

*The Four Dharmas
Of Gampopa*

by

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Geshe Lharampa

Translated by

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Note

The technical words have been italicized the first time that they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary of Terms.

We use the convention of B.C.E. (Before Common Era) for B. C. and C. E. (Common Era) for A. D.



Chapter 1

The Lineage of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa

It is said that the teachings of the Kagyu lineage¹ originated from the *dharmakaya* Buddha Vajradhara. We might think, “Wait a minute. I thought that the Buddhist teachings came from the Shakyamuni Buddha.” However, the mind of the Buddha is the *dharmakaya* and he manifested in our world in a body as the Buddha Shakyamuni in a *nirmanakaya* emanation.² So there is no difference between the *dharmakaya* and the Buddha Shakyamuni who was born in India 2,500 years ago.

The *dharmakaya* is not something that is born and later dies; it is not something that needs to pass beyond *samsara*. The *Dharmakaya* has three qualities: knowledge, compassion, and skillful means. These three qualities are not just qualities of the Buddha, but they are the very nature of wisdom (Skt. *jnana*). This wisdom of the *dharmakaya* appears to students in two ways. The first is to highly realized students in the form of the *sambhogakaya*. For example, these pure students would visit the pure lands and see Vajradhara and other bodhisattvas as they appear in a *thangka* with various ornaments and so on.

The second is the *nirmanakaya* as an ordinary being such as the Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance in India many centuries ago. However, these two forms are not fundamentally different from each other because Vajradhara is the mind of both the *sambhogakaya* and the *nirmanakaya*. The *sambhogakaya* Vajradhara can only be met by the great bodhisattvas and the great *siddhas*. It is possible for them to meet face to face with the *sambhogakaya* Vajradhara. For example, the great *siddha* Tilopa met directly with the *sambhogakaya* Vajradhara. When Tilopa met with the *sambhogakaya* Vajradhara in the tenth century, the *nirmanakaya* Shakyamuni Buddha was no longer in the world. However, meeting with the *sambhogakaya* Vajradhara

was no different from meeting with nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddha. The reason for this is that both are emanations of the mind of the dharmakaya.

The great *pandita*, Naropa was a student of Tilopa. At that time, Naropa was abbot of Nalanda Monastic University, which was a major place of study of the dharma in India. One day Naropa was studying the tantric text known as the *Guhyasamaja*. A wisdom *dakini* appeared in the room where he was studying this *tantra*. While Naropa was looking at the book, he had the feeling that a shadow or a stain had suddenly appeared on the book that he was reading. He said, "What is this?" and looking up, he saw a hideous old woman in the room. She asked him, "Do you understand the words or do you understand the meaning of this text?" He replied, "I know the words." This made the woman extremely happy and she began to smile and then laugh. So Naropa thought, "Well, if she was so happy at hearing that I know the words, she'll be even more tickled to know that I understand the meaning as well." So he added, "I also know the meaning." At that point the woman's face turned black and she became very sad and was completely crestfallen. Seeing this, Naropa thought, "Well, this is very strange. When I said that I knew the words she was happy. Now when I say I know the meaning, she is very sad. I'll have to ask her why." So he asked her and she replied, "You are indeed a very learned person and you do understand the words: that is true and made me very glad. However, you don't know the meaning of the words. So when you said that you knew the meaning, that wasn't true and that made me very sad." Hearing this, Naropa said to the old woman, "Well then, who does know the meaning of these words?" And she replied, "In the eastern portion of India, there is a *mahasiddha*, a greatly accomplished person, named Tilopa. He knows the meaning of these words." Just hearing the words "Tilopa" gave Naropa a tremendous feeling of faith and gave him confidence. He thought, "I must do everything possible to meet with this person."

Since Naropa was a great teacher, he had many students at Nalanda University and many responsibilities there. When he proposed that he go find the great siddha Tilopa, the students and the other teachers said to him, "You just can't go. Please remain here because we need you." Naropa thought about it and

came to the conclusion that if he knew only the words without the meaning, then there would be no real benefit in his being there so he must indeed go find Tilopa.

To find Tilopa, Naropa underwent many hardships, travelling to where Tilopa was reported to be and endured many hardships training under him after he found him. But eventually Tilopa gave him the instructions of pointing out the nature of mind and the oral instructions on how to practice the understanding of true nature of mind. Naropa practiced these instructions and was able to generate profound realization in the continuum of his being.

The Tibetan translator, Marpa, was the student of the great teacher, Naropa. He requested instructions from Naropa. Naropa appointed Marpa as his regent in Tibet and made a prediction that just as the children of a *garuda* become stronger and more powerful than the mother to whom they are born, so each generation of Marpa's students in Tibet would be more accomplished than their own gurus.

To see if this prophecy is true, we could look at the generations that followed Marpa. Marpa passed these teachings to his student, Milarepa; Milarepa passed them to his student, Gampopa. By the time the teaching had reached Gampopa, he had not only received the teachings on the mahamudra which were known as the *Six Yogas of Naropa*, but he had combined these teachings with the oral instructions on training the mind from the great Indian master, Atisha.

We could say that these two lineages of the instructions on *mahamudra* that Gampopa received from Milarepa were extremely profound. They show how to practice the path of the vajrayana. The instructions from the great master Atisha were on the way in which all beginners can enter the Buddhist path and establish the very pure motivation to practice dharma that enables one to become accomplished. These instructions of Atisha are very subtle and carefully guide the training of one's mind.

The Story of Atisha

The Buddhist dharma was originally transmitted to Tibet from India by the great guru Padmasambhava and by Shantarakshita

in the 8th century C.E. The dharma began to flourish in Tibet based on their teachings. However, in 905 C.E. King Langdarma persecuted the dharma in Tibet and it almost vanished from Tibet. People had to flee to high mountain regions of the country. Because of these conditions, the great Indian teachers no longer came to Tibet. This meant that the people who were in Tibet had books and teachings on Buddhism, but they had to sit around and speculate on what these teachings meant. One person would say, “Well, I think it means this” and then another would say, “No, I think it means this.” They would discuss this way and as a result the dharma became corrupted and no one really knew what the genuine dharma was. After Langdarma had ruled, a King whose name was Yeshe Ö of Guge thought that it was necessary to purify the dharma. So he invited the foremost of Indian teachers, Atisha, to come and purify the dharma in Tibet.

How had the dharma become degraded? The teachings that had proliferated in Tibet were of a very advanced profound and subtle view that ordinary people could not practice immediately. To achieve this advanced view, it is necessary for people to train in more basic teachings first.³ The practitioners needed to arouse themselves first with the determination to achieve freedom from samsara. This is done by taking refuge in the three jewels of the Buddha, the dharma, and the *sangha*. So they needed to arouse *bodhichitta* or heart of enlightenment before doing advanced practice. Raising *bodhichitta* is the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for oneself for the purpose of bringing about the welfare of others. They also needed to practice sending or taking (Tib. *tong len*) meditation which involves the exchange of self and others. If one trains one’s mind initially in the above practices, then when one combines these teachings with the teachings on the very profound view of mahamudra, one’s practice will progress very well.

Chapter 2

The First Dharma:

*Grant your blessing so that my mind
may be one with the dharma*

The first dharma of Gampopa is usually translated as, “May my mind be one with the dharma,” but a more literal translation would be “May my mind go into the dharma.” For beginners whether the activities of the body conform to the dharma or not doesn’t make that much difference. Whether one’s speech conforms to the dharma or not doesn’t make much difference either. But whether one’s mind conforms to the dharma makes all the difference. If one’s mind conforms to the dharma, then one’s speech and one’s body’s activities will conform with the dharma on their own. And if one’s mind doesn’t become one with the dharma, then it really doesn’t matter what one does with the body and speech; it won’t be of much real benefit anyway. That is why it is most important that one’s mind becomes one with the dharma in the beginning.

The problems of laziness

For one’s mind to become one with the dharma it is necessary to abandon the cause of one’s mind not becoming one with the dharma. This cause is laziness and through laziness one is unable to practice. There are three kinds of laziness. The first is underestimating oneself by thinking, “Well, the situation I’ve got is sort of okay. I don’t think that I can really do any more than this. I’m just not ready for doing any more. It’s great to talk about enlightenment, but those aren’t things that I could accomplish. I’m just not that sort of person and it’s really beyond me.” Thinking this way, one just begins to slide into more degrading activity and this behavior becomes a great obstruction to being able to practice the dharma.

The truth, on the other hand, is that there is no reason one isn't capable of practicing because we do, in fact, have the ability to accomplish great things. We have within us the conditions for becoming liberated and enlightened people. This lack of courage that we feel is groundless because we have already achieved a state of being free and well-favored. We also have a marvelous mind that has sugatagarbha which literally means "the essence of the one who has gone to happiness" and is usually translated as "Buddha-nature" or "buddha essence." This sugatagarbha refers to the potential of becoming a completely enlightened person, a buddha.

We are fortunate to have found a situation that can bestow great benefit upon us. That is, we have achieved a human birth which allows us to practice on the path. Whether we are male or female, young or old, big or small, strong or weak, beautiful or ugly doesn't make any difference. We have a body that can actually practice the dharma. Unlike animals we have the ability to speak so we can discuss things with other people and improve our understanding. We have a mind that is suited for thinking about things and it's not beyond our capacity to think over what we've heard and begin to understand it.

It is said in the oral instructions that to achieve a human birth is to have found a body that is like a precious jewel. The reason for this metaphor is that a jewel is worth a lot of money and with a precious jewel we can use it to buy whatever we want. Similarly, we now have a body that enables us to do what we want. That's why we don't need to have to adopt this attitude of laziness in which we believe that we don't have the prerequisites for doing great things in this life.

The second reason we do not need to feel discouraged about our situation is that we have within us the sugatagarbha that is the root from which all the good qualities of intelligence (prajna) and wisdom (jnana) can develop and increase. All sentient beings without exception have this sugatagarbha which is the essence of the sugata, the one who has gone to a happy state. Except for not putting forth the necessary exertion, there is no reason whatsoever that we cannot achieve complete enlightenment. Because we have this nature that allows for enlightenment to be achieved, we should never think, "I could practice forever and it won't do any good."

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The second type of laziness is called the “laziness of attachment to bad actions.” Generally people enjoy doing good things, but there are people who actually enjoy doing all kinds of bad actions. If one becomes involved with bad actions, this creates an obstacle to one’s happiness and comfort. So if one has this kind of laziness, one needs an antidote for it. The antidote to such an attachment is to meditate on the impermanence of life and on karma and its effects.

Followers of other religious traditions say that Buddhism is very bad because of all this talk about impermanence and non-self tends to depress people whereas a religious tradition should uplift people. But the truth of the matter is that thinking about impermanence leads one to have exertion. Contemplating impermanence, one’s delight in all sorts of things subsides and one begins to feel some regret or remorse. Although in the beginning thinking about impermanence might discourage a person, this is just a temporary situation. Thinking about impermanence has three benefits. First in the beginning it calls us to the dharma and exhorts us to practice the dharma and to think about the dharma. Secondly, when one is further along the path, whenever one remembers impermanence, it calls us back to our practice and inspires us to further exertion. When we become distracted by something else, the thought of impermanence brings us back to practice. And thirdly, impermanence is said to be the friend of achieving the fruition of our practice, that is, it inspires exertion and through exertion, the fruition is said to arrive “in the palm of one’s hand.”

In addition to thinking about impermanence, one needs to think about karma. “Karma” literally means “action” and is the relationship between cause and effect. Now the word “karma” is relatively well known and generally people understand it to mean that they are helpless. When something bad happens, they say, “Oh well, it’s just my rotten karma and there’s nothing I can do about it” meaning they are doomed, that they are not independent and free. That is just backwards to what karma really means. The teaching of karma is a teaching of our actually being in control. We can create what we want. Since everyone without exception wants happiness, people can have the happiness they want. So if we practice decent and virtuous activity, happiness comes about as an effect. If one develops

understanding and confidence in this teaching about the relationship between the actions in the present and the effects experienced at a later time, this understanding of karma will destroy the laziness of an attachment to a nonvirtuous activity.

The third type of laziness is the laziness of indifference. This is what we ordinarily understand by laziness. It is just doing nothing at all. We don't feel like doing anything particularly good and we don't feel like doing anything particularly bad. We're just bored and don't really want to do anything at all. However, this is a very dangerous situation. The antidote to this type of laziness is thinking about what's wrong with being in samsara. Samsara has the nature of change and it has the nature of suffering and that is why we need to understand samsara. The very definition of samsara is "that which has hardship and obstructions." Now we often think there's some other reason, some particular detail that we need to alter to achieve happiness and we almost always believe it's our inability to change the situation that is the cause of our suffering. We think, "I don't have the right woman (or man) and that's the problem" and "if I form a relationship with a good woman (or man), then everything will be all right." Or we think, "There's something wrong with my job, I need to find myself a good job and then things will be fine." But actually that is not the situation at all because suffering is the nature of samsara. When we understand that the problem isn't just some temporary situation like being in the wrong situation or not having enough money, and that suffering is the very nature of samsara, then we realize that only the dharma can allow us to achieve liberation from the suffering of samsara. So that is the meaning of "May my mind become one with the dharma."

Chapter 3

The Second Dharma:

*Grant your blessing so that
the dharma may go along the path*

The first dharma of Gampopa discussed the necessity of practicing the dharma. This chapter will discuss the second dharma of Gampopa which involves the need for motivation that will bring about the final fruition of the path which is enlightenment. There are two types of motivation. One is seeking happiness for oneself which is called the motivation of the *hinayana*. The other is the motivation of seeking happiness for all sentient beings which is as limitless as space which is the very pure, exceptional motivation of the *mahayana*.

The motivation of the *hinayana* is a good motivation. Because it is taking care of one's own welfare alone, it is a narrow motivation. However, it is necessary to abandon it and to take up the very vast motivation of the *mahayana* or the *vajrayana*. One needs the very vast motivation of accomplishing the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings throughout all of space. Everyone wants happiness and wants to be free of suffering. So, understanding that, one aspires to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings without exception and that is the motivation one needs.

Now, both of these motivations are referred to as "mind generation" or "mind development." There are two ways in which one's mind can be aroused towards the dharma. The first is the *hinayana* and the second is the very special and extraordinary *mahayana* way. With *mahayana* motivation one will be able to accomplish the welfare of oneself and all other sentient beings. Without such a motivation, one will achieve something good, but not attain complete enlightenment and the extraordinary fulfillment of the welfare of others. This *mahayana* motivation is called "arousing one's mind towards the supreme enlightenment."

How is it ordinary beings such as ourselves can arouse such an extraordinary attitude of seeking supreme enlightenment through bringing about the welfare of all sentient beings? Having this attitude depends upon refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. One recognizes the Buddha as the teacher of the path that leads to enlightenment and affirms the Buddha as one's own teacher by saying, "I am going to follow the teachings that the Buddha gave." One then needs to identify the teachings and the path that the Buddha taught. So it is through looking to the Buddha and the dharma that is the beginning of refuge that one is able to give birth to a motivation.

For one's mind to develop the mahayana motivation, one needs to have a mind that is at rest, relaxed, peaceful, tamed, and well-trained. There are a variety of systems of how to do this. Some teach first taking refuge, then arousing bodhichitta, then doing the preliminary practices or *ngöndro*. Having completed ngöndro, one would practice the methods of shamatha meditation to set one's mind in a relaxed and peaceful, clear state. Another way of doing this is practiced by Vajradhatu in accordance with the teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche. He taught the practice of *tranquillity* (Skt. *shamatha*) *meditation* first to develop some peace of mind, some relaxation, which becomes the basis for receiving the vows of refuge and developing the aspiration of the mahayana. After that ngöndro is introduced. It seems to me that this is a very beneficial, very practical and sensible way to do it. It particularly helps in developed countries where one has a very busy life and people have a lot of worries. So in these developed countries, we need to practice the methods of pacifying the mind first of all.

The nine stages of shamatha meditation

There are nine ways of resting the mind accompanied by various antidotes to bring about a peaceful, relaxed, clear and calm state of mind. The first is called "placing the mind" which is how one enters into meditation. Rather than exert oneself strenuously, one simply allows one's mind to relax and whatever comes about is fine. Whether one's mind relaxes for a long period or a very short period of time, whether it's stable or not stable is just

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fine. In this stage one is trying to experience the mind being at rest and not generating a lot of thoughts.

When one is able to set one's mind in this relaxed state free from thought for a little while, one enters into the second stage of "continuously placing the mind." Basically, one is able to set one's mind in a state of relaxation somewhat longer. In the first state there is more distraction than there is mindfulness. In the second state the balance shifts in that when one becomes distracted and the mind begins to wander, one doesn't go on with the distraction very long. Rather mindfulness appears and one's mind becomes clearer and is able to meditate again.

In the second stage when a thought or distraction occurs one still goes with it for a while. In the third stage, when a thought comes up, one is able to see it as a thought and one comes back simply setting the mind in a relaxed state. This third stage is called "placing again." One is trying to practice shamatha meditation and set the mind in a state of peace. So at this point one recognizes that one does indeed have thoughts. Yet these thoughts keep occurring and one becomes discouraged. Sometimes people will say, "here I am trying to meditate and I've got all these thoughts appearing." But actually there's a reason for not feeling discouraged because that's just what our mind is like. We have this untamed explosion of thoughts that just occur and that's why we need to practice meditation. In the past all this thinking was also going on, but we were totally unaware of it. There was no mindfulness and no meditation then. But with meditation we develop an ability to recognize thoughts as thoughts and that is a good quality.

This discussion of having so many thoughts is set down in various manuals of instruction on meditation. It's said that when one begins to make a little progress in the practice of meditation, one begins to think that things are definitely getting worse. One thinks, "before I was practicing meditation I didn't have a lot of thoughts and now that I am practicing there are a lot more thoughts than there used to be." It also says in these books that this isn't the case at all: Before one began meditation practice, one was always distracted. We had many thoughts, but we never recognized them and so we never had an experience of them. After practicing for a while, we are able to identify the thoughts

as thoughts and it is said that an irritation at all these thoughts is actually a sign of one's mind beginning to rest somewhat.

After we are able to recognize our thoughts, as thoughts we usually develop an attachment to our thoughts. We begin to think, "These thoughts are very important and very good." And so we go on thinking about them, following them out because they seem important. To not fall into becoming fascinated by our thoughts, we have to apply an antidote. We tend to think our thoughts are extremely important because we're making various plans about what we're going to do. It is appropriate to say firmly to ourselves, "Okay, I've got plans I need to make, but I can do that later. Right now, I'm supposed to be meditating." A traditional example is that when a pig breaks into a garden and begins eating the flowers and vegetables, the gardener should come up to the pig with a stick and rap it sharply on the nose. The pig then will run away. Whereas if the gardener were to be very gentle and coax it along and pet it, pretty soon the pig will have eaten up all the flowers and vegetables. It's pretty much the same way with thoughts. If thoughts arise and we think, "Oh, that's very important, I'll have to think about it" and we don't stop these thoughts right at the beginning, we will get lost in them. So it's harder to get rid of the thoughts later than it is to immediately say "no" to them.

The fourth stage is called "close placement." At this point in meditation one is able to cast out thoughts when they come up. One just puts them aside. But this takes some forcefulness of discipline to do and this is done through the techniques of mindfulness and awareness. At this point mindfulness is basically a matter of remembering that one is practicing meditation. Awareness then is looking inside the mind and seeing what's going on in one's practice. With mindfulness and awareness one is able to accomplish the fourth level of resting the mind.

The bodhisattva Shantideva discussed this fourth stage in his treatise on the bodhisattva path called *A Guide to the Bodhisattvas's Way of Life* in which he said that all of these thoughts can be compared to thieves. He said that if someone has an intention to steal from you, they would look into your house to see if the guards protecting your house are clever and strong. If they find so, they would simply go somewhere else.

On the other hand, if they see that the guards are timid and not very strong, then they will overcome the guards and break into the house and carry off your possessions. It is somewhat like that with mindfulness and awareness which are the guards of your practice of meditation. If they are not strong, then thoughts come along and just carry you off. But if mindfulness and awareness are well established, then thoughts are not able to come in and take over. In this particular metaphor, Shantideva points out that our mind resembles a doorway. It is like a doorway to a bank where something very valuable is stored inside. If the guard at the bank is a strong and alert person and carries a gun, the thieves will go somewhere else. They'll simply say, "It's not going to work, we can't get in there." Similarly, mindfulness and awareness are the guardians of the treasures of our mind which is the virtue and merit that has been accumulated in our practice. If mindfulness and awareness are well established, then the *disturbing emotions* (Skt. *kleshas*) will not come in and wreak havoc stealing the virtue we have accumulated and harming our practice of meditation.

The fifth stage of practice is called "taming." At this point one has been practicing meditation for an extended period of practice and one's mind becomes tired. It becomes very difficult to practice and one doesn't really want to practice any more. The mind has become thick and heavy; lacking freedom or independence. This is the time to remember the purpose of practicing meditation and the good qualities of meditation. One encourages oneself and recalls the reasons for meditating with "If I am able to succeed in this practice and pass beyond this obstacle, I will achieve true happiness of body and mind and achieve the real fruition of my practice. And if I let my mind continue with this heaviness, I won't be able to achieve these things." This is the time to remember the real benefits and good qualities of meditation and having done so, one will be glad to continue, being delighted in meditation.

Becoming delighted in practicing meditation makes it easier to practice meditation. This then brings us to the sixth stage which is called "pacifying." At this point one is beginning to look more closely at the thoughts that interrupt one's practice of meditation. Rather than just noticing thoughts with, "Oh, it was a thought" one begins to look into it and say, "Hmm, meditation

isn't going so well today. What are these thoughts? Is it attachment, is it aggression, is it doubt, is it discouragement? Just what is going on now?"

So by recognizing attachment, aggression, doubt and so forth, one can deal with it this way: If the thoughts are attachment or desire, one can remember that there is no real benefit that comes from clinging. Understanding no benefit comes from pursuing desire is the key to abandoning the emotion of attachment. In the case of hatred or aggression, one recognizes that hatred harms oneself as well as others and it doesn't do anyone any good. One realizes that abandoning hatred is good both for oneself and for others. This is really the key to being able to pass beyond hatred. To deal with doubt, one understands that if one is eaten up by doubt, the more one thinks about it, the worse it gets. Having doubts about things doesn't really help to resolve the matter, it just makes more and more doubt. So during meditation, it really is fruitless to dwell on doubt. It's a faulty way to do things. So looking at things closely in this way and stepping over them is the way one pacifies the mind.

Up to this point we have abandoned the coarser problems that come up in meditation. Now we need to talk about the more subtle obstacles that are more difficult to overcome. Although they've been present all along, at this point we begin to focus on them. These are what's called a heaviness of mind on the one hand and wildness of mind on the other. Wildness of mind means simply being unable to place one's mind in a state of tranquility. You might be thinking about some game that you enjoy playing or some place where you liked staying. Whatever it is, your mind begins to center on that, then it's not possible to just release the mind into a peaceful and relaxed state because it is greatly stuck on something. The other type of problem is a heaviness or darkness of mind in which the mind begins to sink and become extremely unclear and inflexible.

To overcome wildness or heaviness of mind we first must identify it as such. Basically, wildness of mind occurs when we are excited and really interested about what one thinks. This means it is necessary to suppress your mind.

There are a number of ways to specifically counteract wildness of mind: thinking about one's motivation for practice,

or engaging in a particular behavior, or visualizing a particular object in one's meditation. For example, to deal with wildness of mind by altering one's motivation, one can think about impermanence, or the faults of samsara, or the disadvantages of not being able to meditate. This will somewhat subdue the wildness of the mind. To counteract wildness of the mind by behavior, if the room were very bright, one could simply darken the room making it more like a cave. This will enable the mind to relax. One could also make the place of meditation a little warmer which will relax the body and in turn release some of the tightness and tension in the mind. To counteract wildness of the mind with visualization, one could visualize a black lotus with four petals at the heart that are turned slightly downward and visualize a black drop (Skt. *bindu*) descending into the petals of the flower. Just visualizing this will reduce the wildness and tension of the mind.

To overcome heaviness or dullness of the mind there are again three major ways of doing this: in relationship to changing the motivation, one needs to cheer oneself up and to lighten up. The method that is traditionally recommended is to think about the remarkable qualities of the Buddha or the remarkable qualities of the dharma. Thinking about these things tends to lift one's mind. In relationship to behavior one can counteract heaviness of mind by adjusting one's posture so one is sitting very precisely and erectly. One can also make the room cooler and brighter which will have the effect of overcoming the heaviness that has set in. In relationship to visualization, one can visualize a white full petalled lotus with a white drop at the heart and have the drop rise slowly through one's body to the Brahmarundhara at the top of the head. This white drop rises there and just stays there.

The seventh stage of resting the mind is called "thoroughly pacifying" and is an extension of the sixth stage of "pacifying." As before one is still working principally with the obstacles of heaviness and wildness and works with them in the same way.

Now the eighth stage of resting the mind is called "one-pointedness." At this point one is working on all sorts of obstacles and one needs a variety of different antidotes. At the early stages one has been engaged principally in getting the mind to stay within the practice of meditation and working on

the more subtle qualities of heaviness and wildness of mind. In this eighth stage the meditator needs to investigate what is going on within the mind and to practice the appropriate antidote.

The ninth stage is called “placing the mind in equipoise.” At this stage further exertion is not needed. Rather one desists from applying the various techniques used up to this point and simply allows the mind to be in a relaxed and clear state which is called a state of being “thoroughly processed” or *shin jong* in Tibetan. There is a certain independence of mind; it’s really just a matter of letting oneself be in a state of meditation.

Chapter 4

The Third Dharma:

*Grant your blessing so that
the dharma may clarify confusion*

The second dharma of Gampopa was about the motivation and the basis for the dharma progressing along the path. What is it that we mean by path? In samsara we experience various sorts of obstacles, suffering, and hardships. What are these suffering and hardships? They are confusion which is not established by their own nature. Since they are not something inherently existent, they can be abandoned. So the third dharma of Gampopa is “may the path clear away confusion” and is about how one can go about abandoning confusion.

As we are in samsara, we experience body, speech, and mind. It's body and mind that experiences samsara, not speech. There are various kinds of experiences that we experience in our body and our mind experiences unhappiness and disturbance. So to have true happiness and comfort there is a need for clearing away that suffering and unhappiness so that it will not arise.

Then between those two, the mind is pre-eminent. Things depend upon the mind and mentally we experience various sorts of interruptions, obstacles, hardships, and difficulties. Where does that hardship and difficulty come from? From the point of view of the dharma, the hardship that we experience comes from desire, hatred, and bewilderment.

Now in terms of the world, desire basically means that we hope that things will go well for us. We would like things to turn out in a good way. The nature of mind is that when we get the first thing that we hope for, we develop a second hope for something else. Gradually our hopes expand and become greater and greater and there is no limit to them at all. Eventually, we hope for something that cannot be fulfilled. At that point we meet with suffering.

Just as desire relates mainly to hope, so aggression or hatred mainly relates to doubt in the sense of fear or even paranoia. Our prajna or knowledge is not very strong so we don't really understand clearly what's going on with other people. We begin to have all sorts of doubts that so-and-so doesn't like me, that they want to embarrass or harm me. Then we respond with aggression and experience further mental hardship.

Ignorance in this context refers mainly to obscuration and there are two main types of ignorance: mixed and unmixed. When we say "mixed," we mean mixed with desire or hatred. When desire is born in us, then it would be mixed with ignorance. When hatred is born in us, it is mixed with ignorance. With desire, our hopes are usually clouded by ignorance. We don't know whether or not we're going to be able to accomplish something that we set out to do, something we have placed our hopes on. We don't know whether accomplishing that would actually be helpful to us. And because we don't see the situation clearly, we begin to hope for things that are not possible or not beneficial, and we end up hoping in vain.

In the case of ignorance mixed with aggression we have doubts or fears about someone else and we don't really understand the situation clearly with another person and we start thinking this way simply because we've misunderstood the situation. So we react to somebody falsely and we express some hostility, and they, in turn, express some hostility back at us. Even though there was no real basis for this aggression, gradually people become angry with each other. So consequently, you can see the way that aggression could be mixed with ignorance and lead to a lot of hardship.

The second type of ignorance is unmixed ignorance that is not associated with desire or aggression. It's simply ignorance by itself. This also has two types: not being aware of the situation and misperceiving the situation. The first is just not realizing what the situation is. We don't understand the situation clearly and we don't have any desire to find out the truth. We just aren't interested. The second is understanding the situation incorrectly. We have a mistaken belief about it. So if it is something good, we think it's bad; if it is something bad, we think it's good.

Then, just in terms of suffering that we experience mentally, there's the suffering of doubt which also has two different types: doubt that goes up and doubt that goes down. Doubt going up means thinking, "Well, it might be this way or it might be that way" but one is tending towards thinking the correct way is the way to go. So gradually one's doubt is cleared away and you actually develop the correct view. The other type of doubt is that you're thinking, "Well, maybe it's like this, or maybe it's like that" but you are leaning towards viewing it differently from the way things are. So you head in that direction and gradually you end up firmly holding the incorrect view.

So these different factors disturb our minds, but what is important to realize is that we have created all this trouble for ourselves. No one else did it; it didn't come from somewhere else. Once we start going in this way, we become unhappy, we become crazy, and we become mad. The central point is, "I created all this trouble for myself, it didn't come from outside of me."

Now where does all this suffering come from? It comes principally from desire, aggression, and ignorance. From where do desire, aggression and ignorance come from? The root of all these is the conception of a self. First, we think, "I" Then having thought "I," we think, "I need good things." And we then start having hope for good things and fear of bad things. So if we want to get rid of our suffering, what we have to do is eliminate this conception of a self or "I." Now we are very fortunate because it is possible to get rid of this conception of "I." The reason it is possible to eliminate this concept is that the object conceived by the conception of self doesn't exist. That is to say, there is no self. It's just confusion. Once we realize that there is no self, then the conception of self will naturally be turned around.

The Buddha taught a variety of methods for clearing away the suffering of samsara. In the context of the hinayana, the Buddha taught that the suffering that we experience is rooted in the disturbing emotions and these kleshas themselves are rooted in the conception of self. By realizing that self does not exist, it is possible to achieve liberation from suffering. When we first hear the teaching of non-self, we might take this to mean that

there is no mind whatsoever, that we're just a corpse. That's not what the Buddha taught.

This conception of self has two aspects: first to conceive something as self and second to conceive something as belonging to self, that is to think of things as being "mine." It is a little bit easier to explain this in the reverse order. For the most part, what we mean when we talk about conceiving something as "mine" means usually that we're talking about our house, our clothes, our salary or whatever. But this can vary quite a bit; sometimes we might think "my country" which is very vast and sometimes we might think "my toe" which is something rather small. So there is no certainty to the extent of this conception of "mine."

The conception of things belongs to "me" can quite easily lead to suffering. For example, if you go let us say to a store that sells watches and you happen to see someone drop a watch on the floor and it breaks, you think, "Oh, the watch fell the to floor" without any particular feeling about it. However, if you drop your own watch on the floor and it breaks, you think, "Oh, it's my watch and it's now broken" and you get very upset about it. So it's the feeling that it's "mine" which leads to pain. However, if we examine this idea of something belonging to oneself and try to discover if this object is really one's own, we don't really find anything. We may ask, "Where is this 'mine' or this 'mine-ness' of things?" It is not something that is outside the object, it is not something that is inside the object, nor is it something between these two. The watch that was in the store and broke and the watch that was on one's wrist and broke were not really different. They were both watches. But one of them has this conception of "mine" attached to it and that is what led us to some pain.

The second aspect of the concept of self is conceiving of something as self. When we think "I," we tend to believe that the "I" at birth and the "I" as an adolescent and the "I" as an old person refers to the same thing. But this is not so. The Buddha explained this in terms of what are known as the five aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*) illustrating that there is no real essence to whatever it is that makes up "I." The five aggregates are form, feeling, discrimination, formations, and consciousnesses. Yet

there is nothing in them that corresponds to what we imagine when we think of “I.”⁴

These five aggregates are a way of talking about the past, present, and future. Many people think that when the Buddha taught about selflessness that this teaching was contradictory with the teaching that there are lives prior to the present lifetime and lives subsequent to the present lifetime. They would say if there is no self, then there is no way that there could be former lifetimes or later lifetimes. In fact, there is no contradiction between the teaching of selflessness and the teaching of reincarnation. There is no self that goes from past to present to the future. If we consider just one lifetime, there is a great difference between an infant, an adolescent, and an adult. Yet we think of them as just one thing. When you are five years old, you are very small and when you are twenty-five years old your body has changed quite a bit from what it was before. But somehow you always think, “Well, it’s just me.” But there is a big difference. For instance, as an infant you could not even say “daddy” or “mommy,” but gradually you began to learn to say these words and thousands more. There is also a great difference between the experience of a young person and an adult. The young child might not regard gold and diamonds as particularly interesting, but they may be fascinated with a little toy made out of plastic. They think that the plastic toy is something beautiful and very important. When they get older, they may not be interested in something made of plastic, but think that something made of gold and diamonds is interesting and important. So despite the great difference in the ways of thinking that we have at different times in our lives, we still persist in believing that it was just the same mind all along.

Fortunately, there is no self and this is fortunate because by understanding selflessness and meditating on that, the path is able to clear away confusion. In the mahayana there are two ways of discussing this view of selflessness. The first is explained by the *Chittamatra* or Mind-only school and the second is explained by the *Madhyamaka* or Middle-way school. The Chittamatra school holds that there is no true existence of self and furthermore there are no real existence to external phenomena. There are all kinds of appearances to the objects appearing in the mind, but they are not objects that exist outside

one's own mind. For example, when we dream all sorts of things appear in our mind: mountains, houses, animals, etc. But if we ask ourselves were these actually mountains, actual houses, and so on, the answer is clearly that they were just appearances in our mind. So, the nonexistence of phenomena is illustrated by this example of the nonexistence of dream phenomena.

The Madhyamaka school is concerned about emptiness. Up to this point we have described how what seem to be external phenomena are merely appearances to one's mind. The Madhyamaka school believes that mind itself does not inherently exist, it does not exist by way of its own nature. Does that mean that it is just nothing? No, that's not what it means because everything must be looked at in relationship to *conventional and ultimate truth*. If we look into phenomena we find that they are not ultimately real. However, on the conventional level of reality things do appear. Thus we can speak about the union of emptiness and dependent arising in terms of conventional and ultimate. Returning to our example of a dream, if we dream about an elephant, is this elephant really an elephant? No, it's not really an elephant, the true or ultimate truth is that it is an appearance in the mind. However, if we were to say that there was no dream about an elephant that would be false. In other words, on the relative or conventional level of reality there was an elephant. In other words, ultimately things are empty of any nature of their own, but their emptiness does not preclude their appearing in a conventional manner. These conventional appearances, however, are not inherently established. They are not established in terms of their own nature.

Questions

Question: I heard that even the most enlightened teachers experience wrathful or peaceful deities in the bardo and even to them they're frightening. Could you expound a little bit more about basically what happens at that time or how they display themselves?

Rinpoche: When one dies, then one's body and mind separate. Having lost the body of that lifetime, there is an emanation of a different sort of body that one takes up at the time of the intermediate state, or bardo. Sometimes there will be an

appearance of the final nature, the *dharmata*, the true nature of all things for a person in the bardo state. If a person has good *samadhi* or meditation and a good understanding of the true nature of phenomena, then these people will be able to identify the bardo experience as what it is, in other words, to recognize *dharmata* as *dharmata*. However, persons without such realization and meditation experience won't at that time recognize it for what it is. The *dharmata* in the bardo could appear as the *dharmakaya* or it could appear as the various peaceful or wrathful figures of the intermediate state. If one understands the nature of things, then one will have no fear. If one doesn't understand the nature of reality, then when one meets that peaceful figures, one will feel attachment and when one meets with wrathful figures, one will experience fear.

Question: It's a little hard for us to imagine what it would be like to act without hope and fear. When we try to act that way in the ordinary world where people aren't interested in dharma, people tend to think that we are crazy when we act that way.

Rinpoche: It seems to be that it is our own hope and fear that actually puts other people off. When we have some hope about something, we tend to see other people as themselves having a lot of desire. When we have fear and someone else looks at us slightly quizzically, then we see them as utterly hard. So it might come back to us lessening the hope and fear that we're broadcasting. If we can bring that down, then what we're trying to accomplish in this world will probably go better.

Question: In dealing with the grosser aspects of the world such as war and crime and poverty, how does it follow that we make all the trouble for ourselves in that situation and how would our minds relate in that situation?

Rinpoche: Well, there certainly is a great deal of hardship and difficulty in the world these days such as wars and criminal activity. Our problems with this actually comes back to how much hope we have that things will go well. If we see a war go on, for example, and think, "I hope that doesn't come here." So actually what would be good is just to take a reasonable estimate of what we are able to help this world. If we're able to help a hundred people, then we help a hundred. If we can help a thousand, then we'll help a thousand. But we should not overestimate more than we can actually do. If we have some

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realistic hope, rather than a completely unrealistic hope about what we might be able to do in the world, that would help.

Chapter 5

The Fourth Dharma of Gampopa

*Grant your blessings so that I may
transform confusion into wisdom*

The main point in the third dharma of Gampopa is selflessness and emptiness. However, the selfless-ness and emptiness that is taught in the third dharma is not realized naturally, but rather is acquired through the practice of meditation. Also it is not an emptiness that is nothingness, rather it has wisdom. And that wisdom has the three aspects of knowledge, tender love, and great capacity.

The true nature of all phenomena is just the same whether the person has manifested wisdom or not. However, realizing dharmadhatu varies from one individual to another. The completely enlightened buddha has completely manifested this wisdom. However, in our case as an ordinary person, that wisdom is somewhat obscured or covered or stained. Therefore when we speak about this wisdom in ourselves, we call it *sugatagarbha* which in Sanskrit means “essence of the sugata” who is the Buddha (with *garbha* meaning essence).

When we speak about *sugatagarbha*, we are speaking about the union of wisdom and space. To be more precise the word “wisdom” is “jnana” in Sanskrit or *yeshe* in Tibetan. The word “space” is *dhatu* in Sanskrit or *ying* in Tibetan. However, this space does not mean space in general, it is the space of dharma where the qualities of an enlightened person can be generated. It is the sphere within which the thoughts, stains and so forth of ordinary persons can be abandoned. This wisdom we are speaking of should be understood as completely unchanging. It doesn't get better or worse. It is an immutable entity unlike knowledge or *prajna* that tends to increase or decrease upon one's experience. So what there is no differentiation of this space with wisdom. It is not like space being empty of

obstructive things so that something could pass through it. It's not just this blank emptiness, but it is something that serves as the very basis for good qualities to develop and for these qualities to increase.

All sentient beings have sugatagarbha, the union of space and wisdom. However, we are not able to make it manifest at this point because it is obstructed by the disturbing emotions. Nevertheless, it does exist within us as is taught particularly in the *Uttara Tantra*. This is taught by way of nine examples, three of which are the main examples.⁵

Sugatagarbha exists within us in a completely perfect form. Nevertheless, it is hidden. By way of an example, if we had a little statue of the Buddha inside a lotus flower and the flower was closed, one could not see that this perfect body of a Buddha was within the flower. However, if someone knew that this Buddha statue form existed within this flower, then he or she could open the flower and see it. Similarly, there is this sugatagarbha which is inside, but most people don't realize it. The Buddha, however, realizing that there was sugatagarbha within that afflicted state of mind taught the methods for abandoning the afflictions that cover it. And through the abandoning of such afflictions, the sugatagarbha can fully manifest.

This particular example was taught by the Buddha in a sutra and was taught again in the *Uttara Tantra*. The reason for teaching this particular example is that temporarily the kleshas are quite attractive. However, they don't stay that way. Similarly, the lotus flower is a very beautiful thing for a certain period of time. But it's not something that one can look at always and find pleasure in because it eventually becomes old and withers. So that's one reason why this particular example is used. The other reason is that the body of the Buddha is used because one is trying to discuss the wisdom of the Buddha and you can't use worldly things to point towards his wisdom. So to indicate Buddha, we have to use a representation of the Buddha.

In the second example sugatagarbha is indicated by the honey guarded by bees. Whereas before we said within desire there is sugatagarbha, now we are saying sugatagarbha is also in the center of hatred. However, until one clears away the emotional obscuration of hatred, we cannot discover the union

of space and wisdom, that sugatagarbha is within it. In the example, a very sweet honey is protected by angry bees. Even though it's protected by angry bees, someone who realizes that honey exists there can clear away the bees and take the honey.

The reason for giving this particular example is that bees are somewhat analogous to hatred. And when one employs the methods for clearing them away, then one is able to taste the sweet honey. Similarly, when one is able to clear away hatred, one is able to experience peace and happiness and achieve the complete enlightenment of a Buddha.

The third illustration of sugatagarbha is connected with the affliction of ignorance. Even though sugatagarbha exists within ignorance, it is not manifest. By clearing away ignorance, the sugatagarbha that exists within it can be made manifest. An analogous illustration of this is rice that is encased within its husk. The husk of rice is very thick and hard. Without eliminating that hard case, it's not possible to eat the rice and gain any nourishment from it. However, if one removes the hull, it's possible to eat the rice and to obtain nourishment from it. Similarly, sugatagarbha is hidden within the affliction of ignorance. If the ignorance can be eliminated, then sugatagarbha will become manifest.

Since sugatagarbha is not manifest, we need to allow it to manifest through listening, contemplating, and meditating. Through listening and contemplating the teachings, we are able to develop a certainty about it. Having done so, we can realize it directly with meditation. Having realized it directly, we can gradually make it manifest completely. The manifestation is the full flowering of wisdom and the exalted activity of the Buddha. This is why we need to clear away the various afflictions that cover sugatagarbha.

The point of these three examples is that usually we think that afflictions and ignorance are what we have inside us and the good qualities are something which exists outside us. We believe we need to achieve these new good qualities. However, it is the other way around. The afflictions and stains that we experience are not in the very nature of things, they are as if on the outside. It is the sugatagarbha that is inside. It is like the flower petals covering the Buddha statue, the bees preventing one from getting the honey, the husk preventing one from being

able to eat the rice. The sugatagarbha already exists in a fully developed form already. The problem is that we're not able to make it manifest. What we need to do is to make it manifest and that's what is being pointed to in this teaching from the *Uttara Tantra*.

Up to this point, we have been discussing the path according to the system of the sutras in which one is lead by a path of reasoning to the understanding of emptiness, selflessness, and so on. However, in the context of the vajrayana, we see that it is very helpful to understand this reasoning, but one needs to settle these ideas mainly in terms of the mind itself. In terms of vajrayana meditation, one looks directly at the mind. It takes a very long time to follow the sutra path of reasoning. In the vajrayana we look directly at the mind itself and this takes much less time.

Now we experience mind, yet if we try to find it, we can't. It cannot be found. The reason it can not be found is that it has no inherent existence. It is empty. Does this mean the mind is nothing whatsoever? No, it is not mere nothingness, for the continuity of mind is unsevered; it goes on. It is mind that knows various phenomena. It is mind that illuminates various phenomena. Thus, we talk about the mind as being empty and luminous, or empty and clear. What one needs to do is to identify this union of emptiness and clarity and to practice meditation in terms of this union. When one practices this way, various temporary experiences (Tib. *nyam*) come about. There are three types of these experiences of meditation which are (1) experiences of pleasure or bliss, (2) experiences of extraordinary clarity and (3) experiences of non-conceptuality. These things just appear by themselves when practicing meditation. They are neither particularly good nor particularly bad. They just appear and one ought to just let go of them without fixating on them.

For example, when Gampopa was training under his guru Milarepa, he requested oral instructions. He receives these instructions and went to practice them. He had various experiences during the meditation which are described in the *Rain of Wisdom*.⁶ Sometimes Gampopa would meet with the mandala of Chakrasamvara, or other times he would meet with the mandala of Hevajra. Sometimes the mandala would be white in color and at other times it would be red in color. Gampopa

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thought, “Oh, this is very good. My meditation is really getting somewhere now.” and he would go back to Milarepa and describe what had happened and Milarepa would say, “Well, it’s nothing particularly special, it just comes along. It’s not good and it’s not bad. Just keep meditating.” At other times Gampopa would have experiences that seemed very bad to him when he practiced. The whole world would become utterly black and dark. Other times it would be as if the entire world were just spinning and spinning and spinning. He would think this was a serious problem with some evil spirits tormenting him and would go to Milarepa and describe these experiences. And Milarepa would say, “Well, it’s nothing, it’s really nothing at all.”

Now to give an ordinary example of these temporary experiences, if you were to poke your finger in your eye and then look up at the sky at night, where everyone else sees one moon, you might see two moons. You might think, “Everyone else sees one moon, but I see two. I’m really something wonderful.” But that is not the case. In this circumstance you might think, “Everyone else sees one moon, but I see two. This is really bad, I’ve got a serious problem.” But you see two moons just because you poked your finger in your eye. Seeing two moons is not a particularly good quality, nor is it a particularly bad quality. It is just like that with the practice of meditation; all kinds of experiences come up, but they really aren’t anything.

There is, however, one thing that one needs to be very careful about when one practices meditation. There is one fault that could become very dangerous. When one begins to understand emptiness, one might think, “Oh, everything is just empty. There’s nothing that’s real. So it doesn’t really matter whether I practice virtue or unvirtue. This karma stuff about the relationship between actions and the effects that are experienced later is something I can disregard because ultimately everything is empty.” In fact that’s not so. If you think this way, you can easily become involved in giving up whatever virtuous practices you might have done and your practice of all sorts of ill deeds and unvirtue will just increase and increase and increase. So this is one thing that we need to be very careful about.

In the fourth dharma of Gampopa we speak about confusion dawning as wisdom. The confusion refers to the stains of the

various afflictions. These stains or kleshas are adventitious which means they are not in the inherent nature of things. They have just come along. They need to be recognized for what they are and when one does so, then wisdom will come about from within because the wisdom which we have speaking about exists primordially, right within everyone and becomes completely manifest when the kleshas have been abandoned. That is the fourth dharma of Gampopa, the transformation of confusion into wisdom.

Questions

Question: If there is no self, what is it that gets reincarnated? If what gets reincarnated isn't me, then why would I care about it?

Rinpoche: We spoke about the five aggregates or skandhas. We said the first skandha is called form. From the very top of your head all the way down to the soles of your feet is the skandha of form. It's very different from one occasion to the next: the form of a child and the form of an adolescent and the form of an old man is distinctly different from each other. The second skandha is feeling. We experience feeling with both the body and the mind. Feeling comes in three flavors: there is pleasure, there is pain, and there are neutral feelings. The third skandha is called discrimination. This refers to determining the various details of things like knowing that sometimes what one sees is white and other times it is red. The fourth skandha is called formation and refers mainly to the various sorts of thoughts we have such as virtuous thoughts of compassion and faith and nonvirtuous thoughts such as desire, aggression, and ignorance. The fifth skandha is called consciousness and this refers to the six types of consciousness: the five sensory consciousnesses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and body sensation and the mental consciousness. Now each of these skandhas is a collection and then you have them all collected together. Then you have the skandhas of the past, of the present, and the future. So we take all these things and sort of roll them together and think of them as a single thing which we call "me." Whereas consider the stage of an infant, then an adolescent, then an adult. At the time of adolescence, the skandhas of the infant have ceased, the skandhas of the adolescent cease and you have an adult. So it is

not that the one is the other: they are actually quite different from each other. In fact, they are said to be a different entity. But we tend to see them as one thing and when the various feeling appear, we think, “I felt that.” We even react to feelings that appeared a long time ago with “I felt that” or “I still feel that.”

Now when we talk about this collection of things going from one lifetime to another. But actually it's that the five skandhas of this lifetime serve as a basis for the generation of the five skandhas of the next lifetime. It's not that anything actually goes from one lifetime to the other, but one doesn't have to cross lifetimes to understand that or to see that. It's just the same now with the skandhas of an infant being the basis for adolescence and the skandhas of adolescence being the basis of adulthood. Nothing goes from childhood to adolescence and then adolescence to adulthood, there is nothing that goes from one thing to another.

Question: We perform various virtuous and nonvirtuous actions and doing this we accumulate karma. Having accumulated these actions, what is it that carries them from the past to the present or from one lifetime to the next?

Rinpoche: It is true that we accumulate karmas and these are carried as latencies or predispositions that are established in the mind. They are established in the mind and exist right with the continuum of the various skandhas. When concordant conditions are met, they ripen and give forth their results. It's similar to planting trees and then getting the harvest. If one plants rice seed and good conditions exist, then one gets good rice. If bad conditions are encountered then one will get a bad harvest of rice. Secondly, depending upon what sort of seed you plant, you get the appropriate type of rice as your harvest. If they are good seeds, you get good rice. If they are not particularly good seeds, you get poor rice. Similarly, the actions we perform establish the predispositions in the mind. When the proper conditions are encountered, those predispositions are aroused or awakened and then one experiences their effect.

It is said that there are two different types of effects: the first is a disposition which is reinforced in one lifetime and carries on in the next. For example, having a strong attachment to something in one lifetime and then in a later lifetime tending to

like that sort of thing very much again. The second is when one does certain actions in one lifetime and the results of this matures later. For instance, one might be an angry person that has harmed people in one lifetime and then in a later lifetime as the effect of having harmed others would result in a great deal of suffering oneself. So these various kinds of actions and established predisposition are put right with the continuum of the mind.

A loose illustration of this is the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. All sorts of poison was thrown into the atmosphere and the wind carried this poison to other places such as Sweden. It fell to the ground and gradually poisoned the ground. Once the ground became poisoned, then the grass and trees became poisoned. Then the cattle that ate the grass and now the humans who eat the cattle are poisoned. So gradually the poison which started out as being very localized in a particular spot becomes pervasive everywhere. It's similar with actions: once one accumulates nonvirtuous actions, they remain within the continuum of one's mind in an unspoiled fashion, that is, they won't disintegrate by themselves. They just stay there and eventually when they meet the right conditions, they start to manifest perhaps over a series of lifetimes gradually poisoning everything.

Question: Even though everyone has sugatagarbha, due to having accumulated many bad actions in the past, could it be that one would not be able to progress along the path even if one wanted to practice.

Rinpoche: One does not proceed along the path automatically. It doesn't just happen by itself. And there are all sort of bad deed and obstructions that we experience, such as the bees that obstruct our getting at the honey or the husk that obstructs our getting at the rice. However, just as it is possible to drive the bees off and remove the husk, so if we exert ourselves, we will be able to separate from bad deeds and obstructions.

There are two classic examples of this: a verse in which Nagarjuna refers to "the clear and beautiful appearance of the moon in a cloudless sky." Sometimes one can't see the moon that way. However, when the clouds disappear from the sky, the moon is there in a completely beautiful and unstained way. Similarly, there are many stories that come from the Buddha

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himself. In these stories various people would come to him who had been afflicted by the results of terrible things they had done or they were afflicted by tremendous desire or hatred of others. In these many stories, when the person entered into the door of the dharma and practiced the dharma, they were able to achieve a condition free from samsara in one lifetime.

Question: How can one get rid of the kleshas that are surrounding sugatagarbha without getting rid of sugatagarbha also?

Rinpoche: Sugatagarbha is what we are, it is our very entity or nature. The various afflictions or kleshas are adventitious which means they are something extra or superfluous. Because they are superfluous we can separate from them. However, separating from them doesn't mean throwing out sugatagarbha at the same time. It is like the clouds and the moon. When the moon is blocked or obstructed by clouds, we cannot see it. However, once the clouds have been cleared away, the moon can be seen directly and clearly in all its beauty. However, eliminating the clouds doesn't mean eliminating the moon also. It's the same way with the kleshas and sugatagarbha.

A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Gyaltshab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA; he is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada, of Thrangu House, Oxford, in the UK. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. He has also founded the monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Boudhnath, a retreat center and college at Namu Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Boudhnath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He built Tara Abbey in Katmandu. In October of 1999 he consecrate the College at Sarnath which will accept students from the different sects of Buddhism and will be available to western students as well.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the recently escaped 17th Karmapa.

The Glossary

- aggregates, five** (Skt. *skandha*, Tib. *phung po nga*) Literally “heaps,” These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything that is not thought. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.
- arhat** (Tib. *dra chom pa*) Accomplished hinayana practitioners who have eliminated the klesha obscurations. They are the fully realized shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.
- Atisha** (982-1055 C.E.) Was a Buddhist scholar at Vikramashila University in India and came to Tibet at the invitation of the King to overcome the damage done by Langdarma. He helped found the Kadam tradition.
- bardo** (Tib.) Literally, bardo means “between the two.” There are six kinds of bardos, but here it refers to the time between death and a rebirth in a new body.
- bindu** (Tib. *tiglé*) Vital essence drops or spheres of psychic energy which are often visualized in vajrayana practices.
- bodhichitta** (Tib. *chang chup chi sem*) Literally, the mind of enlightenment. There are two kinds of bodhichitta: absolute bodhichitta, which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and relative bodhichitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara.
- bodhisattva** (Tib. *chang chup sem pa*) Literally, one who exhibits the mind of enlightenment. Also an individual who has committed him or herself to the mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six paramitas to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from samsara.
- Chakrasamvara** (Tib. *korlo dompa*) A meditational deity which belongs to the annuttara tantra set of teachings.
- Chittamatra school** (Tib. *sem tsampa*) A school founded by Asanga in the fourth century and is usually translated as the Mind Only School. It is one of the four major schools in the

mahayana tradition and its main tenet (to greatly simplify) is that all phenomena are mental events.

consciousnesses, eight (Skt. *vijnana*, Tib. *nam shé tsog gye*)

These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation. Sixth is mental consciousness, seventh is afflicted consciousness, and eighth is ground consciousness.

conventional truth (Tib. *kun sop*) There are two truths: relative and absolute. Conventional or relative truth is the perception of an ordinary (unenlightened) person who sees the world with all his or her projections based on the false belief in self.

dakini (Tib. *khandroma*) A yogini who has attained high realizations of the fully enlightened mind. She may be a human being who has achieved such attainments or a non-human manifestation of the enlightened mind of a meditational deity.

dharma (Tib. *chö*) This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as it is used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddhadharma).

dharmadhatu (Tib. *chö ying*) The all-encompassing space, unoriginated and without beginning, out of which all phenomena arises. The Sanskrit means “the essence of phenomena” and the Tibetan means “the expanse of phenomena” but usually it refers to the emptiness, which is the essence of phenomena.

dharmakaya (Tib. *chö ku*) One of the three bodies of Buddha. It is enlightenment itself, that is wisdom beyond reference point. See *kayas*, three.

dharmata (Tib. *chö nyi*) Dharmata is often translated as “suchness” or “the true nature of things” or “things as they are.” It is phenomena as it really is or as seen by a completely enlightened being without any distortion or obscuration so one can say it is “reality.”

disturbing emotion (Skt. *klesha*, Tib. *nyön mong*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “afflictions” or “poisons.” The three main *kleshas* are (passion or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or

delusion). The five kleshas are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).

doha (Tib. *gur*) A spiritual song spontaneously composed by a vajrayana practitioner. It usually has nine syllables per line.

Gampopa (1079-1153 C.E.) One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet. A student of Milarepa he established the first Kagyu monastic monastery and is known for writing the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.

garuda (Tib. *khyung*) A mythical bird which hatches fully grown.

Guhyasamaja tantra (Tib. *sang pa dus pa*) This is the “father tantra” of the anuttara yoga which is the highest of the four tantras. Guhyasamaja is the central deity of the vajra family.

Hevajra tantra (Tib. *kye dorje*) This is the “mother tantra” of the anuttara yoga which is the highest of the four yogas.

hinayana (Tib. *tek pa chung wa*) Literally, the “lesser vehicle.” The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion. Also known as the Theravada path.

jnana (Tib. *ye she*) Enlightened wisdom which is beyond dualistic thought.

Kagyu (Tib.) One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet. It was founded by Marpa. The other three are the Nyingma, the Sakya, and the Gelupa schools.

kayas, three (Tib. *ku sum*) There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body,” is the complete enlightenment or the complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” manifests only to bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, also called the “emanation body,” manifests in the world and in this context manifests as the Shakyamuni Buddha.

klesha (Tib. *nyön mong*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “disturbing emotions” or “poisons.” The three main kleshas are (passion or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or delusion). The five kleshas are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).

Madhyamaka (Tib. *u ma*) The most influential of the four schools of Indian Buddhism founded by Nagarjuna in the second century C.E. The name comes from the Sanskrit word meaning “the Middle-way” meaning it is the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. The main postulate of this school is that all phenomena—both internal mental events and external physical objects—is empty of any true nature. The school uses extensive rational reasoning to establish the emptiness of phenomena. This school does, however, hold that phenomena do exist on the conventional level of reality.

mahamudra (Tib. *cha ja chen po*) Literally, “great seal” meaning that all phenomena are sealed by the primordially perfect true nature. This form of meditation is traced back to Saraha (10th century) and was passed down in the Kagyu school through Marpa. This meditative transmission emphasizes perceiving mind directly rather than through rational analysis.

mahasiddha A practitioner who has a great deal of realization.

mahayana (Tib. *tek pa chen po*) Literally, the “great vehicle.” These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which emphasize shunyata, compassion, and universal Buddha-nature.

mandala (Tib. *chin kor*) A diagram used in various vajrayana practices, which usually has a central deity and four directions. It also denotes a sacred location such as the mandala of the dharmakaya and this is how it is used in this text.

Marpa (1012-1097 C.E.) Marpa was known for being a Tibetan who made three trips to India and brought back many tantric texts including the Six Yogas of Naropa, the Guhyasamaja, and the Chakrasamvara practices. His teacher was Tilopa and he founded the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

Naropa (956-1040 C.E.) An Indian master who is best known for transmitting many vajrayana teachings to Marpa who took these back to Tibet before the Moslem invasion of India.

ngöndro (Tib. and pronounced “nundro”) Tibetan for preliminary practice. One usually begins the vajrayana path by doing the four preliminary practices which involve about

100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations, 100,000 vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga practices.

nihilism (Tib. *ché ta*) The extreme view of nothingness, the nonexistence of a mind after death.

nine steps for settling the mind (Tib. *semnegu*) These are the ways to place the mind in meditation. They are (1) placing the mind, (2) continuously placing, (3) intermittent placing, (4) taming the mind, (5) pacifying the mind, (6) complete pacification, (7) single-mindedness, (8) complete composure.

nirmanakaya See **kayas, three**

Padmasambhava (Tib. *Guru Rinpoche*) He was invited to Tibet in the 8th century C.E. and is known for pacifying all the nonBuddhist forces and founding the Nyingma lineage.

pandita (Tib. *pan di ta*) A great scholar.

prajna (Tib. *she rab*) In Sanskrit it means “perfect knowledge” and can mean wisdom, understanding, or discrimination. Usually it means the wisdom of seeing things from a high (e.g. non-dualistic) point of view.

pratyekabuddha (Tib. *rang sang gye*) Literally, solitary realizer. A realized hinayana practitioner who has achieved the knowledge of how it is and variety, but who has not committed him or herself to the bodhisattva path of helping all others.

rinpoche Literally, “very precious” and is used as a term of respect for a Tibetan guru.

samadhi (Tib. *tin ne zin*) Also called meditative absorption or one-pointed meditation, this is the highest form of meditation.

sambhogakaya See the **kayas, three**.

shamatha or tranquility meditation (Tib. *shinay*) This is basic sitting meditation in which one usually follows the breath while observing the workings of the mind while sitting in the cross-legged posture. The main purpose of shamatha meditation is to settle or tame the mind so that it will stay where one places it.

samsara (Tib. *kor wa*) Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses

attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

sangha (Tib. *gen dun*) These are the companions on the path. They may be all the persons on the path or the noble sangha, which are the realized ones.

Shantideva (675- 725 C.E.) A great bodhisattva who lived in 7th and 8th century in India known for his two works on the conduct of a bodhisattva.

shastra (Tib. *tan chö*) The Buddhist teachings are divided into words of the Buddha (the sutras) and the commentaries of others on his works the (shastras).

selflessness (Tib. *dag me*) Also called egolessness. In two of the hinayana schools (Vaibhashika and Sautrantika) this referred exclusively to the fact that “a person” is not a real permanent self, but rather just a collection of thoughts and feelings. In two of the mahayana schools (Chittamatra and Madhyamaka) this was extended to mean there was no inherent existence to outside phenomena as well.

sending and taking practice (Tib. *tong len*) A meditation practice promulgated by Atisha in which the practitioner takes on the negative conditions of others and gives out all that is positive.

siddha (Tib. *grub thob*) An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

six yogas of Naropa (Tib. *naro chödruk*) These six special yogic practices were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa and consist of the subtle heat practice, the illusory body practice, the dream yoga practice, the luminosity practice, the ejection of consciousness practice, and the bardo practice.

skandha (Tib. *pung pa*) Literally “heaps.” These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived: form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything we usually think of as outside the mind. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.

- spiritual song** (Sk. *doh*, Tib. *mgur*) A religious song spontaneously composed by a vajrayana practitioner. It usually has 9 syllables per line.
- shravaka** (Tib. *nyen thö*) Literally “those who hear” meaning disciples. A type of realized hinayana practitioner (arhat) who has achieved the realization of the nonexistence of personal self.
- sugatagarbha** (Tib. *der sheg nying po*) Buddha nature or that enlightened essence present in all beings that allows them to have the capacity to achieve enlightenment. It is closely related to tathagatagarbha.
- sutra** (Tib. *do*) These are the hinayana and mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha’s vajrayana teachings and the shastras which are commentaries on the words of the Buddha.
- tantra** (Tib. *gyü*) The texts of the vajrayana practices.
- thangka** (Tib.) A Tibetan religious scroll.
- Tilopa** (928-1009 C.E.) One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas who became the guru of Naropa who transmitted his teachings to the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.
- ultimate level** (Tib. *dondam*) This ultimate truth which can only be perceived by an enlightened individual is that all phenomena both internal (thoughts and feelings) and external (the outside physical world) does not have any inherent existence.
- vajra** (Tib. *dorje*) Usually translated “diamond like.” This may be an implement held in the hand during certain vajrayana ceremonies or it can refer to a quality which is so pure and so enduring that it is like a diamond.
- Vajradhara** (Tib. *Dorje Chang*) The name of the dharmakaya Buddha. Many of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage came from Vajradhara.
- vajrayana** (Tib. *dorje tek pa*) There are three major traditions of Buddhism (hinayana, mahayana, vajrayana) The vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.

Books by Thrangu Rinpoche

The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice. This book gives an overview of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as it was practiced in Tibet. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1998.

The Open Door to Emptiness. This book goes through in a easy-to-understand way the arguments made to establish that all phenomena are indeed empty. Vancouver: Karme Thekchen Choling, 1997.

The Practice of Tranquillity and Insight. This book is a practical guide to the two types of meditation that form the core of Buddhist spiritual practice. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1993

Buddha Nature. This book is an overview of the whole concept of Buddha-nature as it is presented in Maitreya's *Uttara Tantra*. Kathamandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1993.

The King of Samadhi. This book is a commentary on the only sutra of the Buddha which discusses mahamudra meditation. It is also the sutra which predicted the coming of Gampopa. Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1994.

The Songs of Naropa. This book tells the story of the life of Naropa and analyzes in detail his famous Summary of Mahamudra which lays out the path of mahamudra meditation by the guru whose succession of students went on to found the Kagyu lineage. Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997.

The Differentiation of Wisdom and Consciousness. This book, which includes the original text of the Third Karmapa and Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary, describes in detail the eight consciousnesses and how these transform into the five wisdoms at enlightenment. [Soon to be published by Namo Buddha Publications]

*The Nine Levels of Stability of Meditation**

1. Resting the mind
(One places one's mind on an object for a brief duration.)
2. Resting the mind longer
(One places one's mind on an object and it wanders and then one places it back again on the object.)
3. Continuously resettling the mind
(One keeps placing one's mind, but there are still thoughts such as "this is important" or "I like this" which prevent complete placement.)
4. Intensely settled mind
(The mind appears to be vast and the thoughts appear only as small intrusions on this vast space.)
5. Taming the mind
(One feels joy, enthusiasm, and relaxation in one's meditation.)
6. Pacification of the mind
(The mind appears tame, but it still wanders because we are still attached to these wanderings.)
7. Complete pacification of the mind
(Whatever the distraction that appears in mind, one immediately applies the right antidote.)
8. One-pointed mind
(One can place the mind almost completely, but it still requires some exertion.)
9. Resting in equanimity
(Mind rests simply and naturally in its own nature.)

z nyam
z shin jong
z tong len
plus all Tibeans in app A

Notes

- 1 There are four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism: the oldest lineage which is the Nyingma lineage founded by Padmasambhava, the Sakya lineage founded by Khon Konchug Gyalpo, the Kagyu lineage founded by Marpa the translator, and the Gelugpa which was founded by Tsong Khapa and is the lineage of the Dalai Lama.
- 2 There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the body of the complete wisdom of the Buddha. From this realm manifests in the sambhogakaya which are the pure realms which can be visited by realized bodhisattvas. The sambhogakaya manifests only to bodhisattvas in the pure realms. The nirmanakaya is the bodily manifestation in the world which occurred with the historical Buddha Shakyamuni.
- 3 In other teachings, Thrangu Rinpoche describes how the position that one had to only examine one's mind to achieve enlightenment was held by Hasang Mahayana and he was debated by Shantarakshita's pupil Kamalashila who held that one had to proceed on the gradual path by accumulating great merit and wisdom first. Kamalashila won the debate and Tibetan monasteries ever since have advocated this gradual approach.
- 4 The five aggregates are the steps in perception with there first being a form which is perceived by the sensory organ going up to consciousness in which the sensory object is recognized and associated with previous experiences. In Thrangu Rinpoche's *Open Door to Emptiness* this logical reasoning is given in detail showing that what we think of

“I” is really a whole set of disconnected thoughts and feelings with no unifying entity that can be called the self.

5 A detailed commentary of the Uttara Tantra is available. *The Uttara Tantra* by Thrangu Rinpoche, Namo Buddha Publications.

6 *The Rain of Wisdom* by Nalanda Translation Committee. Boston, Mass.: Shambhala Publications, 1980.