fulfilling this aspiration to attain happiness by focusing their attention exclusively on external causes and conditions.

However if one reflects in a deeper fashion, one will come to understand that although everyone has the natural disposition to seek happiness and to overcome suffering, this happiness one seeks and this suffering that one seeks to avoid, exist on two levels. On the one level is the experience of happiness or suffering primarily related to one’s physical existence or one’s body. On the other level, one has the experience of pain and suffering or happiness and joy that primarily relate to one’s thoughts and emotions, a mental level of experience. How do we know this?

Simply observe a situation where although one may have the best physical facilities, even in this context of great physical comfort, one’s state of mind can still be deeply disturbed,

be in great pain and suffering. Similarly that same individual with the same type of physical comfort surrounding them can have a mental state that is joyous and happy. This shows that in terms of one's own experiences, there is a level of experience based upon physical conditions and a level of experience based on one's thoughts and emotions.

Generally speaking, in terms of these two levels of experience, even animals possess these levels to some extent, the physical and the mental. What is unique to human beings is level of sophistication of their faculty of intelligence as well as imagination. Human beings have a much greater scope for the experience of the mental level and also these experiences of pain or joy on the mental level have a deep impact on one's own experience. The fact that this is so, that this is a fact in reality can be observed which have a great impact on one's own experience of pain and happiness. This is easily seen on simple reflection.

Therefore it is important to understand that when one thinks of the happiness that one seeks or the suffering that one seeks to avoid, there is this more nuanced and deeper understanding of the true nature of suffering and of happiness. Now given these two levels of the experience of happiness and suffering, the one on the physical level consists mainly of the five senses or sensory experience and the other is based on emotions and thoughts. Now ask yourself the following question, "Which level of experience is more acute or powerful?" If one reflects deeply on this one can see that if one's state of mind is contented and happy with a deep sense of satisfaction, even if that person faces great hardship on the physical level, because of that person's state of mind is contented and happy with a sense of satisfaction, that mental experience can override the physical level of discomfort and pain. On the other hand, even though one may be surrounded by the best of facilities needed for comfort, if that person's mind is agitated and disturbed then even though that person is listening to their favorite music, wearing their favorite clothes, being served the most delicious food, wearing the best of fragrances and so on, because of the power of the mental disturbance, none of these external sensory experiences can be enjoyed. This indicates that the mental level of experience of happiness or pain can override and supercede any physical experience of comfort or pain. The physical level of comfort or happiness cannot supercede or override one's mental pain and suffering on the basis of emotions and thought.

Once one understands these differences between the two levels of experience, one comes to recognize that the experience of pain or happiness on the level of emotions and thoughts is much more acute and powerful than experiences based on the level of the senses. Given that no matter how pleasurable or comfortable one's physical surroundings may be in terms of possessions and facilities, since they cannot override or supercede the experience of pain and suffering on the level of one's thoughts and emotions, and since the experience of pain and suffering on the level of one's thoughts and emotions is so dominant for us as human beings, this indicates that one needs to find a way or method whereby one can learn to overcome this level of suffering and pain.

So one comes to recognize that many of the external factors such as material wealth, money and so forth pertain only as factors necessary to create a level of comfort for the

body, for bodily sensations. However in relation to one's aspiration to overcome suffering and pain on the mental level of thoughts and emotions, they do not play much of a role. One needs to find a method or means that is more appropriate for overcoming the suffering and pain on the level of one's own emotions and thoughts. What is required here is the cultivation of certain ways of thought or attitudes, states of mind which are appropriated resources to help one overcome mental suffering and pain. In conclusion, this suggests that to place all of one's hopes and trust into external conditions for the elimination of suffering is truly misplaced; one needs to seek more appropriate means in addition to material facilities to help one overcome the suffering that each one of us seeks to avoid. Primarily, what is required here is a way in which to cultivate calmness and peace of mind, tranquility within oneself.

Strictly from the point of view of this life alone, as I explained before, to entirely place one's trust and hope into external factors is a misplaced hope; one needs another method, another means. Here I personally believe that although on a deeper level the practice of the various religious teachings and faiths may be important, but purely from the point of view of the wellbeing of this life alone, my own personal view is that one can find a method or a means by which one can bring about the mental resources needed to overcome one's suffering and promote the happiness that we all aspire to without resorting to any traditional religious faith or belief.

The key here are the basic human values, particularly loving-kindness and compassion. I believe that it is not necessarily a question of religious faith but I believe that by the simple biological constitution of our bodies, we humans have a natural capacity and seed for affection. The natural capacity and seed for generating affection lies within all of us, by nature. This is because all of us have the capacity to appreciate when other fellow human beings express affection towards us. No matter how evil, no matter how negative an individual person may be, if this person has a friend or family member who shows affection for this person, this person is capable of responding to that affection. This simple fact reflects that even in this individual there is the seed for affection and compassion. This is because my belief is that we human beings did not have a seed or natural capacity to express affection then in that case, even if someone else shows affection to another, that person would not be able to respond to that as there would simply be no basis for appreciating the expression of kindness or concern. So the fact that we all have this natural capacity to respond to affection from others indicates that each one of us possess within us the seed for affection and compassion. And I believe that it is through the enhancement and cultivation of this seed for compassion and affection that really is the key for bringing about happiness and overcoming suffering on the level of thoughts and emotions.

In this respect there is no difference whatsoever between the educated or uneducated, the wealthy or the poor, ethnicity or whether or not one is a religious believer or a non-believer in so far as this seed for compassion is concerned. Also there is no difference as to the potential for the cultivation and enhancement. We are all fundamentally equal in this respect. So long as one is a human being, born from a mother's womb, nourished on mother's milk, one will share this basic capacity, nature and disposition to appreciate

affection and compassion. Because of this fundamental belief, I always make the effort to share with as many others as possible the tremendous importance of recognizing these fundamental human values and the need to cultivate and enhance them. This is what I refer to as the promotion of the perspective of secular ethics.

In actual fact, among the more than six billion human beings who live on this planet today, the majority of human beings probably belong in this category of secular ethics. The majority of human beings fall into the category of being unreflective, not overly concerned with the deeper meaning of existence or the deeper causes and conditions but they are rather primarily concerned with only the wellbeing of this life, everyday experience. This even includes members of the monastic order who, although they wear robes and who may claim to explicitly be followers of the Buddha Shakyamuni, but deep down, many of us who wear these clothes and claim to be a religious practitioner are actually following this path of the unreflective where they are only concerned with the wellbeing of this life, of everyday experience.

[His Holiness in English] So I am giving an explanation about nirvana but most are more interested in the dollar! (Laughs) So in order to get some dollars, they sell the Dharma. So in this case even though one appears like a follower of the Buddha Shakyamuni but in practice one is more concerned with this life. Theoretically we say we belong to the Mahayana or Tantrayana but practically we belong to this group. (Laughs) I think it is very important from time to time to remember, observe and check one's own thoughts and motivation, one's own behavior. This is very important. Therefore the observation of one's own body, speech and mind is extremely important. Although police are very important, it is most important to have internal police and from time-to-time watch one's concepts. [Back to Tibetan]

When thinking along these lines it resonates deeply with the sayings of the old Kadampa master. For instance the master 'Ban gung-rgyal stated that so far as his own spiritual practice was concerned, there was really only one thing to do which is to stand guard at the entrance to his mind with spear in hand. When a mental affliction arrives he then needs to immediately challenge it and as the mental afflictions are becoming increasingly clever, he needs to strengthen his own vigilance being equally clever in his response. It is said that this master was formerly a thief. He of course later became a monk and became a great practitioner. One day as a monk because of his old habit of stealing, he reached with his right hand to steal something without thinking. He instantly recalled his mindfulness, reached out with his left hand grabbing his right hand and shouted, "There's a thief here!"

The fourth view is called the extremists and the text defines this as: **The extremists uphold the existence of an eternal self for they reify all phenomena through conceptual imputation. These extremists are comprised of those who the presence of effects where there is no cause, those who view cause and effect erroneously and those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause. All of these are views of ignorance.** This view, called here as the extremists, refers to an adherence to a philosophical school. Generally speaking, within human beings, there are those who

adhere to a philosophical school and those who do not. Many of the views described earlier are strictly speaking, not truly philosophical schools as such but rather represent a certain mental inclination of individuals. From here on though, a view refers to the standpoints of various philosophical schools.

When one speaks of philosophical schools in this context, broadly speaking there are the Buddhist schools on the one side and the non-Buddhist schools on the other. The demarcation between Buddhists and non-Buddhists is made on the basis of whether or not an individual uphold what are called the Four Seals or Axioms of Buddhism. Those who uphold these Four Seals are grouped as belonging to the Buddhist philosophical school and those who reject these Four Seals and uphold different axioms are referred to as the non-Buddhists.

The Four Seals of Buddhism refer to the following:

1) All conditioned things are impermanent. Generally speaking, when one refers to impermanence or the transient nature of things, this can be understood on two levels: in terms of a continuum of a phenomenon or thing, or in terms of the moment by moment existence of a phenomenon. We are all aware of the transient nature of things if one reflects on the nature of things over time. For example in the case of one's own existence, one is born, grows and then at some point one dies. Even in relation to objects one understands that over a period of time these things change and eventually perish. However this is not the true meaning of impermanence here in the Buddhist context. The true meaning of impermanence in the Buddhist context is the understanding of impermanence in terms of the moment by moment existence of a phenomenon. Because if there is no process of change on a moment by moment basis then one cannot account for change over a period of time.

For example, take one's own body. From the very moment of conception until the final moment at death, one's body undergoes a tremendous process of change in terms of development and decay. In the case of the body on the cellular level, there is a constant dynamic process of change taking place. These changes on a moment by moment basis are responsible for the observable changes. At times some of these changes even reflect in visible changes in one's own appearance such as when one ages and so on. The mechanism that gives rise to this visible change is on the subtle or microscopic level.

It is by understanding this dynamic, the moment by moment changing nature of things that one comes to understand the subtle impermanence of conditioned things. Of course within the Buddhist tradition the question is asked, "What is the factor that compels conditioned things to change, decay and eventually disintegrate?" The Vaibhasika School explains this in terms of a temporal process where things come into being, then they abide or endure for a period of time and finally enter the process of decay, disintegrating and ceasing to exist. However most Buddhist schools understand the mechanism for this change in a subtler manner where it is understood that the very causes and conditions bring about a phenomenon into existence that is subject to change, subject to decay. So in a sense the seed for a conditioned object's own destruction is produced in the very

moment that the conditioned object itself is produced. Therefore in order for a phenomenon to come into being, decay and cease to exist, there is no need for a third factor. Any thing that comes into being as a result of causes and conditions over time will eventually decay and cease to exist.

So it is the understanding of this subtle impermanence, the moment by moment process of change that is understood in Buddhism, that all conditioned things are subject to impermanence, that all conditioned phenomenon are transient and impermanent. This is the First Seal.

2) All contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering. This does not suggest that all conditioned phenomena are subject to suffering. Within conditioned phenomena one can make a distinction between those that are contaminated and those that are uncontaminated. Any phenomenon whose causes and conditions are contaminated is subject to the nature of suffering. Here this primarily refers to those phenomena which come into being say from the fundamental ignorance that lies at the heart of one's existence. Although some Indian master such as Asanga understand this fundamental ignorance as a mere unknowing, it is otherwise understood to be an active form of mis-knowing or distorted understanding. This distorted understanding of the nature of reality lies at the heart of one's causes and conditions so any effects that are produced by such a distorted state of mind are bound to be distorted themselves. Therefore in the Second Seal, the Buddha states that all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering.

3) All phenomena are empty and devoid of selfhood or self-existence. This refers to one's understanding of the nature of one's own existence and phenomena. For example, if one observes one's normal sense of selfhood, one tends to believe that underlying one's physical and mental constituents, which change through time, there is something constant, something enduring called "me" or "I." If yesterday one was ill and today one is well and one has a memory of that experience of being ill, instinctively one remembers that experience as "When I was ill ..." One has this underlying sense or assumption that there is something constant, something that endures through that period of time. Although one's body has gone through change somehow there seems to be this "I" that remains unchanged through this time period of illness and health.

If one pushes this temporal framework further to the case of some yogis who are capable of recalling their past life experiences, in these cases one's memory will reach much further back through the distance of time. These individuals will immediately have the thought, "I was born from such-and-such." Here again the temporal reach of one's memory and the reference to the term 'I' becomes much longer.

The point is that one, in one's normal conception of selfhood, tend to have the idea that underlying all of these mental and physical processes which change over time, there is something enduring, something that is lasting; there is something unchanging, something that is one which is the real 'me.' This is something that is entirely natural for one to believe [; it is not a matter of philosophical training]. Of course one can then have learned philosophical ideas which reinforce this [innate] idea which will then examine the nature

of this sense of selfhood and come to the understanding that given that the body and mind are constantly changing, therefore neither the body nor the mind can be identified with this unchanging self. Therefore there must be something independent of both the body and mind, a self that is unitary, unchanging, permanent and so on.

Here Buddhism is saying that the belief in such an enduring, unchanging, eternal and permanent self is a misconception. This is because apart from one's body and mind, one's physical and mental constituents, there is no independent self that is outside or independent of those two. So in the Buddhist tradition, the idea of a self that is independent, unitary, permanent and unchanging is rejected. This is not only in relation to one's own existence but also in relation to all phenomena as well. Therefore the Third Seal is stated as: All phenomena are empty and devoid of self-existence. (End of day)

Day Two

We left off speaking of the Four Seals of Buddhism.

4) Nirvana is true peace. Nirvana here is the transcendence of all sorrow and refers to a state where one is totally free from conditioned existence, existence conditioned by means of fundamental ignorance. I spoke about how existence is characterized by ignorance and how one's existence is therefore in the nature of suffering. Here in the phrase 'transcending sorrow', sorrow refers to the one's nature of existence conditioned by the afflictions and fundamental ignorance because for as long as one remains under those conditions, one is under the power of this distorted state of mind. At the root of this distorted mind is the mistaken belief in self-existence or the selfhood of one's own being.

Therefore by cultivating the wisdom that perceives the nonexistence of this selfhood, by cultivating the wisdom of no-self, one is able to recognize that one's grasping at selfhood is a mistaken state of mind and in this way, one will gradually be able to, through enhancing this wisdom of no-self, undermine the force of one's grasping at selfhood. In this way one is able to completely remove ultimately from one's mind any grasping at selfhood. This state where one is totally free of afflictions and fundamental ignorance is a state of lasting happiness and peace. Therefore in the Fourth Seal it states: Nirvana is true peace. True peace here refers to lasting peace and tranquility.

What is found here in the teachings of the Four Seals is the theoretical basis for the Buddhist understanding of the path to liberation. So the question now arises: "How does one integrate this theoretical knowledge of the Four Seals into one's actual practice of embarking on the path to enlightenment?" Here there is an actual sequence to how the understanding of one leads to the understanding of the other. Therefore in a text it reads: "Because it is transient, it is in the nature of suffering." The realization of suffering leads then to the understanding of the absence of selfhood. This suggests that if one reflects deeply upon the nature of one's own existence, particularly one's own physical and mental constituents such as body, mind and so on, all of which are objects of one's own self-cherishing. When one thinks of oneself, one has the instinctive thought of "I am doing this" or "I am ...". The object of this sense of selfhood really are the physical and psychological elements that make up one's existence.

If one deeply observes the nature of these physical and mental constituents that make up one's existence then it becomes evident that none of them are permanent; they are all transient, they are all subject to fluctuations, changes and so on. The realization of their transient nature, particularly in terms of their moment by moment existence, allows the beginning of an intellectual understanding. Once one gains an intellectual understanding of the momentary nature of the subtle impermanence of one's own body and mind, then this intellectual knowledge through constant cultivation can be internalized. This recognition, this understanding of the impermanent nature of one's own existence can then lead to an understanding of their nature of suffering because once one realizes that one's own body and mind, one's own existence is momentarily changing, subject to moment by moment transience, realizing their impermanence then one also comes to realize that they are the products of causes and conditions. Once one realizes that they are the products of causes and conditions then one immediately recognizes that they are under the power of their causes and conditions. This is in general for all conditioned things, in particular, in the case of one's own existence, it is characterized by unenlightenment. This unenlightenment is conditioned by the afflictions and karma. It is karma and the afflictions which have given rise to one's unenlightened existence, at the root of which is the fundamental ignorance of grasping at the imagined self-existence of oneself.

Once one recognizes this, one comes to realize that one's existence is under the power of karma and the afflictions. Upon reflecting upon the nature of the afflictions, the cognitive and emotional afflictions, the very term 'affliction' or klesha in Sanskrit or nyon mongs in Tibetan, in the very etymology of the term nyon mongs there is the immediate connotation of something that afflicts from within, something that creates a deep disturbance, something that inflicts suffering within one's mind the moment it arises. Any form of existence which is under the domination of these afflicted states of mind is bound to be in the nature of suffering. Once one recognizes this then one will also come to realize that on the one hand in one's normal conception of selfhood, one tends to grasp at some kind of eternal, unitary and unchanging self. But once one recognizes that one's body and mind are in a state of constant flux then one comes to realize that one's belief in a self as unitary, unchanging and eternal is misguided. In this way one gradually comes to develop insight into no-self, anatman, the absence of selfhood. One will also come to recognize that this 'self' one grasps at is not worthy of grasping as this grasping leads to all of the forms of afflictions, suffering and so on.

In this way the recognition, the realization of impermanence leads to the realization suffering nature of conditioned phenomena. And the realization of the suffering nature of phenomena culminates in the realization of no-self. It is this insight into no-self which eventually leads one to gradually overcome the afflictions and the state where one has totally eliminated self-grasping and its effects is the true lasting peace which in Buddhist terms is called liberation or moksha. Once one has this type of recognition of the possibility of attaining such a cessation of the afflictions and attaining liberation, then a genuine aspiration to attain this liberation arises within one's mind.

In fact when one speaks of the Buddhadharma, the true definition here of the Buddhadharma relates to the quest for seeking liberation from cyclic existence. Any form of spirituality that is grounded upon and inspired by an aspiration to seek liberation that is Buddhadharma. For example many of the basic ethical practices such as avoidance from the ten negative actions [of body, speech and mind], this practice alone cannot be characterized as a specifically Buddhist path as it is common to all religious traditions.

Also, deliberately abandoning the act of killing out of fear of its legal consequences cannot even be characterized as religious practice. On the other hand if one deliberately takes a vow not to kill on the basis that one is afraid of the karmic consequence such as being reborn in a lower realm of existence, this is a common ethical practice to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. However if one's practice of an ethical discipline which is a deliberate vow to abandon the act of killing is motivated by or grounded upon the aspiration to attain liberation as I defined earlier as the total freedom from the mental afflictions, fundamental ignorance and so on, then this type of ethical practice can be described as a truly Buddhist ethical practice.

For example, generally when one speaks of taking refuge in the three Jewels this is mainly the Dharma Jewel. The Dharma Jewel in the context of the Three Jewels is defined in terms of the cessation of the afflictions. Within the three objects of refuge, the Three Jewels, the Dharma Jewel is the most important. However in the actual sequence of going for refuge, one first goes for refuge to the Buddha, secondly to the Dharma and finally to the Sangha or the Spiritual Community. This reflects their chronological order as they came into being in the context of the specific historical Buddha. For example in the case of the Buddha Shakyamuni, he first came into the world, then he gave teachings which constituted the scriptural Dharma and on the basis of the practice of those teachings realization took place in the minds of the disciples. Together the scriptures and the realization in the minds of the disciples constitute the Dharma Jewel. These individuals who have gained the direct realization of the truth of the Dharma, they become the Arya Sangha, the Noble members of the Sangha. So in this approach it follows a chronological order.

In the case of Buddha himself, in order for him to become fully enlightened, it was necessary for him to internalize the knowledge of the Dharma and the same holds true for the Noble members of the Sangha, the Arya members as it is the embodiment of this Dharma knowledge which makes them Aryas or Noble Beings. Therefore to indicate the importance of the Dharma Jewel, it is stated in the scriptures that even the Buddha when giving teachings to demonstrate his respect and reverence for the Dharma he would arrange his own cushion on the seat.

To go back to the text, I was discussing the distinctions between the non-Buddhist philosophical schools on the one hand and the Buddhist on the other and how these are distinguished on the basis of whether one followed the Four Seals among which the most important one is that of no-self, the denial or rejection of the belief in an eternal and independent self. This becomes the characteristic mark of Buddhism which is the rejection of any notion of independent self-existence, in an independent, eternal and

unchanging self. Historically if one looks at the many philosophical schools in ancient India, there is a clear line between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists based on the position of whether or not there is self-existence or selfhood. On the one side are the Buddhists who on the whole rejected any notion of an eternal, unchanging and independent self and on the other hand were the non-Buddhist schools on the whole who believe in one form or another in a version of self-existence or in the atman which is eternal, unchanging and unitary. Other than this, within the non-Buddhist schools there are theistic schools, non-theistic schools; there are some who believe in rebirth and others who do not; some who believe in liberation or moksha and those who do not and so on. So the distinction between the Buddhists and non-Buddhists centers around their position on the nature and/or existence of the self.

The text reads: **The extremists uphold the existence of an eternal self for they reify all phenomena through conceptual imputation.** The reference to conceptual imputation here suggests that this is a reasoned, philosophical standpoint or postulate so here this does not refer to the innate, natural conception of selfhood. This refers to a reasoned, philosophical standpoint where on the basis of analysis and reflection, one comes to adhere to a standpoint that upholds a belief in eternal and independent self-existence or selfhood. This is common to all non-Buddhist schools.

Within this group of non-Buddhist schools who uphold an eternal self doctrine, there are differences so the text reads: **[The extremists are comprised of] those who view the presence of effects where there is no cause.** This refers to the Indian school called the Charvaka which rejected any notion of [causation,] rebirth and so on. Although they believe in the existence of an eternal, enduring, unchanging self, they do not espouse the doctrine of rebirth [or causation]. They accept effects such as the existence of a self but they reject the notion of rebirth [or a previous existence] which is the cause.

The next reads: **those who view cause and effects erroneously** which refers to those schools such as the Samkhya who understand the origin of the cosmos in terms of what they call the primal substance or prakrti. This primal substance is viewed as permanent, unchanging and so on. This also refers to the Indian theist schools who believe in an unchanging and eternal First Cause or self-causation or the naturally-arising cause. The problem here from the Buddhist point of view is that if the cause is characterized as eternal and unchanging then how can one account for the origin of the world of effects, all of which very evidently reflect the fact of change, fluctuation and transience. How can one account for the origin of these ever-changing effects from a cause that is unchanging and eternal?

The third subdivision is described as: **those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause.** This refers to another category of a non-Buddhist philosophical school who while accepting the existence of the self that is unchanging and permanent, they believe that the basis of this selfhood which is the body and mind to be transient and fluctuating. The objection here is that there is a contradiction between the characteristics of the cause on the one hand and the characteristic of the effect on the other.

Having described the various forms of non-Buddhist philosophical views, it sums them all up saying: **All of these are views of ignorance.**

As a summary of the discussion up to this point, one finds something very similar in Tsongkapa's *Praise to the Buddha Shakyamuni* where he states the following in reference to the Buddha:

The truth that you have revealed on the basis of your own insight
The truth of no-self and the emptiness of inherent existence
And those who follow your teachings and example in the understanding of these truths
For these individuals
They will go further and further away from all sources of downfall.
However those who are contrary to the path revealed by you
Even though they may resort to all sorts of hardship and ascetic practices
They will continue to proliferate the basis for the afflictions.
This is because they continue to reinforce their grasping at selfhood.²

Here the idea is that in addition to the innate grasping at selfhood that we all naturally possess, sometimes as the result of philosophical analysis one may further reinforce this innate grasping and solidify it through the process of philosophical reasoning. In that case, in addition to the already present innate grasping at selfhood, one will also have a powerful grasping that is philosophically acquired. Here the distinction between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists is made on the basis of whether or not one affirms or rejects the object of self-grasping.

Here Jamyang Shayba has summed this up in his root text on the Indian philosophies (*The Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*) by saying: "It is on the basis of whether one is affirming or rejecting the object of the grasping at selfhood, the distinction between Buddhists and non-Buddhists schools is made."³

Then the question can be raised, "Why is there such a proliferation of so many philosophical standpoints, so many philosophical schools, including the various forms of Buddhist philosophy?" In response to this form of questioning, one finds in the *Lankavatara Sutra* reference to many different forms of spiritual vehicles. It refers to vehicles of the celestial beings, humans and so on. The point made in the *Lankavatara Sutra* is that so long as sentient beings exist, there will be a multiplicity and diversity of spiritual inclinations, mental dispositions and so on.

Chapter Two: The Deva vehicle, the Brahma vehicle, the Sravaka vehicle, the LVI Verse 203 Pratyekabuddha vehicle and the Tathagata vehicle, of these I speak.

² A paraphrase of verses 31 -32. See Thurman's translation in *Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*.

³ Literally: "The two, Outer [non-Buddhist] and Inner [Buddhist, respectively] establish and refute the referent object of the view of self."

Verse 205. There is really no establishment of various vehicles, and so I speak of the one vehicle; but in order to carry the ignorant, I talk of a variety of vehicles.

From the Buddhist point of view, if one observes the diversity of the world's religious traditions present in the world today, all of them emphasize the practice of ethical discipline. All of them emphasize the importance of cultivating love and compassion, warm-heartedness aimed at the creation of a better human being, a kinder more compassionate human being. Many of these traditions also teach spiritual practices which are aimed at a higher level of attainment such as being reborn in heaven and so forth. Therefore ethical practice is at the heart of all of these religious traditions. So from the Buddhist point of view this multiplicity of faith traditions can be seen as what is referred to in the scriptures as the vehicles for humans and divine beings.

In ancient India there were also non-Buddhist spiritual traditions where in addition to ethical practices there were also highly developed and refined meditation techniques all of which were aimed at the cultivation of deep, single-pointed and heightened states of mind. These were described as formed and formless states. Many of these meditative practices which emphasized the cultivation of single-pointedness of mind are also known as samatha or tranquil abiding and special or penetrative insight (vipasyana). These were developed in conjunction with reflecting deeply upon the defects of existence within the Desire Realm and by transcending the level of the senses, moving beyond the formed and formless states. These types of practices and the religious systems which enshrine them from the Buddhist point of view, from the *Lankavatara Sutra's* point of view would be understood as the Brahma Vehicle.

There are other paths such as one primarily aimed at the attainment of liberation from cyclic existence and the elimination of the fundamental ignorance grasping at selfhood. These paths are described in the scriptures as paths transcending the world and have further subdivisions. For example, there is the Sravaka Vehicle or the Disciple's Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle or Self-realized Ones and the Bodhisattva Vehicle which are listed and described here in this text.

As the *Lankavatara Sutra* states, so long as the diversity of human thoughts remains, there will be a diversity of spiritual paths which will be appropriate for individual human beings. This suggests a recognition at a profound level that given the diversity of the mental dispositions, spiritual inclinations and interests of sentient beings, there is a need for a diversity of spiritual paths. So in correspondence with the diversity of the mental dispositions, spiritual inclinations and interests of sentient beings, paths will evolve that are appropriate and suited to these varying dispositions, inclinations and interests of sentient beings.

If this is the case, if this is a fact then there is simply no basis to argue or make the claim in one way or another to say that this is the best path [for all beings] or that is the worst path. This is because the evaluation of the validity of a path really needs to be performed on the basis of whether or not a particular path is beneficial and suited for a given individual. Simply because from a certain point of view of a certain religious tradition or philosophical standpoint may be described as higher that does not mean that it is the

“best.” Because depending upon the need of the individual, there is a specific path which is best suited for that individual. As a Buddhist, once one comes to recognize that kind of understanding then one will immediately appreciate the need and importance of inter-religious understanding and harmony.

Even in the context of Buddhism, one speaks of four philosophical schools, Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra and Madhyamika. One also speaks of the Three Vehicles, Two Vehicles, the Lesser and Greater Vehicles and so on. All of these are attributed to a single teacher, the Buddha Shakyamuni. If one were to ask, “What is actually the Buddha’s own final standpoint?” “Why did the Buddha teach in such a diversity and at times contradictory teachings in his scriptures?” The Buddha’s own final standpoint is from the point of view of the Madhyamika is that of the Middle Way philosophy but it is a fact that the Buddha taught the philosophy behind the schools of Vaibhasika, Sautrantika and the Cittamatra. He also taught the practices of the Lesser and Greater Vehicles.

One can see even within the Buddhist context a recognition of how the Buddha’s teaching of the Dharma needs to be understood in a context of its appropriateness to a given audience. It is not the case that the Buddha as an enlightened being only wanted to reveal a single truth to everyone. The Buddha selected what was most beneficial, effective and suitable in a given context for a given situation. It is understood that the profundity, value and validity of a particular teaching is based on the evaluation of how beneficial it is. If the teaching is beneficial in its given context, it is profound. If it is not beneficial, even though it may be a very profound teaching, it has no value. So the validity and value of a spiritual teaching needs to be judged on the basis of its effectiveness and its benefit in its own particular context.

From this point of view, one cannot really say one teaching is more profound than another as its profundity and validity needs to be evaluated contextually. If one can use this as an example from one’s own tradition, one can extrapolate this perspective extending it to other religious traditions. If one looks at other religious traditions, generally speaking, one can observe two dimensions to any spiritual tradition; there is the ethical dimension and the philosophical or metaphysical dimension. In the realm of metaphysics/philosophy, there can be great differences between the various religious traditions. However on the level of ethics, there is a uniformity of methods between all of the great traditions of the world. All of them carry the same message of love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance and the need for discipline, simplicity and contentment. All of these are common methods of the ethical teaching of all religious traditions. So from this perspective one cannot say that this is a better religion than that one. One cannot make any such simple statement because they all carry the same message.

On the philosophical side, one can see that the philosophy/metaphysics is the premise or explanation that culminates in the outcome which is the core of the religious teaching, the ethical teachings. The ethical teachings are the outcome of the philosophical analysis. So in the realm of philosophy, obviously there are many differences as the differences lay in how one explains the importance of love, compassion, forgiveness and so on; how one grounds the importance of these ethical practices and what explanations or reasons are

given for following them. This is where the differences lay between the different religious traditions.

For example in theistic religions, there is the belief in an all-powerful creator or divine being is the foundation of the philosophical understanding and the ethical teachings are grounded upon this fundamental belief. If one is grounded in this kind of belief system then the premise for one's entire ethical practice is to try to live one's life in accordance with fulfilling the wish or will of the all-powerful creator. So for some individuals, this theistic approach has a sense of immediacy or power where for other individuals an explanation based on a non-theistic approach would be better suited. Here the importance of love, compassion and so on may have to do with understanding one's own individual responsibility towards others based on cause and effect and so on. This non-theistic approach, where emphasis is on understanding oneself as one's own ultimate salvation, may be more effective and carry a greater resonance.

Therefore, one cannot truly say that one particular approach is best or better as "best" and "better" need to be judged on the basis of an individual context. However purely on the philosophical or metaphysical level one can identify certain ideas as being more sophisticated, refined or logical than others. This is possible but in evaluating a tradition as a whole, there is simply no basis for making a judgment as one being better or another worse.

I often use the example of medicine. When one looks at medicine, one can make various distinctions based on cost. However when one is asking what is the best medicine for a certain condition, one cannot decide based on cost. The value of any medicine lays in its ability to cure or treat a particular illness. Whatever is the most effective medicine for that particular illness, it is from that point of view that one decides regardless of the cost. One can certainly say that one medication is more valuable than another in that it is more expensive but in the proper sense the value of the medicine is judged on the basis of its effectiveness with respect to a specific ailment.

However when one tries to define medicine, the defining characteristic of a medicine is its ability to cure or treat an illness. One cannot define medicine in terms of how much it costs. One can only define it in terms of its effectiveness in relation to a particular ailment. Similarly when one speaks of a spiritual practice or teaching, one can only define the value of a spiritual teaching in relation to its effectiveness in transforming one's emotions and thoughts.

When the Buddha was in India, he lived within a cultural context where there were many other spiritual traditions. Within this context the Buddha developed his own method of no-self, the rejection of the belief in an eternal, enduring, abiding self and so on. In some instances the Buddha had debated with his contemporaries on the virtues and drawbacks on believing in selfhood and so on. However the Buddha never stated anywhere within his teachings nor did he expect all the people of India to turn to Buddhism. He never imagined or claimed the possibility or demanded that everyone should follow his path.

{His Holiness in English] This is the basis for mutual respect among the different traditions and in fact, mutual admiration. I am a Buddhist. Sometimes I described myself as a strong Buddhist so I disagree with some of the views [of others]. But I respect them sincerely because they worked for humanity in the past. They gave immense benefit to millions of people so there is plenty of reason for respect, to admire, to appreciate. So this I feel is the proper way to develop and promote genuine harmony among the [various] spiritual traditions.

Going back to the text, it is now going over the Buddhist path. **The path that transcends the world also consists of two categories, 1) the dialectical vehicle and 2) the indestructible vehicle of the Vajrayana. The dialectical vehicle in turn is three-fold, 1) the vehicle of the disciples, 2) the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones and 3) the vehicle of the bodhisattvas.**

Of these, the view of those who have entered the vehicle of the disciple is as follows. So the text will now refer to those who hold the philosophical views of the Lesser Vehicle, the sravakas. Their view is explained as: **They maintain that the nihilistic view denying everything and the eternalistic view asserting the existence of eternal reality which are postulated by the extremists and so on by means of reification and denigration are as untrue as perceiving a coiled rope as a snake.** The nihilistic view here refers to the standpoints of the unreflective, the materialists and the nihilists who on the whole reject the notion of previous lives, rebirth and so on. Here the eternalistic view refers to the belief in an eternal, enduring and independent self that was discussed earlier.

Those who adhere to the philosophical viewpoint of the Disciple Vehicle maintain that these kinds of postulates, the rejection of rebirth and so on, constitutes denigration. A belief in an eternal self and so on constitutes a form of reification. These are as untrue as seeing a coiled rope as a snake.

After having explain what they reject, the text goes on to explain what the Disciple Vehicle actually espouses: **In contrast they view the aggregates, elements and the sources as being comprised of the four great elements and as well as the consciousness as being ultimately real.** The text is pointing out their philosophical understanding of the nature of reality where they see the physical world as being constituted by indivisible and partless particles which are devoid of any spatial dimension. It is through the aggregation of these indivisible particles that they understand the material or physical world. They understand the origin and nature of the consciousness in terms of an aggregation of moments of consciousness or mental states that are indivisible temporally. They understand both of these, external material objects and internal mental states, to be ultimately real.

The text goes on: **It is by means of meditating upon the Four Noble Truths that in due course, the four kinds of results are realized.** Therefore the followers of the Sravaka Vehicle or Disciple's Vehicle maintain that it is through the basis of practicing the Four Noble Truths that one will in due course, the four types of result, the Stream Enterer, Once Returners, Never Returner and the Arhat.

Next follows the explanation of the view of the followers of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, which is the Self-Realized Ones. The text reads: **The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones is as follows. With respect to viewing the eternal self and so on that are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration to be nonexistent, they are similar to the Disciples.** The point made here is that in relation to the teaching on no-self or anatman, for both the adherents of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle and the Disciple Vehicle, they share the same position. With respect to anatman, they share the same view.

The difference is that they understand the aggregates of form and one aspect of the reality-element to be devoid of self-existence. This is a reference to the uniqueness of the viewpoint of the Pratyekabuddhas. Here the reference to one part of the reality-element refers to the understanding of the absence of selfhood for the object as opposed to the subject. Within the world of subject and object, the adherents to this viewpoint reject the self-existence of objects but not of the [perceiving] subject. They believe in the ultimate reality of subjective experiences.

This way of differentiating the sravakas from the self-realized ones is similar to the one found in Maitreya's *Abhisamayalamkara* or *Ornament of Clear Realization*. In this text, the wisdom of the three vehicles are clearly differentiated and the primary wisdom of the sravaka vehicle is that of insight into no-self of person and the primary wisdom of the pratyekabuddhas is that of insight into the nonduality of subject and object which is similar to the Mind-Only School's standpoint. The primary wisdom of the bodhisattva is that insight into the no-self of persons and phenomena.

Verse 76: Within the scope of the knowledge of the path
 Through not observing the aspects
 Of the four realities of the Noble Ones -
 This path of the Hearers should be known

Verse 80: Because they realize the self-originated essential character
 They do not even need teachings from others.
 The wisdom of those who are like a rhinoceros
 Is expressed to be definitely more profound.

Verse 81: In certain people, who wish to listen to
 Certain subjects in certain ways,
 These certain subjects
 Will appear accordingly even without words.

Verse 82: Because conceptions about apprehended objects are relinquished,
 Because the apprehender is not relinquished,
 And through the support, the path of those who are like a
 rhinoceros
 Should be known to be perfectly summarized.

The text continues: **Also, at the time of attaining the fruit of Self-Realized One's state, unlike Disciples, they do not depend upon a spiritual mentor.** So the self-realized are able to gain realization without depending upon the presence of a teacher. **[Rather] due to the force of their past habituation, they realize the profound ultimate reality by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment.** In the scriptures, the pratyekabuddhas are particularly associated with a deep understanding of the mechanism and the dynamics of the twelve links of dependent origination. This deep understanding is both in terms of forward causation from the first link of the chain leading to the second link and so on as well as the understanding of how by bringing about the end of the earlier link one can bring about the cessation of the latter link in the chain. So this understanding of the twelve links of dependent origination in the context of the vehicle of the self-realized is both in terms of its forward dynamic of creation and also how to bring about its end.

Ultimate reality here refers to the self-realized's understanding of the absence of duality between the [perceiving] subject and the [perceived] object. The text continues: **they realize the profound ultimate reality by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment.**

Next is the bodhisattva vehicle and here the text reads: The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the bodhisattva is as follows. All phenomena of the thoroughly afflicted and enlightened classes are on the ultimate level devoid of intrinsic nature while on the conventional level they possess their individual characteristics in a clearly distinctive manner. This sentence explains the philosophical viewpoint of the Middle Way School which represents the bodhisattva's standpoint.

Historically among the commentators on Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness, there broadly emerged two distinct approaches. On the one side are the great masters such as Bhavaviveka, Haribhadra, Santaraksita who visited Tibet and Kamalashila. While all of these masters reject the notion of true existence on the ultimate level, they do accept some notion of svabhava or self-nature on the conventional level. On the other side are the great masters such as Buddhapalita, Candrakirti and Santideva who reject the notion of ... (Interruption by His Holiness) His Holiness was disputing my use of the word self-nature to translate svabhava because by rejecting the concept of svabhava, which is sometimes translated as intrinsic being, self-nature or own-being, His Holiness pointed out that they are not rejecting the individual characteristics of phenomena. For example, solidity is the defining characteristic of the earth element. (Interruption again by His Holiness) One is not rejecting any notion of nature, individual phenomena having their own defining nature such as solidity being the defining nature of the earth element or heat as the defining characteristic of fire and so on. These kinds of defining natures are not being rejected but is being rejected is any type of intrinsic being or svabhava.

So on the other side are the great masters like Buddhapalita, Candrakirti and Santideva who not only reject any notion of true existence on the ultimate level but they also reject the notion of svabhava, intrinsic being or self-nature or own-being even on the conventional level. So one can see that historically there emerged different interpretations

of Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness and the differences lay in either the acceptance or rejection of the notion of svabhava or self-nature on the conventional level. They also differ as to whether or not the disciples or sravakas and pratyekabuddhas realize the emptiness of phenomena in order to gain liberation. There is also a difference of opinion as to whether or not there is a difference in subtlety between the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. On these details broadly speaking, there emerged two distinct approaches to the understanding of Nagarjuna's understanding of emptiness.

The text continues: **The bodhisattvas aspire to seek the unexcelled enlightenment which is the culmination of traversing the ten levels and the fruit of practicing the six perfections one by one.** The text here is pointing out that in terms of the path, bodhisattvas traverse through the ten bodhisattva bhumis or grounds by means of practicing the ten perfections. When one speaks of the ten perfections, in addition to the usual six, the sixth perfection, the perfection of wisdom, is further divided into the wisdom of skilful means, power, aspiration and transcendent wisdom. It is on the basis of practicing these ten perfections that a bodhisattva finally aspires to attain unexcelled enlightenment going through the ten bodhisattva bhumis one by one.

Next the text discusses the Vajrayana and reads: **The indestructible vehicle of the Vajrayana has three classes: 1) the vehicle of Kriya Tantra, 2) the vehicle of Ubhaya Tantra and 3) the vehicle of Yoga Tantra.** Kriya Tantra is also called Action Tantra. Ubhaya Tantra is both external activities and internal yoga. Here Yoga Tantra is a generic term which is used for both Yoga and Highest Yoga Tantras.

Next the text discusses the first class of tantra saying: **The view of those who have entered Kriya Tantra is as follows. Whilst there is no origination or cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level, one visualizes oneself in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image.** The text here is pointing out that in general, one of the defining characteristics of the Vajrayana path is the practice of deity yoga. Here the text explains the heart of the deity yoga practice which is to generate oneself into the deity on the basis of a deep insight into the ultimate nature of oneself. This is pointed out in the text with the phrase "no origination and cessation on the ultimate level." Of course in reality there is no origination or cessation on the ultimate level but what is being emphasized here is that one must cultivate the recognition, the awareness of this truth. Then using the same mind that has understood or gained this realization, it arises in the form of a deity.

The text next says that "on the conventional level, one visualizes oneself in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image" (or body) **and the attributes –the hand implements** (which symbolize the deity's mind) **and the mantra repetitions** (which symbolize speech) **on the basis of the power of the coming together of the necessary ritual articles and other conditions.** Therefore, the key characteristic of Kriya Tantra is the emphasis upon the need for external activities, the ritual articles and so on as an aid for bringing about the realization of the inner deity yoga state.

Here the text is discussing the various levels of the path of the Vajrayana Vehicle and here it is important to understand what is meant by Vajrayana or the Indestructible Vehicle. The term vajra here has the connotation of indivisibility so in this sense one is referring to a vehicle that has indivisibility as its central characteristic. What is this indivisibility? It refers to the indivisibility of the method aspect of the path with the wisdom aspect of the path so it is the indivisibility of these two aspects of the path, method and wisdom, which is the essence of the Vajrayana path.

However, in so far as the need for the union of method and wisdom is concerned, this is also emphasized in the Perfection or Sutra Vehicle as well. For example, one finds in Nagarjuna's text there is an aspiration at the conclusion of the text where Nagarjuna draws a parallel or correlation between the two accumulations: the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom as corresponding to the two Buddha Kayas, the Form Body of a Buddha and the Truth Body of a Buddha. It is through relying upon a path which has both the accumulations of merit and wisdom that one aspires to attain Buddhahood which is the embodiment of the two Buddha Kayas or the two Buddha Bodies of Form and Reality.

Similarly, Candrakirti explains in his text *The Supplement to the Middle Way* or *Madhyamakavatara* in which he compares the two aspects of the path, method and wisdom, as being the two wings of a bird that glides across the ocean to reach the shore of enlightenment.

Verse 226: And like the king of swans, ahead of lesser birds they soar,
 On broad white wings of the relative and ultimate fully spread.
 And on the strength of virtue's mighty wind they fly
 To gain the far and supreme shore, the oceanic qualities of Victory.

So again there is an emphasis on the need for the union of the method and wisdom aspects of the path.

However in the context of the non-Vajrayana path, the Sutra Vehicle, the union of these two accumulations is understood in terms of one complementing the other so the method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect are seen as two independent streams of realization. Method is primarily characterized by the five perfections of generosity, cultivating the awakening mind and so on whereas the wisdom aspect of the path is primarily characterized by the wisdom of emptiness. It is through the complementarity of these two aspects of the path that one develops the union of method and wisdom.

In the Vajrayana context however, the union of these two accumulations is understood at a much more profound level where their union is not a matter of two factors with one complementing the other but rather their union is in the form of their indivisibility. In other words, both the method and wisdom aspects of the path need to be present within a single event of a mental state. How is this achieved? This is reflected in the early stages of the practice. For example in deity yoga meditation, the core of its practice is to first generate the understanding of emptiness and then this wisdom of emptiness is imagined

as arising or taking the form of a deity. Therefore within a single mental event there is both the realization of emptiness and the visualization of oneself as a deity and these are seen as inseparable.

But ultimately the true meaning of the indivisibility of method and wisdom arises at the level of Highest Yoga Tantra where within a single instant of the clear light state of mind, both the factors for the attainment of a Buddha's Rupakaya or Form Body and of a Buddha's Dharmakaya or Reality Body are present within a single instant of the experience of clear light. This is the ultimate meaning of the indivisibility of method and wisdom. However even on the lower classes of tantra such as Kriya or Action Tantra, their deity yoga meditation truly conveys this indivisibility of method and wisdom though at the level of the imagination as it is at the level of visualization. But still within a single moment of visualization, both aspects of the path present.

The reference to the absence of **origination and cessation on the ultimate level**, as I pointed out earlier, implies the need not just for understanding this factually but actually cultivating this understanding within oneself as the basis for deity yoga meditation. Generally speaking as it is stated in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, in a system where emptiness is possible then everything is possible and in a system where emptiness is not possible then no functioning is possible. From this point of view generally speaking, if one's standpoint embraces the understanding of emptiness, then within this standpoint, the entire functioning of the everyday world of cause and effect is tenable. However in this context here, the understanding of how one on the conventional level comes to be a deity even though on the ultimate level there is no origination or cessation. The meaning here is the deeper one which is explicitly brought out in Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary on this particular section. He says that while mental abiding in equipoise on the absence of origination and cessation on the ultimate level. This reference to one's mind being in equipoise refers to the need for a deep understanding of the emptiness of origination and cessation on the ultimate level.

This is an important point because normally there are quite a large number of people who perceive themselves as practitioners of the Vajrayana. They perform sadhana practices, mantra recitations and visualize themselves as deities. It is important to understand what the core of deity yoga meditation is. What is supposed to happen when one generates oneself as a deity? Because during the course of deity meditation not only must one visualize oneself as a deity but one must also cultivate an identification of oneself as a deity. So in addition to visualizing oneself as a deity, there is also the need for cultivating the identity of a deity (divine pride). A form of identification takes place here and if there is no deep understanding of emptiness as the basis for the meditation then what may happen is a further reinforcement of clinging to a sense of "I" based on one's ordinary sense of selfhood. This ordinary sense of selfhood is grounded upon one's bodily existence composed of flesh, bones and so on.

However what is required in the Vajrayana deity yoga meditation is not only a clear perception of oneself as a deity, a visualization, but also a strong identification with the deity on the basis of a purified aggregate. So what is required here is not only the

dissolution of grasping at the inherent existence of oneself but also the dissolution on the level of ordinary appearance of oneself as an ordinary human being composed of flesh, blood and so on. One therefore goes through a process of dissolution into emptiness and Jamgon Kongtrul writes that from within that state devoid of origination and cessation on the ultimate level, one arises on the conventional level in the form of a deity. The point made here is that not only on the level of apprehension does one need to negate one's own inherent existence but also on the level of perception as well, one must dissolve the perception of oneself as an ordinary being. Then from within that state of emptiness, one assumes the form of a deity. So it is from the realization of emptiness that one arises or assumes the form of a deity. When this happens there is a real union [of method and wisdom]. Otherwise, no matter how many mantras one may recite or how many times one visualizes oneself as a deity, none of those practices are truly Vajrayana as the core element of ... (End of recording) [the practice of deity yoga is missing.

No matter that one may have done a three year retreat or one may have recited the mantra of the deity so many times and so on, none of them will truly become Vajrayana practice. The point being made here as explained before is that as a foundation for the practice of Vajrayana, to engage in a successful practice of Vajrayana, it is indispensable to have at least some form of experience in the understanding of emptiness. Without an understanding of emptiness, there is simply no basis for the cultivation of the deity yoga practice. When one speaks of the understanding of emptiness here it could be according to the Cittamatra (Mind-Only school) or according to the Middle Way School. Historically in India, there have been yogis, followers of the Cittamatra, Mind-Only School or Middle Way School who have been great Vajrayana realized masters.

An understanding of the ultimate nature of reality either according to the Cittamatra or the Middle Way is indispensable as a foundation for a successful deity yoga meditation. In order for the understanding of emptiness to become an effective antidote to overcoming the subtle obstructions to knowledge which is the primary obstacle to the attainment of full enlightenment, it is indispensable that the realization of emptiness is complemented with the factor of bodhicitta, the awakening mind.

The point I am making is that in order for one to successfully engage in the Vajrayana practice, it is indispensable to have a realization of the sutra system of the path, particularly the realizations of emptiness and bodhicitta. For a follower of purely the Perfection Vehicle, the Sutra system of the path, there is no need for any realizations of the Vajrayana path. For the practitioners of the Vajrayana, it is indispensable to have the realization of emptiness and bodhicitta, the awakening mind as presented in the Perfection Vehicle.

If one's practice of the Vajrayana path, the deity yoga meditation, is truly grounded upon a deep understanding of emptiness as presented in the Sutra Vehicle and complemented with bodhicitta, the practice of awakening mind, then that very understanding of emptiness at the level of imagination assumes the form of whatever particular deity one may be practicing or emphasizing. Once one has a clear visualization of the deity, one needs to reflect upon the emptiness of that deity. When one has that kind of combination,

of a clear visualization of the deity on the basis of the understanding of emptiness and then once again reflect on the emptiness of the deity then truly in one's practice there will be the union of what is called the profound aspect of the path as well as the luminosity or clarity aspect of the path as well.

In terms of the sequence of the path or practice, when one speaks of one's realization of emptiness being complemented with bodhicitta, the awakening mind, it is not the case that when one actually has the experience of emptiness, bodhicitta is consciously present at that moment. When one actually has the experience of emptiness at that moment, at that point, in terms of the content of one's thought or one's mental state, there will be the mere simple negation of intrinsic existence.

Initially what is required is to cultivate bodhicitta, the awakening mind, and once one's experience of bodhicitta, the awakening mind, becomes very strong and intense, then at that point one should reflect upon the ultimate nature of the individual, this "I" who is aspiring for the attainment of Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings or on the nature of the sentient beings for whose benefit one wishes to attain enlightenment, or the nature of enlightenment itself. So one subjects these and ultimately or eventually one's own self to critical analysis and examine whether or not they possess inherent existence and once one arrives at the realization that the self as well is devoid of intrinsic existence, at that point, one dwells with one's mind single-pointedly on that conclusion that one has arrived at where one has totally negated any possibility of intrinsic existence of one's own self.

Then that state of mind which is the state of realization of emptiness of one's own self is then on the level of imagination seen as transforming into a deity (whatever form of deity one may be visualizing). Once you have a clear visualization of the deity, then once again reflect upon the emptiness of that deity. What you see here in this process is the two stages or two instances of meditation on emptiness, at the initial stage you meditate on the emptiness of yourself and at the culmination you meditate on the emptiness of the deity.

Insofar as both of these are realizations of emptiness, they are equal. The difference is that in the former case, the object of meditation of emptiness is a contaminated object which is the unenlightened existence of your own self, whereas in the latter case, the object of the meditation on emptiness is an enlightened form albeit on the level of imagination but it is the form of the deity.

There is a difference between these two types on the level of imagination. Although both of these are meditations on emptiness, there is a difference in terms of the object upon which the meditation on emptiness takes place.]⁴

Day Three

To pick up from where I left off yesterday, but first I would like to share that it is important to bear in mind and understand that one commonality of all of the teachings of

⁴ Additional material thanks to the Thekchen Choling website:
<http://thekchencholing.org/spiritualnourishment/sutrasandcommentaries/sutrasprayerscommentaries.htm>

the great religious traditions of the world is that the emphasis is not so much relying upon external material conditions for one's wellbeing and happiness but rather to focus upon internal development of one's inner resources.

From a philosophical point of view as I discussed yesterday, the difference or demarcation between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions is whether or not one subscribes to a belief in some sort of eternal, permanent self. In Buddhism one of the primary grounds upon which the notion of an eternal, permanent and unchanging self is rejected is because of its emphasis on the understanding of the law of cause and effect, causality or dependent origination. The essence of the Buddha's teachings can be summarized into two elements. First is its philosophical standpoint, which is the view of dependent origination and the conduct or action of the Buddha's teaching, which is the action of no-harm and compassion.

Because of the basic Buddhist understanding of dependent origination as its fundamental philosophical standpoint, there is a deep emphasis placed upon the understanding of the law of cause and effect. The point made here is that if on the causal stage one creates the causes and conditions which have the potential of bringing about suffering and harm then as a consequence of creating those causes and conditions at the stage of the effect or result, one will experience consequence or effects consonant with the set of conditions that one created. Similarly on the causal stage, if one engages in actions that are constructive with the potential of benefit and help, then these actions on the resultant stage will bring about consequences and effects which are again consonant with that set of conditions. The point being made here is that a beneficial action will lead to a beneficial result and negative actions or negative causes and conditions will lead to undesirable consequences and effects. In essence the heart of the teachings on dependent origination is basically this: if one does good, one will reap beneficial results and if one does evil, one will reap undesirable consequences. Since harm causes harm and violence or suffering and pain therefore there is the emphasis in the Buddhist teachings on avoiding harm and violence.

When one speaks of avoiding harm or avoiding engaging in violent activity, how does one demarcate between violence and nonviolence, harm and non-harm? This distinction cannot be made simply on the basis of the external appearance of the act itself. The demarcation must be made on the basis of the motivation, the state of mind that underlies the act. At the root of this issue is compassion as one's motivation and because of this, nonviolence must be defined in terms of an action grounded in compassion. Therefore the Buddha's teaching is often characterized as being rooted in compassion.

So when one speaks of engaging in acts that are non-harmful and which avoid violent activity, one can understand this on two levels. On the initial level, when one speaks of engaging in actions that are not harmful motivated by compassion and a concern for other sentient beings, one deliberately refrains from engaging in harmful actions. This is the first stage of nonviolence or non-harm where it is primarily in the form of refraining from certain actions. However as one's capacity for compassionate activity increases then on the second level when one is more advanced, not only does one deliberately refrain from

harming others but one must actively engage in actions that are beneficial and helpful to others.

This practice of compassionate action is the skilful means or method aspect of the spiritual path and the understanding of dependent origination is the wisdom or insight aspect of the path. When one can combine these two together within one's own spiritual practice then one's practice and actions will become truly powerful.

When one speaks of the Buddhist understanding of dependent origination there are of course different levels of understanding. One level of understanding of dependent origination is in terms of cause and effect, how every thing and every event comes into being through depending upon causes and conditions as well as other factors. This is one level of understanding. Also in the writings of the Madhyamika or Middle Way, there is a deeper understanding of the meaning of dependent origination. Here not only are things and events understood to arise in dependence upon causes and conditions but also their very identity as things or events are dependent upon other factors. Therefore they are dependent upon conventions, designations and so on.

This idea of dependent origination, although in terms of a systematic presentation may have primarily originated in the Buddha's teachings, as far as the philosophical perspective of dependent origination is concerned, this has relevance in many areas such understanding our environment or understanding the global economy, even politics. This idea of dependent origination is applicable and useful in many areas of human activities because the more one is able to appreciate the deep interconnectedness of all things and every event. One will then naturally have a much more holistic perspective on everything.

If one were to ask: "What is the essence of the Buddha's teaching? What is the heart of the Buddha's teaching?" One could respond by saying that the essence of the Buddha's teaching is the efficacy of a way of conduct rooted in compassion and that is not harmful or nonviolent which is based upon the philosophical standpoint of dependent origination. This truly captures the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

In terms of the goal of spiritual practice in Buddhism, one can speak of two goals. One is the temporary goal of attaining rebirth in the higher realms endowed with the facilities for engaging in the practice of the Dharma and the ultimate goal is the attainment of liberation from cyclic existence. Rebirth in a higher realm is characterized as a temporary goal as it is in the higher realms that one has a relative degree of freedom from many of the more evident forms of pain and suffering. This accords the individual the opportunity to engage in spiritual practices and so on. As for the ultimate goal of the attainment of liberation, liberation here is understood as the total freedom from suffering characterized by the complete elimination of fundamental ignorance which lies at the root of one's unenlightened existence. It is this type of liberation that is the ultimate goal or object of aspiration for a Buddhist practitioner.

The Buddhist texts speak of four factors of human aspiration and these four factors are listed as the attainment of one's mundane objects of aspiration, the acquisition of wealth, the practice of Dharma and the attainment of nirvana. Wealth is seen as a factor that would enable the individual to attain their mundane aspirations so that the individual has the facilities to then engage in the practice of the Dharma. The practice of the Dharma is the factor that leads the individual to attain liberation and Dharma here refers to the practice of the three higher trainings: training in morality, meditation and wisdom.

Generally speaking, with respect to the first two factors, the attainment of mundane aspirations and the means through which that attainment is achieved is material wealth. Generally speaking in North America, you have in most cases achieved this. Because of this many Tibetans are eager to come to the United States because they believe that by coming here they will at least be able to fulfill the first two aspirations. These Tibetans are not content with the three higher trainings and because of this they want to run to the United States.

However in the case of many individuals in North America, there are individuals who, after having gained a relative degree of wealth and the fulfillment of their mundane aspirations, feel a sense of incompleteness and a sense of disillusionment and frustration. Such a sense of incompleteness or frustration with material success is understandable because if one thinks more deeply one will recognize the importance of having some sense of contentment with relation to material facilities and acquisition. Material acquisition, wealth and so on, which are finite, which are limited, which can cease to exist, any object that has an end, that is finite, are in the end unreliable. With relation to such objects it is always wiser to have a sense of contentment instead of being never satiated.

However in relation to phenomena that have the potential of being infinite such as the positive qualities of the mind and so on, with relation to these, one should not have a sense of contentment; one should always aspire for more. Most of us however do the opposite with relation to material acquisitions and so on, all of which are finite and have limits. We tend to have very little contentment in regard to these, and in relation to the spiritual or mental qualities, we have an easy sense of contentment. Also this inability, to be content with what one already has, is very deeply related to the huge gulf between rich and poor especially in the more affluent societies.

Since in the Buddhist text the attainment of mundane aspirations is understood to be a legitimate goal of spiritual activity, also not only is the attainment of rebirth in a higher realm in a future life an object of aspiration, having one's aspirations fulfilled in this life as well is something one should aspire for.

With relation to the ultimate goal of a Buddhist practitioner, which is the attainment of liberation referred to as the definite goodness, there is the liberation from cyclic existence and also the attainment of full Buddhahood. In the Mahayana texts there is the identification of two ultimate spiritual goals: one is the attainment of liberation from cyclic existence and the other is full enlightenment. Corresponding to these two ultimate

goals of spiritual practitioners there are two main obstacles that one must overcome. The obstacle to the attainment of liberation [from cyclic existence] is the defilements in the form of afflictions or kleshas and the obstacle to the attainment of omniscience or full enlightenment are the subtle obstructions to knowledge.

How does one distinguish between the defilements in the form of afflictions and the defilements in the form of subtle obstructions to knowledge? Here, of course depending upon the philosophical understanding on the ultimate nature of reality, there are differences amongst the [various] schools [of Buddhism]. The most definitive and profound explanations of these are found in the works of Candrakirti, Buddhapalita and Santideva. In their writings there is a very explicit explanation of the primary form of the afflictions being that of one's natural grasping at the true existence or the substantial existence of all things and events. This grasping at true existence in all phenomena is understood as a form of mental affliction. In fact this is also understood to be the fundamental ignorance that underlies one's unenlightened existence; it is this innate grasping at true existence or substantial reality of all phenomena.

This is also very clear in Nagarjuna's own writings. For example in the *Seventy Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna explicitly states that when identifying the twelve links in the chain of dependent origination, the first link, which is ignorance, is explained in terms of grasping at substantial reality and the true existence of the self and of phenomena. He then states that this ignorance, this grasping at true existence of the self and all phenomena, sets in motion the entire chain of the twelve links, giving rise to volition actions and so on. This culminates in birth and death. So here there is an explicit recognition that the grasping at true existence and substantial reality is the basic form of affliction and is the fundamental ignorance.

Verse 62: Through understanding the truth, ignorance, which arises from the four perverted views, does not exist. When this is no more, the karma-formations do not arise. The remaining [ten members vanish] likewise.

Verse 64: To imagine that things born through causes and conditions are real the Teacher calls ignorance. From that the twelve members arise.

Similarly in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas on Emptiness*, he compares the grasping at true existence to the basic body faculty and all of the other derivative afflictions are like the other sense faculties. So just as all of the other sense faculties such as vision, hearing and so forth are all based upon the basic body faculty, in the same manner, all of the derivative afflictions such as desire, anger and so on are grounded upon the grasping at the true existence of things. Aryadeva explicitly draws a causal connection between the derivative afflictions with grasping at true existence.

Verse 135: As the tactile sense [pervades] the body
Confusion is present in them (the disturbing emotions) all.
By overcoming confusion, one will also
Overcome all disturbing emotions.

Having identified what this fundamental ignorance is, Aryadeva then goes on to state that it is through cultivating insight into the suchness of dependent origination, the ultimate nature of dependent origination, one will then dispel this delusion. Here by developing insight into dependent origination which is emptiness is the key antidote for dispelling ignorance, Aryadeva is implicitly recognizing as well the grasping at true existence of self and phenomena to be a form of mental affliction.

Verse 136: When dependent arising is seen
 Confusion will not occur.
 Thus every effort has been made here
 To explain precisely this subject.

Therefore one can find very explicit explanations of the defilements in these texts. Another question arises: “If this fundamental grasping at the substantial reality of the self and phenomena is a form of mental affliction, what then is the subtle obstruction to knowledge?” Here Candrakirti states in his own commentary *The Supplement to the Middle Way* or *Madhyamakavatara* that it is the imprints implanted within one’s mind by those grosser afflictions, by the grasping at the true existence. They are the imprints and propensities for grasping including the dualistic perception that one has [of self and other] as well as the perception of the duality of the Two Truths, conventional and ultimate truth. These are the subtle obstructions to knowledge.

Chap. 11: The tenth strength of the Buddha is to know unhindered, unconfined,
Verse 40 That by the power of his omniscience,
 The defilements and their tendencies are instantly removed
 And that his followers arrest defilements through their wisdom.

This perspective or way of distinguishing between the two defilements is quite different from the perspective of another viewpoint where the grasping at the selfhood of phenomena and the grasping at the self-existence of the person are felt to be different.

For the path to the attainment of such an ultimate goal which is the full enlightenment of Buddhahood there are two vehicles explained in the scriptures. One is the Perfection Vehicle of Sutra and the other is the Vajrayana or Indestructible Vehicle. Within the Vajrayana, as discussed yesterday, there are three divisions identified in this text. These are the Kriya Tantra or Action Tantra, Ubhaya Tantra and Yoga Tantra.

The Disciple Vehicle and the Self-Realized Ones Vehicle that were discussed yesterday are the primary vehicles for the attainment of liberation from cyclic existence. In relation to the three vehicles of the Disciples, the Self-Realized Ones and the Bodhisattvas, there are some sutras where the Buddha explicitly states that these three vehicles constitute final vehicles in themselves. In other words, the Sravaka or Disciple Vehicle constitutes the final path for some individuals for whom it is appropriate. The final realization of the Self-Realized Ones constitutes the final attainment for some individuals and similarly for the Bodhisattva Vehicle. However in other sutras, Buddha states that the Vehicles of the Disciples and Self-Realized Ones do not constitute a final vehicle or attainment because

even those who attain the enlightenment of a Disciple or of a Self-Realized One will eventually enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle. All beings will ultimately attain Buddhahood. Even within the teachings of one and the same teacher, the Buddha Shakyamuni, one finds these conflicting statements with relation to these three vehicles. This underscores the point that I mentioned yesterday that the Buddha presented his teachings in response to the needs of specific individuals. For some beings, one set of teachings is more effective and beneficial while for others another set of teachings is more effective and beneficial.

This approach of adapting the Buddha's message in response to individual inclinations and contexts has also been continued by subsequent Indian masters. For example in the Five Treatises of Maitreya, *The Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*, Maitreya teaches the standpoint where the three vehicles are presented as final vehicles in themselves. However in his *Uttaratantra* or *Ratnagotravibhaga*, *The Sublime Continuum*, Maitreya presents the opposing standpoint where the first two vehicles do not constitute final vehicles and the Bodhisattva Vehicle is the final vehicle. Similarly in Asanga's writings, in his commentary on Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* or *Sublime Continuum*, he explains Maitreya's teachings primarily from the perspective of the Middle Way School or Madhyamika. However in his own text such as the *Bodhisattvabhumi* or *The Bodhisattva Levels*, he adopts the position of the Cittamatra or Yogacara School as presented in the *Sutralamkara*. So even in the writings of one Indian master, one can find different standpoints presented.

Now to go back to the text. Yesterday we finished the section explaining Kriya Tantra or Action Tantra. Now the second class of tantra is the Ubhaya Tantra Vehicle where ubhaya means both referring to both the external activity of rituals and so on and internal meditation. The text reads: **The view of those who have entered the Vehicle of Ubhaya Tantra is as follows. Whilst there is no origination or cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes oneself in the form of a deity.** This is the same as it was for Kriya Tantra.

The text continues: **This is cultivated on the basis both the practice of meditative absorption endowed with the four aspects as well as the necessary ritual articles and conditions.** In the phrase "the meditative absorption endowed with the four aspects," here the four aspects are identified in two ways in Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary. In the first he identifies the four aspects to be the suchness of oneself (the practitioner), the suchness of the deity (the object of meditation), the suchness of mantra repetition and the suchness of the actual visualization of the meditation. In the second way, he states that these four aspects can also be understood as referring to sound (the mantra), mind (the meditative state), the self-generation of oneself as a deity and the generation of the other (the front-generation of the deity). So the phrase "the meditative absorption endowed with the four aspects" refers to these aspects. It is through the combination of the meditative absorptions and the reliance upon external conditions such as rituals that this particular form of yoga is achieved.

Jamgon Kongtrul in his commentary goes on to explain that although in some texts there is mentioned for Kriya Tantra the visualization practice being only in the form of a front-generation, visualizing the deity in front of oneself and seeking blessings. In this form there is no practice of generating oneself as a deity but he explains that this must be understood in terms of the differences between the principal and secondary Kriya practices. In the principal Kriya Tantra meditation, certainly one must have the meditation of generating oneself as a deity. In the secondary practices of Kriya Tantra deity yoga the blessings take the form of visualizing the deity in front from whom one then visualizes receiving blessings. But the principal deity yoga practice of Kriya Tantra must contain a practice where the practitioner generates themselves into the deity.

This is in agreement with the explanation of Kriya Tantra found elsewhere where there is an identification of six forms of deity yoga meditation in Kriya Tantra. These include the empty deity, sound, letter, form, seal and sign. In the Tibetan tradition there are many meditation practices, deity yoga meditations that belong to the category Kriya Tantra or Action Tantra. However with relation to the second class of tantra, which is Action or Caryya Tantra, apart from the *Vairocana-Abhisambodhi*, there are very few [Caryya Tantra] deity yoga practices in the Tibetan tradition. I have been told that in Japan there are quite extensive Caryya Tantra practices including the *Vairocana-Abhisambodhi* and the *Vajradhatu* practices. These two are very prominent in the Japanese tantric tradition the lineage of which came from China.

Next are the Yoga Tantra Vehicles and the text reads: **The view of those who have entered the Vehicle of Yoga Tantra is two-fold: 1) the view of outer yoga, the tantra of the sages and 2) the view of the inner yoga, the method tantra.** The distinction between the two yogas here, the inner and outer yogas, is made on the basis of the approach of their practitioners. In the case of outer yoga, although unlike Kriya and Ubhaya Tantra, here the emphasis is mainly on the internal yoga of mental concentration and not reliance upon external conditions of rituals, articles and so on. However in common with the other two lower tantras, in the outer yoga one still does use the external conditions such as rituals and articles, including the practices of purity, but the main emphasis is on the internal yoga of meditative absorption. The difference is that in outer yoga, the state or level of mind that is used for one's meditative absorption remains on the gross level of consciousness.

In the inner yoga, not only is the practitioner totally independent of depending or relying upon external means such as ritual practices and so on, but also the level of mind that is used in the meditative absorption is subtler. It is therefore referred to as the method tantra where here method refers to the methods and techniques used in bringing about the experience of the subtle level of consciousness. Such methods include the yogic practices of focusing upon the channels, the energy winds or prana and the bodhicitta drops. It is through employing these methods that the practitioner brings about the experience of the subtler level of consciousness which is then utilized to engage in the meditative absorptions. So the difference between the outer yoga and the inner yoga is made on the basis of whether or not the level of mind used in the meditative absorptions is gross or subtle.

In Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary he explicitly states that it is only in the inner yoga where one finds the approach of the two stages of generation and completion. This provides a complete method for the practitioner to bring about the attainment of the two bodies of a Buddha, the Form Body or Rupakaya and the Truth Body or Dharmakaya. Therefore he explains that in many Vajrayana scriptures there are explicit statements that it is only by relying upon the practices as presented in the unique teachings of Highest Yoga Tantra or Anuttarayoga Tantra that one can attain the full enlightenment of Buddhahood. So therefore the practices of Highest Yoga Tantra are referred to as highest yoga or anuttara or unsurpassed yoga as they are unsurpassed in the sense that it is only in these teachings that the complete method or path for the attainment of the Dharmakaya and Rupakaya is found. The reason for this is that it is only in the teachings of Highest Yoga Tantra where teachings are explained whereby one can utilize the innate mind of clear light, the ever-present innate mind, transforming it into the path.

Many of the grosser levels of mind are adventitious or occasional; they do not last. They arise and then cease to exist, fluctuating and so they are occasional and adventitious. The yoga which is cultivated with the grosser levels of mind therefore cannot be lasting so therefore it is incomplete. In order for the yoga aimed at the attainment of the two bodies of a Buddha to be comprehensive and fully effective, that yoga must take place using the subtlest level of one's consciousness referred to as the innate mind of clear light. It is only in the Highest Yoga texts that the methods for transforming the innate mind of clear light into the aspect of the path are explained. Therefore these practices are referred to as yoga, meaning the indivisible union of method and wisdom. They are also referred to as anuttara meaning unsurpassed because it is only in the Highest Yoga teachings that the method for effecting the innate mind of clear light into a meditative absorption, into a path are found. Therefore Jamgon Kongtrul explains this very clearly in his commentary to this text, making the distinction between the outer yoga tantra and the inner yoga tantra along the lines of whether or not one finds the techniques and practices for turning the innate mind of clear light into the path.

The text reads: **The view of those who have entered the Outer Yoga, the sage's tantra is as follows. Not holding the external ritual articles to be of primary importance, they cultivate their goal on the basis of emphasizing the yoga of visualizing male and female deities who are devoid of ultimate origination or cessation and the Form Body of the Noble One that share resemblance with them, which is the meditative absorption endowed with four seals (mudras) of a thoroughly purified mind.** This reference to "visualizing male and female deities who are devoid of ultimate origination or cessation" is not simply a statement that these deities are by nature devoid of origination or cessation but rather to emphasize the need to cultivate the understanding and realization of these deities as being devoid of any ultimate origination or cessation as explained before. It is this wisdom realizing emptiness that is then imagined as arising into the form of a deity.

In the Outer Yoga, which is Yoga Tantra, the meditative absorptions are endowed with the four seals. These four seals correspond to the body, speech, mind and action. The

Outer Yoga practice is modeled upon a process of purifying one's body, speech, mind and actions. In relation with one's body, speech, mind and action, four seals are mentioned which are the pledge seal, the dharma or reality seal, the action seal and the great seal. It is through the meditative absorption endowed with these four seals that the yogic practitioner goes through the process of purifying body, speech, mind and actions. This prepares the practitioner to then attain the body, speech, mind and actions of an enlightened deity.

One of the characteristics of Yoga, Performance or Outer Tantra as it is called here, is its tremendous emphasis placed upon mudras or hand gestures which are part of the meditation ritual. Many of these mudras are very complex so that there are very few experts who are completely knowledgeable of these intricate hand gestures or mudras. In fact once when I was giving the transmission of the Vajradhatu, the principal Yoga Tantra, I needed to rely upon a ritual expert who sat next to me guiding me so that I could form the mudras appropriately. He was like a shepherd guiding me. On another occasion when I was giving one of these teachings, the abbot of Namgyal Monastery who was a great expert on these mudras, was sitting to the side of me and while I was making these mudras I needed to watch him all of the time. This went for so long that I started getting a cramp in my neck so I finally asked him to sit in front of me so that I didn't have to strain my neck.

Now the text moves on to the Inner Yoga which reads: **The view of those who have entered the vehicle of Inner Yoga, the method tantra is three-fold: 1) the mode of generation, 2) the mode of completion and 3) the mode of great completion or perfection.** In his commentary, Jamgon Kongtrul explains that the distinctions between these three modes should not be confused with the general distinction between the Mahayoga generation, the Anuyoga completion and the Atiyoga great completion or great perfection as is found in the general explanation of the Dzogchen teachings. Here the distinction is not exactly the same as the one found in the general explanation of the three stages of generation, completion and the great perfection of the Dzogchen teachings.

Jamgon Kongtrul in his commentary then goes on to explain that when generally speaking the two stages of generation and completion, the Tibetan scholars/masters have two primary standpoints. First is the standpoint of Rapjampa Longchenpa (1308-1363) and his disciples where Jamgon Kongtrul is referring to the two Kun mkhyens,⁵ the first being Longchenpa Rapjampa and the second Kun mkhyen Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798). The pairing of these two with Jigme Lingpa as a disciple of Kun mkhyen Longchenpa does not imply that he was an immediate or direct disciple as Jigme Lingpa lived much later. But in his biography, it is mentioned that once when Jigme Lingpa was meditating at Samye Chimpu Monastery, he had a mystical visionary experience of receiving direct blessings and inspiration from Longchenpa. Therefore Jigme Lingpa is sometimes referred to as the disciple of Longchenpa. According to them the distinction between the generation and completion stages is made on the basis of the two aspects of deity yoga

⁵ Kun mkhyen means all-knowing in Tibetan.

meditation, the aspect of appearance relates to the generation stage and the aspect of emptiness relates to the completion stage.

Jamgon Kongtrul then goes on to say that the most excellent way of making the distinction between the two stages is the one found in the writings of Locen Dharmashri (1654-1717) which also happens to be the position of Tsongkhapa as well. Here the distinction between the two is made on the basis of whether or not the individual practitioner has been able to generate the wisdom that is the union of bliss and emptiness on the basis of the entry, abiding and dissolution of the prana winds within the central channel. All subsequent experiences of yogic meditative states which arise following the entry, abiding and dissolution of the prana winds in the central channel, this stage is referred to as the completion stage. All prior experiences of deity yoga meditation or visualizations are described as belonging to the generation stage.

Because of this, the generation stage is sometimes referred to as the contrived yoga as it is a simulated form of yogic states whereas the completion stage is referred to as the uncontrived yoga because the experiences are not simulations. So the distinction between the two stages is by emphasizing that the one is contrived and the other uncontrived. Jamgon Kongtrul goes on to explain that this is the most excellent way of understanding the difference between the two stages.

However Jamgon Kongtrul in his commentary goes on to explain that the distinction between the three modes mentioned in this particular text is completely different [from that just outlined]. Here the modes of generation, completion and great completion refer to various stages of a single deity yoga meditation. The deity yoga meditation here is described in terms of what are called the three meditative absorptions. The first is referred to as the meditative absorption of suchness, the second is the meditative absorption of the appearance of everything and the third is the causal meditative absorption. These three meditative absorptions correspond respectively to Dharmakaya meditation, Sambhogakaya or the Buddha Body of Enjoyment meditation and the Nirmanakaya or the Buddha Body of Perfect Emanation meditation.

The process of engaging in these three stages of meditative absorptions belongs to the mode of generation according to this text. The culmination of this process, which is the actual visualization of the complete deity, is referred to as the mode of completion as one has completed the process of generating oneself as a deity. Having completed oneself as a deity there are other practices such as visualizing other deities on specific points in the body such as the body mandala and these constitute then what is referred to in this text as the mode of great completion.

The text continues: **The mode of generation is achieved by means of the meditative practice of gradual development of the three meditative absorptions, which were just explained, and gradual creation of the mandala. The mode of completion is achieved by abiding unwaveringly within the visualization of male and female deities that are ultimately devoid of origination and cessation as well as the middle way of ultimate expanse which is the nonconceptual truth, while on the conventional level**

cultivating a perfect equanimity and an un-muddled manner, the form of the noble deity with clear visualization.

The reference to the ultimate nature of reality called here in this text the “ultimate expanse” is to be understood in its proper context. Since we are dealing here with the context of Highest Yoga Tantra or Anuttarayoga Tantra, the reference to terms such as ultimate expanse, ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya), dharmadhatu and so on need to be understood in accordance with Anuttarayoga Tantra explanations.

So here ultimate truth or emptiness needs to be understood on two levels. The first level is objective emptiness which is the ultimate truth as explained in the Middle Way philosophical texts. This is emptiness as understood in the Perfection Vehicle. The ultimate truth or the ultimate expanse in the Vajrayana context also includes the second dimension, the subjective dimension or the subjective experience of emptiness. This is not referring to any subject but a unique subject which is the experience of emptiness at the level of the innate mind of clear light. The innate mind of clear light is the subject that realizes emptiness which is also referred to as the ultimate truth or the ultimate expanse. This is described as a nonconceptual truth and it is in this context that one needs to understand the meaning of the term ultimate expanse in the context of Anuttarayoga Tantra.

This is described differently within the different lineages. For example in the Kagyu lineage of Mahamudra, this union of objective emptiness and the subjective clear light is called the indivisibility of emptiness and awareness (rigpa byerme SP?). In the Sakya lineage, this is called the indivisibility of emptiness and luminosity/clarity. In the Sakya Lamdre cycle, clarity is said to be the defining characteristic of mind and emptiness is said to be the nature of mind and it is the union of these two that is understood to represent the ultimate nature of reality. So in the Lamdre this is called tsel stong shung drup (SP?) or the unity of emptiness and clarity. In the Gelug tradition, this is described as the indivisibility or union of emptiness and bliss where emptiness here is the objective emptiness and bliss refers to the great bliss of the innate mind of clear light. Similarly in the Dzogchen teachings of the Nyingma tradition, because of their distinction between ordinary mind and basic awareness or rigpa which is described as pure and pristine cognition, they speak of primordially pure reality and its nature of compassion so for them it is the union of primordially pure reality and compassion.

So when this text speaks of the ultimate expanse, this is from the context of Highest Yoga Tantra, representing the nonconceptual truth, one needs to understand this ultimate expanse in terms of the union of emptiness as explained in the Madhyamika writings with the subjective experience of clear light fused with that emptiness. The text goes on to say the “origination and cessation as well as the middle way of ultimate expanse which is the nonconceptual truth” and this also alludes to the understanding of how the entirety of phenomena comes into being as the result of the play of the ultimate expanse.

For the next stage the text explains: **The mode of great perfection is to meditate on the basis of the understanding all mundane and supramundane phenomena**, all worldly

and trans-worldly phenomena, **as being devoid of any differentiation and recognize as always having been present as the mandala of body, speech and mind.** In the language of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, one will understand the entirety of origination of all factors of both cyclic existence and nirvana as the manifestation of the activity of the innate mind of clear light as either the sequential processes of arising or the reversal process of dissolution. For example in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* literature, one can find explanations as to how the entire element of cyclic existence, of the afflicted world of samsara is a product of the activity of karma and the prana winds propelled by the karma. Underlying this is the activity of what is called the Eighty Conceptions indicative of the various levels of consciousness and these Eighty Indicative Conceptions are in turn the grosser level of manifestation of subtler states of consciousness such as the appearance, increase, great increase and near-approximation or near-attainment and these three states of subtle consciousness give rise to the Eighty Indicative Conceptions. In turn, these three subtle states arise from the fundamental, innate mind of clear light which is the fundamental state of mind which remains ever-present and enduring. From this point of view, at times this innate mind of clear light is also described as unconditioned, unconditioned by temporary causes and conditions. So in terms of its continuity, it is ever-present and is also called the unborn nature.

In the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* literature language, one can find a description as to how the entire world of samsara and nirvana are in some sense the play, the constant play or manifestation or a resonance of the fundamental innate mind of clear light. When seen from this point of view of the clear light then there is certainly no distinctions to be made between samsara and nirvana or the unenlightened and enlightened states.

As far as the equality of samsara and nirvana is concerned, one also finds references to this even in the sutra teachings as well. For example, there is a passage in Maitreya's *Abhisamayalamkara* or the *Ornament of Clear Realization* where he states the equality of existence and the transcendence of existence. Similarly in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, one can find explicit statements of the equality of samsara and nirvana. However in these sutra writings, the equality of samsara and nirvana are understood from the point of view their ultimate nature of reality as both being empty. In the Vajrayana context however, the equality of samsara and nirvana has the added meaning of how the entirety of factors for both samsara and nirvana can be understood in some sense as the constant play or manifestation of the subtle mind of clear light.

The text then goes on to read: **It is stated in the tantra:**

**As for the limbs of the vajra body
They are known as the Five Buddhas.
The sources and the numerous elements
They are the mandalas of the bodhisattvas.
Earth and water are Locana and Mamaki;
Fire and water are Pandaravasin and Tara;
Space is Dhateshvari.
So the three worlds are primordially pure.**

So all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana are primordially unborn yet they have the capacity for illusory function as they have always been in the nature of the ten Tathagatas and their consorts. This reference of all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana as being primordially unborn does not imply that they do not come into being due to their causes and conditions. Here being primordially unborn refers to the perspective that from the point of view of the innate mind of clear light, because they are all in some sense manifestations or the effulgence of the innate mind of clear light. Therefore in that sense they can be referred to as unborn.

The text continues: **All phenomena are therefore naturally transcendent of sorrow.** This indicates that all phenomena are in some sense primordially pure and this is sometimes referred to as primordially enlightened or they are primordially Buddhas. This is because so far as the clear light nature of the mind is concerned, its nature is always pure; it is the afflictions and the various defilements which co-exist with it but they do not penetrate into the essential nature of the clear light mind itself. So as far as the clear light mind itself is concerned, it is pure and so from that point of view, all phenomena, which arise from it, can also be described as being primordially pure and of being primordially in the nature of Buddhahood.

The text continues: **The great elements are in the nature of the Five Consorts, the five aggregates in the nature of the Five Buddha Families, the four consciousnesses in the nature of the four great bodhisattvas, the four objects as the four beautiful goddesses, the four senses as the bodhisattvas, the four temporal stages as the four goddesses, the bodily organs as the consciousnesses, the sensory fields and the bodhicitta drops arising from them as the Four Wrathful Deities, the four extremes of eternalism and nihilism as the four female wrathful deities, the mental consciousness as the nature of Samantabhadra, namely the indestructible bodhicitta, the objects of both conditioned and unconditioned phenomena are in the nature of Samantabhadri who is the receptacle of the creation of all phenomena. All of these in turn have already been in the nature of complete enlightenment (as explained before); they are not now acquired by means of the path.** This refers to the natural enlightenment which is the fundamental innate mind of clear light because that is ever-present; it is not brought into being as the result of the path.

Thus all phenomena, conditioned and un-conditioned such as the ten directions, the three temporal stages, the three worlds and so on do not exist apart from one's own mind. The reference to these not existing apart from one's own mind should not be understood in terms of the statement of the Buddha in the sutra text where he states how all phenomena are one's own mind. Here it refers to how all phenomena are manifestations of the innate mind of clear light.

The text continues: **It is stated:**

**The clear understanding of one's own mind -
This is the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas;**

**This constitutes the three worlds;
This constitutes the great elements as well.**

Thus it has been stated:

**All phenomena dwell in the mind; the mind dwells in space, while
space dwells nowhere.**

Space here does not refer to external space as we conventionally understand it but space here refers to an inner space which is again the clear light. Since the clear light is ever-present, it develops nowhere.

Furthermore,

**All phenomena are devoid of an intrinsic nature; all phenomena are
thoroughly pure from the very beginning; all phenomena are thoroughly
radiant; all phenomena are naturally transcendent nirvana and all
phenomena are manifestly enlightened.**

This then is the meaning of Great Perfection. In the commentary at this point, Jamgon Kongtrul summarizes and states the conclusion that in this context when one reads the term *jñāna* or transcendent wisdom, one should not understand it in terms of any other form of knowledge/wisdom but understand it in terms of the mind of clear light. Similarly when one finds references to the term the self-resonance of something, one should not understand it purely in terms of the resonance of any thing but rather the resonance of the mind of clear light. He then goes on to explain that in the Dzogchen literature, the clear light is sometimes described as being unconditioned. Here this meaning of unconditionedness is not the same as the characterization of permanent phenomena as being unconditioned such as the mere absence of something like space is defined as the mere absence of obstruction; this is not the meaning here of unconditionedness in the context of the Dzogchen teachings. Unconditionedness in that context refers to the clear light mind being unconditioned by any temporary causes and conditions or any other fluctuating adventitious causes and conditions.

He then goes on to substantiate his own understanding of these teachings and concepts by citing from Saraha, the great Indian yogi, he also cites an Old Translation tantra and finally he cites a tantra known as *Grol ba'i thig le* or the *Drop of Liberation* or the *Liberating Drop* which is a New Translation tantra.⁶ In all of these citations, explanations are given as to how the emergence or evolution of the entirety of the phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana can be understood as manifestations arising from the innate mind of clear light. Kongtrul Rinpoche then refers to the explanations found in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, as explained before, how the entire process of coming into being of cyclic existence can be understood in terms of the function or activity of the Eighty Indicative Conceptions which themselves arise from the three progressively subtle states of consciousness called appearance, increase and near-attainment, all of which arise from

⁶ The *Muktilaka* is a tantric commentary written by Buddhaśrījñāna (Buddhajñānapāda)

the innate mind of clear light. It is from the arising and dissolution from this mind of clear light that one needs to understand the origination of cyclic existence or samsara.

He then goes on to explain that when one says that the entirety of phenomena is a manifestation or play of the innate mind of clear light, one does not need to prove that all everyday objects such as vases, pillars and so on are somehow manifestations of this. Rather the meaning here is that in so far as an individual sentient being is concerned, their experience of the entire world of phenomena arises from the previously mentioned process. Karmic prana winds arise from their previous karmic actions, which in turn give rise to progressively grosser levels of consciousness culminating in the Eighty Indicative Conceptions which themselves give rise to the afflictions which then motivate the individual to perform actions and the actions set in motion the chain of causation within cyclic existence. So as far as the individual is concerned, it is in this manner that the entire cosmos is a function of the innate mind of clear light.

So here one can understand that if one examines the language of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, one will find that sometimes the innate mind of clear light is described as the Basic Dharmakaya or the Foundational Dharmakaya. The term Basic Dharmakaya suggests that the entire process is understood in terms of some sort of analogous process of the arising of the Three Kayas: the Buddha Body of Reality, the Buddha Body of Perfect Enjoyment and the Buddha Body of Perfect Emanation. These also have correlations with one's day-to-day experience of the periods of wakefulness, deep sleep and death. Because of this in these tantras, one will find specific meditative practices called the "mixings" which are aimed at mixing one's experience with the states of wakefulness, deep sleep and death.

Jamgon Kongtrul then goes on to explain an analogy of how all of the dreams that one experiences are in some sense manifestations of one's sleep as they arise from the state of sleep. In a similar manner one can understand the arising of the entirety of the phenomena of cyclic existence as coming out of the innate mind of clear light. In the commentary, he then states that for detailed explanations of these topics one should consult the great commentarial treatises on the tantras.

In the Sutra System of teachings one finds references to what is called the natural nirvana and the non-abiding nirvana where natural nirvana refers to the emptiness of all phenomena, the ultimate nature of reality which is naturally pure, naturally devoid of any grasping at intrinsic existence. Non-abiding nirvana refers to the individual who has not only realized this natural nirvana but who has also purified all of the defilements which are the adventitious obstacles. By clearing all of these, one attains the non-abiding nirvana of a Buddha.

In a similar manner in the Vajrayana context of Highest Yoga Tantra, mentioned is made of the naturally pure wisdom or naturally pure jñana and the thoroughly pure jñana. The naturally pure jñana refers to the innate mind of clear light that each of us all naturally possess because its essential nature is unpolluted and so from that point of view, it is naturally pure jñana or wisdom. Once the individual through the practice of the path

gains total liberation and Buddhahood then at that point, not only is the clear light mind of that individual pure but also that individual is free of all of the adventitious defilements therefore at that point this individual's mind of clear light can also be referred to as the thoroughly pure jñana. So such terms are also found in the Vajrayana texts. We will stop here.

Day Four

We will start with the ceremony for generating the awakening mind. Generating bodhicitta or the awakening mind is truly the essence of the Buddha's teachings as well as the path. One can say that all of the various elements of the practices presented in the teachings of the Vehicles of the Disciples and of the Self-Realized Ones can be viewed as preliminary to the practice of bodhicitta or awakening mind. The cultivation of the awakening mind is the main practice or the main element of the path. All of the other practices such as the Six Perfections and all of the Vajrayana practices can be seen as precepts of generating the awakening mind. Particularly the Vajrayana practices can be seen as an extension, elaboration or refined development of especially the last two perfections, the Perfection of Concentration and the Perfection of Wisdom.

For this ceremony for generating the awakening mind, first of all imagine the Buddha in the space in front in a standing posture. Imagine that this is really the Buddha and that he is surrounded by all of the great bodhisattva masters of India such as Nagarjuna and so on and the great bodhisattva masters of Tibet from both the Old Translation and the New Translation, all of whom made tremendous contributions for the welfare of sentient beings. So imagine that the Buddha is surrounded by all of these great masters. Based upon this visualization, we will now engage in the practice of the seven-limbs for which we will do perform a specific recitation but I will explain the seven limbs one-by-one.

The first limb is prostration and for this limb, reaffirm the visualization of the Buddha surrounded by all of the great masters, contemplate on their great enlightened qualities of body, speech and mind and finally from the depth of your heart, develop a deep admiration and reverence to these objects of refuge and veneration. Also from the depth of your heart cultivate the determination to attain their great enlightened qualities of body, speech and mind for yourself. With this sort of deep admiration and reverence, place the palms of your hands together and imagine making prostrations.

The second limb is the making of offerings and so here reaffirming the visualization in front in whose presence you have made prostrations, mentally offer everything, things that belong to you as well as things that do not belong to anyone such as the environment. All of these things you mentally offer to the great objects of refuge. Most importantly offer all of the virtue, spiritual practices and realizations that you have accumulated. For example right now after having reflected on the qualities of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas, one has generated a deep sense of veneration and out of that you have paid homage to the Buddha by making prostrations with folded hands. This itself is a virtuous activity performed through your body. Verbally by reciting verses which praise the enlightened qualities of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha, those verbal actions also constitute virtuous actions of speech. Even the

utterance of a single word out of a motivation to bring benefit to someone else, even that single utterance constitutes virtuous activity. Offer all of these activities to the Buddha. On the mental level, cultivating deep reverence and deep conviction in the truth of the Dharma as well as cultivating a deep sense of admiration to the Buddha and the Three Jewels along with great compassion and some understanding of the view of emptiness based on the previous days' discussions, these are all acts of mental virtue and you should make an offering of all of these. This is the most important offering and it is referred to as the true offering of spiritual practice.

The third and fourth limbs are confession and purification or disclosure/declaration and purification. Here reflect upon all of the negative activities that you have engaged in, all of which will be the causes and conditions for our own suffering which we do not desire. By reflecting upon the fact that these destructive and negative actions will give rise to suffering, one should develop a deep sense of recognition of their destructive nature. With this sense, develop a strong resolution or sense of resolve that from now on "I will never again indulge in these negative acts." With such a thought, one declares and purifies them.

The fifth limb is rejoicing in one's own spiritual and virtuous activities that one has engaged in and one also rejoices in the spiritual and virtuous activities of others. With relation to others, cultivate a deep sense of admiration for the great enlightened deeds of the Buddhas as well as the masters such as Nagarjuna and his immediate disciples, Asanga and his immediate disciples and also all of the great masters of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of all four major schools. Cultivate a deep sense of rejoicing and admiration in the enlightened deeds of all of these great masters.

The sixth limb is through focusing upon the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are visualized in front of yourself, make supplications to this assembly to turn the Wheel of Dharma.

The seventh limb is to make a plea to the assembled Buddhas and bodhisattvas not to enter into nirvana. This is the main content of the practice of the Seven Limbs and there is no need to explicitly recite any prayers for this practice.

Now most important is to perform a concentration and here first of all, it is important to reflect on a very deep level the fundamental equality of oneself and others. This contemplation upon the fundamental equality of oneself and others needs to be understood on the basic level where just as you wish to achieve happiness and overcome suffering, so too do all sentient beings seek happiness and wish to overcome suffering. Similarly just as in your own case, your essential nature of mind is pure and your sufferings particularly your afflictions are in principal removable, in the same manner, all sentient beings possess the nature which will allow them to at least in principle, to remove the causes of their suffering. Similarly just as you have the potential for the attainment of the omniscient mind of a Buddha, so too all sentient beings equally possess that same potential of being able to attain the omniscient mind of a Buddha. Therefore

from all of these points of view, if you reflect deeply, you will recognize the fundamental equality of yourself and others.

Then the question arises, “What is the difference when it comes to the wellbeing of oneself and others?” The difference only lies in the number. When one speaks about the wellbeing of oneself, one is speaking only of the wellbeing of a single individual. Whereas when one speaks of the welfare of others, one is speaking of an infinite number of sentient beings. So although on the fundamental level there is equality between oneself and others, the difference lies in the number of beings.

Having recognized the fundamental equality of oneself and others and also having realized that the difference lies only in the number of beings involved, one develops a strong wish to relieve other sentient beings from their suffering. Then next it is important to reflect upon what is stated in Santideva’s *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* or the *Bodhicaryavatara* where he makes the following statement: All problems and adversity that can be seen in the world are in the final analysis the consequence of self-cherishing and all of the joy, happiness and prosperity that is in the world, are in the final analysis the consequence of the thought cherishing others. Through reflecting upon this statement, become aware of the shortcomings, disadvantages and drawbacks of the thought that cherishes one’s own wellbeing alone.

Chap. 8 All the joy the world contains
Verse 129 Came through wishing happiness for others;
 All the misery the world contains
 Came through wanting pleasure for oneself.

Then reflect upon the benefits and virtues of cultivating the thought that cherishes the welfare of other sentient beings. When one does this then one will appreciate Santideva’s summary in the text where he states: What more needs to be said, simply compare the fate of the childish whose concern is only for their own self-interest with that of the Buddha, the fully enlightened one whose only concern is the welfare of others. As Santideva points out that if one simply compares where ordinary sentient currently are with the fully enlightened Buddhas, the difference is an indication of the difference between self-cherishing and the thought cherishing the wellbeing of others. Our own situation of remaining continuously within the unenlightened state is the function and consequence of perpetually being caught in self-cherishing whereas the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have reversed this process and have replaced self-cherishing with the thought cherishing the welfare of other sentient beings. Because of this reversal of self-cherishing, the bodhisattvas have already embarked upon the path that will lead them to the full enlightenment and the fully awakened have already attained full enlightenment.

Chap. 8 Is there need for lengthy explanation?
Verse 130 Childish beings look out for themselves;
 Buddhas labor for the good of others
 See the difference that divides them!

By reflecting upon these lines one needs to compare the pros and cons of these two thoughts: the thought cherishing only one's own interest and the thought cherishing the wellbeing of other sentient beings. One arrives at the conclusion that recognizes the disadvantages of self-centeredness and appreciates the value and benefit of other-centeredness, the thought that cherishes the welfare of others.

After having thought along these lines, one should then reach the conclusion making a strong resolve that "From now on, I will not allow myself to be enslaved by the two powerful negative forces; grasping at the inherent and true existence of all phenomena and cherishing my own self-centered interests." These two graspings, grasping at the self-existence of oneself and grasping at one's own self-interest, are the twin forces which up till now have enslaved you and are responsible for all of the adversity and suffering that you have faced. But now you have resolved that from now on "I will not allow myself to be enslaved by these thoughts and today I have truly recognized my true enemy." Having recognized this true enemy, resolve that "From now on, I will never endorse them, never reinforce them again. Instead I will counter them and combat them with their corresponding antidotes, the cultivation of the wisdom realizing emptiness that counters grasping at true existence and the generation of the awakening mind that counters self-cherishing thoughts. With these two practices I will aim to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings." Make a very strong resolve.

The actual ceremony of generating the awakening mind will be constituted of repeating three times the following three stanzas. The first two stanzas are for going for refuge in the Three Jewels as well as the generation of the awakening mind. The third stanza is an affirmation of that fact. With these three stanzas the actual practice of generating bodhicitta is very explicit as well as going for refuge.

What is not explicit is the practice of meditating upon emptiness so this needs to be complemented with a reflection upon the nature of the self. For example when you recite the line "I will always go for refuge," this reference to the term "I" when reciting it you should be aware of the emptiness of one's own self. Similarly when going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, just as the person who is going for refuge is devoid of any intrinsic existence so too the objects of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, are devoid of intrinsic existence. The Buddha is a being as well as the Sangha is composed of beings and if the beings themselves are devoid of inherent existence then the Dharma that is a realized quality of these beings as well must be devoid of intrinsic existence.

So when you go for refuge to the Three Jewels, when you declare that "I will always go for refuge," you need to be aware of the emptiness of yourself and also the emptiness of the object of refuge, namely the Three Jewels. Also the beings, for whose benefit you are going for refuge and generating the awakening mind, are devoid of inherent existence. If you are able to have this type of awareness when doing the recitation then this act of generating the awakening mind will also contain a meditation on emptiness. This practice will then contain both the practice of bodhicitta through generating the awakening mind which is the skilful means aspect of the path and also a cultivation of insight into emptiness which is the wisdom aspect of the path.

So recite these stanzas three times:

With the wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Until the attainment of full enlightenment.

Enthused by wisdom and compassion
Today in the Buddha's presence
I generate the mind for enlightenment
For the benefit of all beings.

As long as space remains
As long as sentient beings remain
Until then, may I too remain
And dispel the miseries of the world.

This is a very brief ceremony for generating the awakening mind and since the text is quite short in being only three stanzas, it would be good if you could read them on a daily basis to the point where you will have them memorized. Once you have them memorized, then reflect upon them on a daily basis and this will be very beneficial.

We will now return to the text. After having briefly explained what the three modes [of the Inner Yoga Vehicle are], the modes of generation, completion and great completion, from this point onward the text explains the way in which one engages in these three different modes. The text reads: **Conviction in this mode of Great Perfection [arises] by means of four understandings: 1) understanding the oneness of cause, 2) understanding through the mode of syllables, 3) understanding through the blessings and 4) direct understanding.**

Understanding the oneness of cause refers to this: Since all phenomena are on the ultimate level unborn, they are not different from each other, they are not different in sharing the characteristics of illusions on the conventional level. What is unborn itself appears as diverse illusory forms just like the reflections of the moon in water. Since illusion is devoid of intrinsic nature and is unborn, and since the ultimate and the conventional are indistinguishable, one understands the oneness of cause.

This alludes to an important passage in the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* which is one of the most important passages within this tantra. It presents the philosophical viewpoint of this particular text. Just as in the case of when reading or interpreting Vajrayana texts such as the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, the reading of a single passage can have many different levels of meaning. For example, [in interpreting Vajrayana texts] one speaks of four modes of meaning: the literal meaning, the general meaning, the hidden meaning and the ultimate or definitive (secret) meaning. So even in relation to a single sentence or even a single

word in the texts of Highest Yoga Tantra, one can read the same sentence on many different levels. This also applies to this particular passage here as well.

Commenting on this particular section of the text, especially on the phrase ‘the oneness of cause’ and that on the ultimate level all phenomena are unborn and not different from each other, Jamgon Kongtrul points out that this non-differentiation of phenomena should not be understood merely in terms of the sutra presentation of emptiness where for example, one speaks of how all phenomena are free from the eight extremes of going-coming, oneness-multiplicity and so on. The meaning here from conceptual elaboration needs to be understood as explained from the point of view of the innate mind of clear light. The point that Jamgon Kongtrul is making is that for the yogi in whose mind the wisdom of clear light has become directly manifest, there is no dualistic perception of any kind in that yogi’s mind. So from that yogi’s point of view such characteristics as coming and going or oneness and multiplicity, none of these conventional characteristics can be said to exist.

While the wisdom of clear light is manifest in the mind of the yogi, none of these dualistic perceptions of any kind will appear to that yogi’s mind. So it is from that point of view that one needs to understand the reference that all phenomena are on the ultimate level unborn and from this point of view phenomena are also not different from each other; there is no differentiation of any kind. In brief, this is a reference to the ultimate meaning clear light.

The next line of the text reads: **they are not different in sharing the characteristics of illusions on the conventional level.** For this line as well Jamgon Kongtrul points out that when one uses the terms conventional and ultimate, these have different meanings in different contexts, but here since ultimate truth is understood in terms of the wisdom of the clear light, then here conventional truth must also be understood in correspondence to that. Therefore, conventional truth here refers to the resonance, the self-expression of the innate mind of clear light. The self-expression of the clear light wisdom is actually the illusory body so conventional truth here refers to the illusory body which is the self-resonance or self-expression of the wisdom of clear light.

These two dimensions of the ultimate clear light which is the dimension of emptiness and the [conventional clear light] illusory body which is the dimension of appearance, effectively become the substantial or primary cause for the attainment of the enlightened mind and body.

Kongtrul Rinpoche goes on to explain oneness of experience or the oneness of taste and refers to two levels of union. In one context it is the union of objective emptiness and the subjective clear light which is understood in terms of the union of emptiness and bliss. As explained before the subjective clear light refers to the ultimate wisdom of clear light and from the perspective of this wisdom of clear light, one can understand how all phenomena are said to be of a single taste. For example, so far as the individual beings experiences of various levels of mental states is concerned, all of the subjective experiences including the grosser levels of consciousness, as explained before, they are

manifestations arising out of the clear light mind. Because of that each and every state of one's consciousness is permeated by the essential quality of the clear light consciousness.

So an analogy is given just as every part of a sesame seed is permeated by the sesame oil contained within that seed, in the same manner, all of the levels of one's consciousness, including the grosser levels of consciousness, are permeated by the clear light nature. Another analogy that is given is that of the relationship between ice and water. When one perceives ice, there is definitely a solidity in the actual structure of the ice itself but regardless of how solid ice may seem, it never loses its essential nature of being water which is in the ice. In the same manner, the entire spectrum of consciousness is permeated by its essential nature which is clear light. Since this is the case then of course the object, the field of experience of one's consciousness, all are in a sense, the manifestations or play of the innate mind of clear light as was explained earlier. So from this point of view there is an oneness of taste in the entirety of phenomena. When the ultimate wisdom of clear light is experienced then it is conjoined with the objective emptiness so there is a union of bliss and emptiness. This is one level of union.

However, Jamgon Kongtrul points to another level of union where bliss and emptiness are one unit of the union and the other unit is the illusory body that I spoke of earlier. The union of the clear light wisdom and the illusory body represents the higher form of union where effectively the Two Truths, the ultimate and conventional, have become integrated and united. This is a unique form of union and because of this one reads in the text: **What is unborn itself appears as diverse illusory forms just like the reflections of the moon in water. Since illusion is devoid of intrinsic nature and is unborn, and since the ultimate and the conventional are indistinguishable** referring to the union of the clear light and the illusory body, **one understands the oneness of cause.** The oneness of cause here is understood by Jamgon Kongtrul as the union of the clear light wisdom and the illusory body.

Having explained the oneness of cause next the text continues with the explanation of understanding through the mode of syllables. This section deals with the oneness of the taste of the body, speech and mind of the yogi who has attained union. The text reads: **Understanding through the mode of syllables is as follows. The unborn nature of all phenomena is AH which is the nature of enlightened speech; that the unborn nature itself appearing as causally efficacious illusion is O, which is the nature of enlightened body and that the awareness which cognizes this, the illusory wisdom devoid of center and periphery is OM, which is the nature of enlightened mind.**

In the terminology of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, it speaks of the innate qualities of the prana energies and the subtle levels of consciousness. These subtle levels of consciousness are indivisible from their mediums which are the prana wind energies. So just as even on the level of gross experience these subtle levels of consciousness are indivisible from the medium which is the prana energy winds. The body, speech and mind are functions of the interaction between the subtle prana energy winds and the subtle consciousness. In fact there are explicit statements in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* which Jamgon Kongtrul cites in his commentary from Candrakirti's commentary of the

root tantra of the *Guhyasamaja*, the *Bright Lamp*, in which commenting on a line from the root tantra Candrakirti explicitly explains that for the yogi who has gained union, body, speech and mind have fused into a single taste.

In this text, it states that from the unit of subtle prana energy wind and the subtle consciousness, one part of the prana wind energy represents enlightened speech and the prana winds in their entirety, which arises as the illusory body, represents enlightened body. The awareness of the yogi that realizes or cognizes this represents enlightened mind. These three have fused into a single taste in the yogi who has gained union therefore the text refers to the three syllables AH, O and OM representing speech, body and mind.

Next is the understanding through the blessings and the text reads: **Understanding through blessings refers to the understanding that just as, for example, the power to change a white sheet of cloth into a red sheet lies in the dye, the power to transform all phenomena into enlightened Buddhas is obtained through understanding the oneness of cause and understanding the mode of the syllables.** Here the text explains the possibility of transformation that is embedded within the phenomena themselves. For example in the context of the Sutra system, one speaks of natural nirvana, which refers to emptiness and because all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence their ultimate nature is emptiness. It is this natural nirvana that allows the possibility for the eventual removal or dispelling of the ignorance that grasps at things as truly existing or as substantially real. Whereas if the belief in substantial reality is true, it would preclude any possibility or potential for transformation and change. Because all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence, because their ultimate nature is empty, it is this emptiness that allows for the possibility of transformation and enlightenment.

In the same manner, here in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra when one understands that all phenomena of cyclic existence are in some sense the effulgence or manifestations arising from the fundamental innate mind of clear light, this implies that all of these factors of samsara which come into existence are truly adventitious. Since the essential nature of mind is clear light which is free of any defilement or obscuration, this allows the possibility for all of these adventitious factors of samsara to be removable in principle. Because of this it also allows the possibility to apply powerful antidotes against the defilements so that these can eventually be removed. Therefore in this text there is the reference to 'blessing' and transformation through blessing. The Tibetan for blessing is *byin rlabs* which has the connotation of something being changed as the result of a power of brilliance or majesty. Blessing here connotes transformation. Because the essential nature of the mind is pure, it allows for the possibility of transformation.

One can relate this to the same analogy that was used earlier concerning the relationship between ice and water. When one examines a block of ice, it is as hard as a rock but despite the solidity of the ice, it retains its quality or nature of water. Because of that nature there is the possibility that it can be melted releasing the water from it. If the ice has no quality of water contained within it, if the nature of ice was not water, then there would not be the possibility of getting water from it. In the same manner, since all of the

various levels of the gross afflictions, conceptual thought processes and so on, impure and contaminated states of mind arise from the innate mind of clear light, there is the possibility that they all can eventually be dissolved back into the innate mind of clear light as well.

Next is the fourth understanding which is direct understanding and the text reads: **Direct understanding is understanding that the abiding of all phenomena, primordially as fully enlightened, is not contrary to the intention of the scriptures and the quintessential instructions and that it does not depend upon the words of the scriptures and quintessential instructions alone. This is understood directly as one has gained conviction from the depths of one's mind by means of one's own intellect.** This passage points to the possibility of gaining a direct experience of this truth.

The text continues: **“Gaining conviction through the path” refers to the comprehension of the meaning of the four understandings, which is the path of a yogi. However this is not like the practice in which the cause depends upon temporal process for its effect to arise; rather, one comprehends it directly by oneself through faith.**

In Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary for this section, he explains that when referring to the direct understanding in this context, this should not be confined only to an understanding the ultimate wisdom of clear light alone. There can be many different levels of direct experience and this is very similar to the ideas found in the Lamdre cycle of teachings where they refer to ultimate wisdom and metaphoric wisdom. In relation to the metaphorical wisdom, in the Lamdre teachings there is also a recognition of subtler and grosser levels and so on. For example there is a metaphoric wisdom that arises following the dissolution of the three subtle levels of consciousness of appearance, red increase and near-attainment. There are grosser levels of metaphoric wisdom which arise in the aftermath of the dissolution of the grosser levels of the Eighty Indicative Conceptions. The point is that when one speaks of direct experience in this context, one should not confine the discussion to refer only to the ultimate wisdom of clear light as there are many different levels of direct experience.

Such kinds of direct experience can also be effected in some cases on the basis of an experienced master giving instructions to a ripened disciple who on the basis of the instruction can bring about an experience of direct understanding. So direct understanding has connotations on many different levels.

Jamgon Kongtrul then summarizes the entire section on the four understandings explaining that the first understanding, the oneness of the cause, explains the nature of the union of the Two Truths. The second understanding, which is the understanding of the mode of syllables, explains the oneness or fusion of the body, speech and mind of the yogi who has attained union. The third understanding, understanding through blessings, explains the process by which the impure aspects of one's existence are purified. The fourth understanding explains the possibility of gaining direct experience or understanding of that process.

In the next section the text deals with what is called the three characteristic marks. Basically this section explains the process by which one's understanding goes through a process of progressive deepening from the stage of understanding derived through study unto understanding derived through reflection and then culminating in understanding derived through meditation. This is the standard process through which one's understanding becomes deepened.

The text reads: **It is by means of understanding the three characteristic marks that successful realization of the goal will take place. The comprehension of the four modes of understanding is the characteristic mark of knowledge**, this refers to the understanding derived through study and learning; **the constant cultivation of familiarity is the characteristic mark of engagement**, so this refers to the understanding derived through contemplation and reflection; **and its actualization due to the force of habituation is the defining characteristic of the result**, so this refers to the understanding derived through meditative practice.

The text then goes on to explain: **These three characteristic marks also present the correlations**, which is the inter-relationships of the various elements, **the purpose and the ultimate purpose. As for the 'correlations', it refers to relating the characteristic mark of the knowledge of the cause – the understanding of all phenomena labeled as afflicted and enlightened as being, right from the beginning, embodiments of enlightened body, speech and mind and as the expanse of natural Buddhahood, which is the meaning of blessing.** Correlation here refers to relating the characteristic marks of the knowledge of the cause to be the cause for achieving the unexcelled enlightenment.

As for the purpose, it is the comprehension of all phenomena - those that are imputed as afflicted or factors belonging to the enlightened class – as the five medicines, as well as the five nectars and so on, within the great equanimity of primordial Buddhahood with no evaluative judgments of affirmation or negation. This is the characteristic mark of engagement and since it is the cause of achieving the unexcelled Buddhahood, it is the purpose.

The ultimate purpose is as follows: Given that all phenomena that are imputed as distinct realities such as the afflicted factors, the factors of the enlightened class, the five medicines, the five nectars and so on, have spontaneously come into being within the great equanimity of unexcelled Buddhahood with no evaluative judgment of affirmation or negation, the wheel of existence itself has existed right from the beginning as the nature of unexcelled Buddhahood sharing the characteristics of nirvana. It is therefore the characteristic mark of the result and the manifest actualization of this wheel of adornment of inexhaustible body, speech and mind which is the ultimate purpose.

By explaining the three characteristic marks, the text goes on to explain the interrelationships, the purpose and the ultimate purpose of these various stages. His

Holiness said that he will not elaborate on the text itself, partly because we do not have much time and partly that there is an expression: “One teaches or comments on a text like an old man chewing; you swallow the hard bits and chew the soft bits.”

The text continues with a discussion of the four branches of yogic practice, approximation, near-approximation, attainment and the great attainment. These four branches of yogic practice differing according to the specific Vajrayana practice, the deity yoga one is engaging in. The text reads: **To achieve this one must strive in the yoga that brings about continuous realization of approximation, near-approximation, attainment and the great attainment. Approximation refers to knowledge of the awakening mind**, in this context here, this refers to the meditation on emptiness in the tantric sense **which is the understanding that it is by means of the path that all phenomena are realized as primordially in the nature of Buddhahood and that they cannot be altered by means of their counter-forces**. When one speaks of the meditation on emptiness in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra, it is not adequate to simply have an understanding of emptiness as presented in the Sutras as one also needs to have an understanding of the nature of clear light. The actual meditation is performed from the perspective of the subjective clear light experience. Therefore, there is a reference to the primordial Buddhahood which does not imply that from the Vajrayana perspective that everything is primordially Buddha. The point is that given that everything arises from the innate mind of clear light, which is primordially pure, all phenomena have the potential of primordial enlightenment or Buddhahood.

The text continues: **“Near-approximation” refers to the knowledge of oneself as a deity**, here referring to the illusory body experience, **which in turn is the understanding that since all phenomena are primordially the nature of Buddhahood oneself too is primordially in the nature of a deity and that this is not something that has been cultivated at present**. Earlier there was a reference to the statement that because of their primordial nature of Buddhahood, nothing can be altered by means of their counter-forces. If one understands this from the perspective of clear light then given that the essential nature of the mind of clear light is pure, there is in the ultimate sense nothing to be removed or eliminated.

This resonates with a passage from Maitreya’s *Uttaratantra* and an identical stanza is found in Maitreya’s *Abhisamayalamkara* or *Ornament of Clear Realization*. In the *Abhisamayalamkara* there is a stanza that reads there is nothing here to be removed nor is there anything from which one needs to remove it and so on. This absence of anything to be removed is explained in terms of the emptiness of true existence so that from the point of view of emptiness of true existence, there is nothing that needs to be removed. This is because no phenomenon has ever possessed any true existence or substantial reality [to begin with] so in the ultimate sense there is nothing to be removed or negated.

- 202 Wisdom of the termination of stains and non-arising
 Is expressed by “enlightenment,”
 Because there is no termination and no arising.
 These should be known according to their order.

- 203 Through the path called “seeing
The nature of no cessation,”
What kinds of conceptions should be exhausted,
And which aspects of no arising should be attained?
- 204 That the phenomena of others should exist,
While at the same time the teacher’s obscurations
With respect to knowable objects should be exhausted,
Such a statement I consider as amazing.
- 205 In this there is nothing to be eliminated
And there is not the slightest to be established.
Actuality is to be viewed as actuality –
The one who sees actuality is completely released.

However in the *Uttaratantra*, Maitreya’s *Sublime Continuum*, there he gives the exact same passage but explains it in a different way. There he understands all of the defilements and afflictions to be adventitious and that the qualities of the enlightened mind are naturally contained within the mind. So in this text he explains the passage along those lines.

Nothing whatsoever is to be removed.
Nor the slightest thing is to be added.
Truly looking at truth, truth is seen.
When seen, this is complete liberation.

The element is empty of the adventitious [stains],
which are featured by their total separateness.
But it is not empty of the matchless properties,
which are featured by their total inseparability.

The Fourth Vajra Point: The Element

In the context of Highest Yoga Tantra this passage needs to be then understood from the point of view of the essential nature of mind being clear light and is devoid of any defilements. So from this point of view, there is nothing to be removed or eliminated.

The text continues: **“Attainment” refers to the generation of the mother. As for the great mother, which here refers to Samantabhadra, it is within the expanse of space and space itself appears as the great mother, namely as [the four great elements of] earth, water, fire and wind. One recognizes these as the mother who is the receptacle [of the creation of all phenomena]. The “great attainment” refers to the relating of method and wisdom, which is the primordial uniting of the wisdom of the five great consorts - the space of the consorts and emptiness - with the father of all the Buddhas of the five aggregates, free of aspiration. From this [union], the bodhicitta drops appear as emanations whose nature is such that within the truth of primordial Buddhahood, illusions play on illusions. And at this blissful moment of illusory supreme bliss continuum, one achieves spontaneously the truth of signlessness with the non-objectified space into a single stream. The four classes of**

Mara, which refers to the obstructive forces, are [thus] subdued and one achieves the final objective.

The next passage reads: **This is achieved in the following manner: With respect to entering the primordially unexcelled mandala, which is the undifferentiated celestial wish-granting mansion wherein all phenomena are primordially pure, hearing the scriptures of the method vehicle is the opening of one's eyes.** A process similar to entering a mandala is explained here. **Understanding the meaning [of these teachings] is seeing the mandala; cultivating its familiarity following its understanding is entering the mandala, while actualizing it after entering it is the obtainment of the great siddhi attainment. This procedure signifies the final stage of Great Perfection - that is one arrives spontaneously on the level of great accumulation,** which refers to the omniscient state of Buddhahood, **which is the wheel of syllables.** In this last passage, the process of entering the path and progressively traversing the path is explained.

The next section reads: **The persons of excellent mental faculty understand what are primordially enlightened as primordially enlightened and the familiarity of this [knowledge] enhances with firm steps. This is not a pursuit of the ordinary person.** This refers to a point that I made earlier that for a genuine practitioner of Highest Yoga Tantra, some realization of bodhicitta or the awakening mind and an understanding of emptiness, as explained in the Sutra system, is indispensable. Particularly in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra meditation, an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality from the point of view of the wisdom of clear light is also indispensable. Without these realizations as a basis, there is simply no foundation upon which one can successfully engage in the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra meditation.

The next part of the text is wonderful and reads: **As for the ordinary person, even though he contemplates, he will have no conviction in its truth and profundity. Relating to this fact of the mind of the ordinary person not gaining conviction, having difficulty in comprehending it and accepting its truth and profundity, there is the danger of thinking that this must be the same for everyone. [One might then] denigrate the excellent persons as all liars and thereby engender thoughts of refuting them. Because of this, it is being kept hidden as such it is taught as the "secret vehicle."** Therefore until the mind understanding the truth of all phenomena as being primordially enlightened has arisen, if one engages in other's welfare on the basis of the lower vehicles, one will not undermine the spiritual trainees, referring to the disciples. **So extensive statements are found [in the scriptures] that the master must be versed in [the knowledge of] the defects of cyclic existence, the excellent qualities of nirvana, as well as in all the vehicles, and that a master who is ignorant of some aspects [of the teachings] must not hold [the position of a teacher].**

The next section of the text reads: **Due to the difference of views, in terms of their profundity and so on, differences also exist in the ascetic practices and conduct [based on those differing views]. Those devoid of ascetic practice are the unreflective worldly and the nihilists. There are four kinds that have ascetic practices: (i) the mundane ascetic practice which the materialists and the extremists have, (ii) the**

ascetic practice of the disciples, (iv) the ascetic practice of the bodhisattvas, and (iv) the unexcelled asceticism.

Of these the unreflective is ignorant of cause and effect and so is therefore devoid of ascetic practices. The nihilists uphold the nihilistic view and are devoid of ascetic practices. The materialists seek qualities characteristic of this life so they possess ascetic practices, such as the observance of purity laws and so on. The extremists, with the goal of purifying the eternal self, engage in such asceticism as abusing the body, keeping themselves in the five types of fire and so on; they engage in the conduct in a distorted manner.

As for the ascetic practice of the Disciple, the Discipline scripture, the Vinaya, states:

**Do not commit any evil;
Engage in virtues as best as you can;
Thoroughly tame your own mind -
This is the doctrine of the Buddha.**

Thus they view all factors of existence, virtuous or non-virtuous, as existing separately and respectively belonging to [the categories of] ultimate and conventional truths. They engage in the conduct of practicing the virtues and relinquishing non-virtues.

As for the ascetic practices of the bodhisattvas, the *Bodhisattva Vows* states:

**Not effecting the means when circumstances call for;
Not employing supernatural powers, threats and so on;
He who has compassion and out of loving-kindness,
And those of virtuous mind, there is no fault [in these acts].**

So if it is sustained by great compassion, regardless of whatever acts one might engage in, be it virtuous or non-virtuous, one's vows will not degenerate. For the bodhisattva vow is, in brief, to act with taking great compassion as its ground.

As for the unexcelled asceticism, the *Great Pledge Sutra* states:

**If one is thoroughly affirmed in the Buddha's vehicle,
Even if one indulges in all the afflictions and the five senses,
Just like a lotus [growing] in muddy water,
In him morality remains pure and perfect.**

The text continues: Since all phenomena are in perfect equanimity from the very beginning, no compassion is to be cultivated and no hatred is to be eliminated. It does not mean however, that enlightened compassion does not arise for those who fail to understand in this way. Just as they comprehend by means of the view that

[all phenomena are] primordially pure, they also engage in the ascetic practices and the conduct with thorough purity.

At the end is colophon which also is a dedication which reads:

**This secret [instruction], a garland of views,
If there are persons who possess the skills of wisdom and method,
May such excellent beings encounter this [instruction],
Just like the blind who opens his own eyes and recovers his sight.**

The quintessential instruction entitled *A Garland of Views* is complete. It was composed by the great master Padmasambhava.

Keep in mind that this is a very profound text and quite elaborate as well. In order to fully understand the full meaning of this text, one will obviously need to consult and study a much wider range of texts as well. Most importantly as the masters of the past advised, what is understood as the result of study must be implemented into practice so the essential point is to concentrate on a single meditative practice.

Among the members of the audience gathered here there are certainly people who are not practicing Buddhists and who follow the practices of other faith traditions or who may have no faith at all in any religious tradition. However you have had the opportunity to at least be informed and introduced to key elements of the Buddhist path and in this way at least you have acquired some knowledge and understanding.

So those of you who are not practicing Buddhists you do have one responsibility which is to constantly watch the behavior and actions of those who claim to be practicing Buddhists.

[His Holiness in English] So thank you very much. You are quite a large number of people who listened attentively and I appreciate that. Now those of you, who consider yourselves as followers of the Buddha, then practice, implement with determination and with lowered (“less”) expectations. This is important. Spiritual development takes time. In my own experience, now I am nearly seventy years old. Since around the age of sixteen I began to practice more seriously but still my experience is limited. At the same time I can assure you that if you implement [the teachings] then your mind will definitely change; it will improve. The result is that you become calmer and happier. I think being enthusiastic all of the time is important.

I think that basically, as you know, if the Buddhist system is utilized in a maximum way then try to transform your emotions; this is the proper way, not just prayer, not just faith but utilize your intelligence to analyze, analyze, thinking, thinking. In this way you develop some kind of conviction which brings determination which brings effort and then time passes and things will change. Thank you.

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Instructions on the Garland of Views
The only written teaching by Padmasambhava (Lopon Pema Jungna)

A note summarizing the different views, vehicles and so on.

Homage to the Blessed Manjushrikumara and Vajradharma!

The Worldly Paths

The countless erroneous views that exist in the realms of the world may be subsumed into four categories: (i) the unreflective, (ii) the materialists, (iii) the nihilists and (iv) the extremists.

The unreflective do not understand whether or not all things and events have causes and conditions; they are thoroughly ignorant. The materialists do not understand whether or not there exist previous and subsequent lives and, relying upon the words of mundane secrets, they acquire wealth and power [only] for this one life. The nihilists view all phenomena to be devoid of cause and effects and maintain all elements of existence that have come about in this one life as having done so accidentally. Thus they uphold nihilism. The extremists uphold the existence of an eternal self for they reify all phenomena through conceptual imputation. [The extremists are comprised of] those who view the presence of effects where there is no cause; those who view cause and effects erroneously; and those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause.

All of these are views of ignorance.

The Path Transcending the World

The path that transcends the world also consists of two categories: (i) the dialectical vehicle and (ii) the indestructible vehicle [of Vajrayana]. The dialectical vehicle in turn is three-fold: (a) the vehicle of the Disciples, (ii) the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones and (iii) the vehicle of the bodhisattvas.

DIALECTICAL VEHICLE

Disciple's Vehicle

Of these, the view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Disciples is as follows. They maintain that the nihilistic view denying everything and the eternalistic view asserting the existence of eternal realities, which are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration, are as untrue as perceiving a [coiled] rope as a snake. [In contrast] they view the aggregates, the elements and the sources, [which are composed of] the four great elements, as well as the consciousness to be ultimately real. [And] it is by means of meditating on the Four Noble Truths that, in due course, the four kinds of results are realized.

Self-Realized One's Vehicle

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the Self-Realized Ones is as follows. With respect to viewing the eternal self and so on that are postulated by the extremists by means of reification and denigration as being non-existent, they are similar to the Disciples. The difference is that they understand the aggregate of form and one aspect of the reality-element to be devoid of self-existence. Also, at the time of attaining the fruit of Self-Realized One's state, unlike Disciples, they do not depend upon a spiritual mentor. [Rather] due to the force of their past habituation, they realize the profound ultimate reality (dharmata) by means of the twelve links of dependent origination and attain the fruit of Self-Enlightenment.

Bodhisattva Vehicle

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of the bodhisattvas is as follows. All phenomena of the thoroughly afflicted and enlightened classes are on the ultimate level devoid of intrinsic nature while on the conventional level they possess their individual characteristics in clearly distinctive manner. The bodhisattvas aspire to seek the unexcelled enlightenment, which is the culmination of traversing the ten levels and the fruit of practicing the six perfections one by one.

INDESTRUCTIBLE VEHICLE OF VAJRAYANA

The indestructible vehicle [of Vajrayana] has three classes: (i) the vehicle of Kriya-tantra, (ii) the vehicle of Ubhaya-tantra and (iii) the vehicle of Yoga-tantra.

Kriya-tantra Vehicle

The view of those who have entered Kriya-tantra is as follows. Whilst there is no origination or cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes [oneself] in the form of a deity and cultivates the deity's image, the attributes - the hand implements - and the mantra repetitions on the basis of the power of the coming together of the necessary ritual articles and other conditions, such as observance of purity laws, performance of rituals on specific days and [auspicious] star constellations and so on.

Ubhaya-tantra Vehicle

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of Ubhaya-tantra is as follows. Whilst there are no origination and cessation on the ultimate level, on the conventional level one visualizes [oneself] in the form a deity. This is cultivated on the basis of both the practice of meditative absorption endowed with four aspects as well as the [necessary] ritual articles and conditions.

Yoga-tantra Vehicle

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of Yoga-tantra is twofold: (i) the view of the outer yoga, the tantra of the Sages, and (ii) the view of inner yoga, the method tantra.

Outer Yoga Vehicle

The view of those who have entered outer yoga, the Sage's tantra, is as follows. Not holding the external [ritual] articles to be of primary importance, they cultivate [their goal] on the basis of emphasizing the yoga of visualizing male and female deities who are devoid of ultimate origination or cessation and the form body of the Noble One that share

resemblance with them, which is the meditative absorption endowed with the four seals of a thoroughly purified mind.

Inner Yoga Vehicle

The view of those who have entered the vehicle of inner yoga, the method tantra, is threefold: (1) the mode of generation, (2) the mode of completion, and (3) the mode of great completion [or perfection].

1. Mode of Generation

The mode of generation is achieved by means of the meditative practice of gradual development of the three meditative absorptions and [gradual] creation of the mandala.

2. Mode of Completion

The mode of completion is achieved by abiding unwaveringly within [the visualization of] male and female deities that are ultimately devoid of origination and cessation, as well as the middle way of ultimate expanse, which is the non-conceptual truth, while on the conventional level cultivating, in [perfect] equanimity and un-muddled manner, the form of the Noble deity with clear visualization.

3. The Mode of Great Perfection

Presentation of the Meaning of Great Perfection

The mode of Great Perfection is to meditate on the basis of understanding all mundane and supramundane phenomena as being devoid of any differentiation and to recognize as having always been present as the mandala of body, speech and mind.

It is stated in the tantra:

As for the limbs of the Vajra body,
They are known as the five Buddhas.
The sources and the numerous elements,
They are the mandala of the bodhisattvas.
Earth and water are Locana and Mamaki;
Fire and wind are Pandaravasin and Tara;
The space is Dhateshvari.
[So] the three worlds are primordially pure.

So all phenomena of cyclic existence and nirvana are primordially unborn yet they have the capacity for illusory function as they have always been in the nature of the ten Tathagatas and their consorts. All phenomena are therefore naturally transcendent of sorrow: The great [elements] are in the nature of the five consorts; the five aggregates as the nature of the five Buddha families; the four consciousness as the nature the four great bodhisattvas; the four objects as the four beautiful goddesses; the four senses as the bodhisattvas; the four temporal stages as the four goddesses; the bodily organs as the consciousnesses; the sensory fields and the bodhicitta drops arising from them as the four

wrathful deities; the four extremes of eternalism and nihilism as the four wrathful female deities; the mental consciousness as the nature of Samantabhadra, namely the indestructible bodhicitta; the objects [of both] conditioned and unconditioned phenomena are in the nature Samantabhadri who is the receptacle [of the creation] of [all] phenomena. All of these in turn have already been in the nature of complete enlightenment; they are not now acquired by means of the path. Thus all phenomena - conditioned and unconditioned – such as the ten directions, the three temporal stages, the three worlds, and so on do not exist apart from one's own mind.

It is stated:

The clear understanding of one's own mind -
This is the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas;
This constitutes the three worlds;
This constitutes the great elements as well.

Thus it has been stated:

All phenomena dwell in the mind; the mind dwells in space, while space dwells nowhere.

Furthermore:

All phenomena are devoid of an intrinsic nature; all phenomena are thoroughly pure from the very beginning; all phenomena are thoroughly radiant; all phenomena are naturally transcendent nirvana; all phenomena are manifestly enlightened.

This [then] is the [meaning of] Great Perfection. (The mode of Great Perfection means the perfection of the accumulations of merit and wisdom and the spontaneous realization of the resultant goal.)

PRESENTATION OF THE MODE OF GREAT PERFECTION

The Four Understandings

Conviction in this mode of Great Perfection [arises] by means of four understandings: (i) understanding the oneness of cause, (ii) understanding through the mode of syllables, (iii) understanding through the blessings, and (iv) direct understanding.

Understanding the oneness of cause refers to this: Since all phenomena are on the ultimate level unborn, they are not different [from each other]; they are not different in sharing the characteristics of illusions on the conventional level; what is unborn itself appears as diverse illusory forms just like reflections of the moon in water; since illusion is devoid of intrinsic nature and is unborn and since the ultimate and the conventional are indistinguishable, one understands the oneness of cause.

Understanding through the mode of syllables is as follows. The unborn nature of all phenomena is AH, which is the nature of enlightened speech; that the unborn nature itself appearing as causally efficacious illusion is O, which is the nature of enlightened body; and that the awareness which cognizes this, the illusory wisdom devoid of centre and periphery is OM, which is the nature of enlightened mind.

Understanding through blessing refers to the understanding that just as, for example, the power to change a white sheet of cloth into a red sheet lies in the dye, the power to transform all phenomena into enlightened Buddhas is obtained through understanding the oneness of cause and [understanding the mode of] the syllables.

Direct understanding is, [understanding] that the abiding of all phenomena primordially as fully enlightened is not contrary to [the intention of] the scriptures and the quintessential instructions and that it does not depend upon the words of the scriptures and quintessential instructions alone. This is understood directly as one has gained conviction from the depth of one's mind by means of one's own intellect. "Gaining conviction through the path" refers to the comprehension of the meaning of the four understandings, which is the path of a yogi. However this is not like the practice in which the cause depends upon temporal process for its effect to arise; rather, one comprehends it directly by oneself through faith.

The Three Characteristic Marks

It is by means of [understanding] the three characteristic marks that successful realization of the goal will take place. The comprehension of the four modes of understandings is the characteristic mark of knowledge; constant cultivation of familiarity is the characteristic mark of engagement; and its actualization due to the force of habituation is the defining characteristic of the result.

[These three characteristic marks also] present the correlations, the purpose, and the ultimate purpose. As for "correlations," it refers to relating the characteristic marks of the knowledge of the cause - the understanding of all phenomena labeled as afflicted or enlightened, as being, right from the beginning, embodiments of enlightened body, speech and mind and as the expanse of natural Buddhahood, which is the meaning of blessing - to being the cause for achieving the unexcelled enlightenment.

As for the purpose, it is the comprehension of all phenomena - those that are imputed as afflicted factors or factors belonging to the enlightened class - as the five medicines as well the five nectars and so on, within the great equanimity of primordial Buddhahood, with no [evaluative judgments of] affirmation and negation. This is the characteristic mark of engagement and, since it is the cause of achieving the unexcelled Buddhahood, it is the purpose.

The ultimate purpose is as follows. Given that all phenomena that are imputed as distinct realities, such as, the afflicted factors, the factors of enlightened class, the five medicines, the five nectars and so on, have spontaneously come into being within the great equanimity of unexcelled Buddhahood with no [evaluative judgment of] affirmation or

negation, the wheel of existence itself has existed right from the beginning as the nature of unexcelled Buddhahood, sharing the characteristics of nirvana. It is therefore the characteristic mark of the result and the manifest actualization of this wheel of adornment of inexhaustible body, speech and mind is the ultimate purpose.

The Four Branches of the Yogic Practice

To achieve this one must strive in the yoga that brings about spontaneous realization of approximation, near-approximation, attainment and great attainment. “Approximation” refers to the knowledge of the awakening mind, which is the understanding that it is by means of the path that all phenomena are realized as primordially in the nature of Buddhahood and that they cannot be altered by means of their counter-forces. “Near-approximation” refers to the knowledge of oneself as a deity, which in turn is the understanding that since all phenomena are primordially the nature of Buddhahood oneself too is primordially in the nature of a deity and that this is not something that has been cultivated at present. “Attainment” refers to the generation of the mother. As for the great mother, it is within the expanse of space and space itself appears as the great mother, namely as [the four great elements of] earth, water, fire and wind. One recognizes these as the mother who is the receptacle [of the creation of all phenomena]. The “great attainment” refers to the relating of method and wisdom, which is the primordial uniting of the wisdom of the five great consorts - the space of the consorts and emptiness - with the father of all the Buddhas of the five aggregates, free of aspiration. From this [union], the bodhicitta drops appear as emanations whose nature is such that within the truth of primordial Buddhahood, illusions play on illusions. And at this blissful moment of illusory supreme bliss continuum, one achieves spontaneously the truth of signlessness with the non-objectified space into a single stream. The four classes of Mara are [thus] subdued and one achieves the final objective.

The Procedure for Entering the Mandala of Great Perfection

[This is achieved in the following manner:] With respect to entering the primordially unexcelled mandala, which is the undifferentiated celestial wish-granting mansion wherein all phenomena are primordially pure, hearing the scriptures of the method vehicle is the opening of one’s eyes. Understanding the meaning [of these teachings] is seeing the mandala; cultivating its familiarity following its understanding is entering the mandala, while actualizing it after entering it is the obtainment of the great siddhi attainment. This procedure signifies the final stage of Great Perfection - that is one arrives spontaneously on the level of great accumulation, which is the wheel of syllables.

Demonstrating that this Mode of Great Perfection is Not Suitable for Everyone

The persons of excellent mental faculty understand what are primordially enlightened as primordially enlightened and the familiarity of this [knowledge] enhances with firm steps. This is not a pursuit of the ordinary person. As for the ordinary person, even though he contemplates, he will have no conviction in its truth and profundity. Relating to this fact of the mind of the ordinary person not gaining conviction, having difficulty in comprehending it and accepting its truth and profundity, there is the danger of thinking that this must be the same for everyone. [One might then] denigrate the excellent persons as all liars and thereby engender thoughts of refuting them. Because of this, it is being

kept hidden as such it is taught as the “secret vehicle.” Therefore until the mind understanding the truth of all phenomena as being primordially enlightened has arisen, if one engages in other’s welfare on the basis of the lower vehicles, one will not undermine the spiritual trainees. So extensive statements are found [in the scriptures] that the master must be versed in [the knowledge of] the defects of cyclic existence, the excellent qualities of nirvana, as well as in all the vehicles, and that a master who is ignorant of some aspects [of the teachings] must not hold [the position of a teacher].

DIFFERENCES OF ASCETIC PRACTICES AND THE CONDUCTS

Due to the difference of views, differences also exist in the ascetic practices and conduct. Those devoid of ascetic practice are the unreflective worldly and the nihilists. There are four kinds that have ascetic practices: (i) the mundane ascetic practice which the materialists and the extremists have, (ii) the ascetic practice of the disciples, (iv) the ascetic practice of the bodhisattvas, and (iv) the unexcelled asceticism.

Of these the unreflective is ignorant of cause and effect and so is therefore devoid of ascetic practices. The nihilists uphold the nihilistic view and are devoid of ascetic practices. The materialists seek qualities characteristic of this life so they possess ascetic practices, such as the observance of purity laws and so on. The extremists, with the goal of purifying the eternal self, engage in such asceticism as abusing the body, keeping themselves in the five types of fire and so on; they engage in the conduct in a distorted manner.

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So if it is sustained by great compassion, regardless of whatever acts one might engage in, be it virtuous or non-virtuous, one’s vows will not degenerate. For the bodhisattva vow is, in brief, to act with taking great compassion as its ground.

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Just like a lotus [growing] in muddy water,
In him morality remains pure and perfect.

Since all phenomena are in perfect equanimity from the very beginning, no compassion is to be cultivated and no hatred is to be eliminated. It does not mean however, that enlightened compassion does not arise for those who fail to understand in this way. Just as they comprehend by means of the view that [all phenomena are] primordially pure, they also engage in the ascetic practices and the conduct with thorough purity.

This secret [instruction], a garland of views,
If there are persons who possess the skills of wisdom and method,
May such excellent beings encounter this [instruction],
Just like the blind who opens his own eyes and recovers his sight.

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The original Tibetan text of *The Garland of Views* chosen here in this translation is the edition found in volume one of the *Collected Works of Rongsom Chösang*. To help facilitate reading of the root text in English key parts of the text have been clearly demarcated with subheadings, based primarily on Rongsom Pandita's commentary to *the Garland of Views*. {I have slightly edited the text to improve the English grammar and hopefully not the meaning.}