

## 2. PITH INSTRUCTIONS OF NGÜLCHU THOGMÉ

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I am very pleased to see that so many Dharma friends have come here today. I would like to offer some teachings based on pith instructions by Gyalsé Ngülchu Thogmé. Gyalsé Thogmé was well versed in the scriptures, a great practitioner, and, most importantly, he gained the distinguished reputation of having become a great bodhisattva by applying the teachings of the Mahayana—the Great Vehicle.

Gyalsé Thogmé opens his text by paying homage to the Lama and the Triple Gem. He continues: “Homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas who are endowed with all spiritual qualities and are free of any faults. I am going to explain how one correctly engages in the practice of the holy Dharma and gains experience in it.”

Gyalsé Thogmé announces that he will explain how we are to engage in the practice of the holy Dharma correctly. When we carry out any kind of task impeccably, it will yield good results. In the context of the Dharma, “correctly engaging in the practice” refers to how the Buddha taught it, and how, subsequently, his followers in India and Tibet explained the various ways of implementing it. In this text, Gyalsé Thogmé explains how practicing in accordance with these teachings, we gain experience.

### **GIVING UP ATTACHMENT TO THIS LIFE**

His first instruction is: “To practice an authentic form of Dharma, one should not be compromised by attachments to this life. Practice should not be done for the purpose of this life.”

The teachings given by the Buddha can help us to pursue four types of aims. We can fulfil the aims of this present life or those of future rebirths. Beyond that, we can gain liberation from cyclic existence, which is the

goal of the Lesser Vehicle. We can also aim for perfect buddhahood. Of these four aims, practicing for the purpose of this life is the wrong approach, because except for the results that ripen in this life, it will bring us no advantage in any future existence. When we observe moral conduct and engage in various virtuous practices for the purpose of avoiding rebirth in the lower realms and aiming for a higher rebirth, there will definitely be benefits for future lives. However, that still constitutes further causes of samsara. Such was not the Buddha's real intention. Our objective should be working for the benefit of beings: wishing to achieve their happiness and wishing to free them from sorrow. Other approaches are merely temporal and, in the long run, do not have the capacity to bring about a reliable form of happiness or the power to end suffering and its perpetuation. The path toward a state of everlasting happiness, where suffering is completely eradicated, is what we call the Path of Liberation. Liberation refers either to the Lesser Vehicle type of liberation or to liberation in the Great Vehicle.

When we want to accomplish the Path of Liberation, we encounter obstacles that must be recognized and subsequently abandoned. What kind of obstacles? We might, for instance, observe moral discipline, study, and meditate, all for the sake of accomplishing the Path of Liberation, but the biggest obstacle we have in our Dharma practice is our attachment to this life. Gyalsé Thogmé says, "Due to our single-minded preoccupation with the desirable things in life and with our friends ..." He's referring to our constant attempts to acquire desirable things and enjoyable experiences in this life, to get a name and a good reputation, to have fun, and power, and so on. Constantly thinking only about these things is "single-minded preoccupation." This is what Gyalsé Thogmé means by "attachment to this life." This is the biggest obstacle and therefore it needs to be discarded. If you are interested in authentic Dharma practice, if you really want to properly engage in the practice of Dharma, then you must abandon the mentality that thinks in terms of this life. The Dharma that we ought to practice is not for short-term purposes. It is not for the sake of this life.

In order to practice the Dharma, we must listen to and reflect upon the teachings. "To listen" refers to listening to instructions given by Dharma teachers, and to studying texts. "To reflect" means that we use our own intelligence to examine the deeper meaning of what we have studied. Through careful analysis, certainty is born and mistaken ideas are

eliminated. On top of that, we meditate, meaning that we train ourselves over and over again until we become completely familiar with the subject. In addition, all our practices have to be sustained by bodhicitta, whether it's the practice of listening, contemplation, or meditation; studying, observing moral discipline, practicing generosity, and so on. They are all to be undertaken with the resolve to attain the state of buddhahood. If our efforts are mixed with intentions to gain advantages in this life, it will not serve the purpose of attaining buddhahood. This is not the authentic Dharma.

To give an analogy: If you have an extremely sumptuous and delicious meal with a hundred flavours that contains even a small amount of poison, the entire meal becomes inedible. Likewise, if virtue becomes spoiled by a mentality that is preoccupied with this life, we are not capable of attaining the state of liberation and omniscience. Therefore, Gyalsé Thogmé teaches not to be attached to this life. When we are attached to this life, we will seek comfort and material possessions for the purpose of this life, and we will then become attached to them, thus wasting the opportunity to attain liberation. Striving for material possessions causes conflicts, between teacher and student, between Dharma friends, and even between close relatives.

Possessions cause us to create negative karma at each stage along the way: first, at the time of acquiring them; then, while we protect what we have accumulated; and in the end, when they are destroyed or lost. In the process, we put up with a lot of troubles—many bad words are spoken and we might even attract a bad reputation. Therefore, as long as we do not give up all that negative acting and talking, that worrying and suffering, but, instead, we strive to acquire ever more possessions, it is clear that we are attached to this life.

Great attachment to possessions causes people to engage in many atrocious actions, such as patricide, matricide, robbing the wealth of charity, or of the Three Jewels—all kinds of reprehensible deeds that will lead them into the hell realms. Not only that, out of jealousy they find an enormous amount of diligence for quarrelling or preventing other people from becoming rich. With all this, neither they themselves, nor others will find happiness. In this life as well as in future lives, they only succeed in bringing about suffering. And the root of all that is a mind that does not let go of this life.

Consider this analogy: If a person needs to walk at night on a narrow, dangerous path along an abyss, if she carries a torch, she is safe from the abyss. Likewise, if we study the Dharma, we become knowledgeable in the Dharma, which is like holding a torch in our hands that will prevent us from falling into the abyss of negative deeds.

Even those who are learned in the Dharma might not shun negative actions. They might instead work for a good reputation, or for the purpose of attracting followers. They might compete for the purpose of popularity. If such things become the focus, it is also a form of attachment to this life. It is said that if the learned bodhisattvas do not abandon attachment to this life, the work they do becomes harmful. If, for instance, one makes a big donation, but does so with the idea of becoming famous, it will taint the initial motivation. A Dharmic motivation means acting without the desire for fame. If the desire for a good reputation—which is the same as a mind attached to this life—gets mingled with charity, then the result will be small and spoiled, even if the donation is big.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF GENUINE COMPASSION

The path of the Lesser Vehicle means that we engage in the three trainings for the purpose of abandoning samsara. The Great Vehicle is based on the urge to work for the benefit of others. To do that, we have to be grounded in compassion. Since the Great Vehicle comprises many paths, there are various practices in which we can engage. Their common and most important foundation is compassion. What is the principal cause for attaining buddhahood? Gyalsé Thogmé<sup>1</sup> teaches that it is the generation of the mind of awakening, or bodhicitta. The root of bodhicitta is compassion, and it has to be cultivated and enhanced by the practice of the six pāramitās. Therefore, we must build a strong foundation of compassion.

We could also explain it in the following way: If we analyze what the origin of samsara is, we come to the conclusion that all suffering in the world comes from a mind that clings to the idea of a self and is solely concerned with selfish interests. It is therefore said that the root of samsara is clinging to a self. Because we think constantly about how to seize advantages for ourselves, we circle incessantly in the three realms. If, on the other hand, we act for the benefit of other sentient beings, we will attain the state of a buddha. The basic impetus for benefitting others is compassion.

In sum, it is taught that the desire to benefit ourselves leads us to flounder in cyclic existence, and the deeper cause of it is clinging to a self. If, however, we act for the benefit of other beings, we will attain buddhahood, and the underlying cause of that is compassion.

The famous Drukpa Künlé is remembered for the following story: When he came to see the Jowo Buddha statue in Lhasa, he spontaneously recited this verse:

First, you and I were equal.  
 You acted for the benefit of others and became awakened.  
 I acted for my own benefit and keep wandering in samsara.  
 Today I bow down to you.

In this poem, Drukpa Künlé affirms that both the Buddha and he himself used to be on the same level. Then, because of solely being concerned with his own interests, he remained imprisoned in samsara, whereas the Jowo Buddha worked to help others and reached the highest state of perfection and flourishing. Drukpa Künlé then admits that the difference between the two has become unimaginably great, and therefore pledges that he will, from now on, pay homage to the Jowo Buddha.

Another analogy: If, at a work place, you have many labor forces and one supervising manager, each individual worker will carry out his or her specific task whilst the manager oversees the work process as a whole. Likewise, on the Mahayana path, we practice giving, moral discipline, patience, diligence, and so forth, and each practice yields specific results, such as prosperity as a result of giving or rebirth in the higher realms as a result of moral discipline. The practice that brings everything to overall perfection, however, is compassion.

## WHY CULTIVATE COMPASSION?

There are a great number of reasons for developing compassion for sentient beings. For instance, we should have compassion because we have received the help of others in many different ways. Even if they have hurt us, there are many reasons to develop compassion for them. For one, all beings have been our mothers in previous lives, not only once, but countless times. As our mothers, they have shown us immeasurable kindness. If we search for the beginning of our existence, we cannot find a particular date, year, or month, and we certainly cannot say that we

have come into existence only in this life. All of us sentient beings exist since beginningless time. In the course of this immeasurably long time we took birth from a womb countless times, and therefore each being has had countless mothers. How can we prove the existence of previous lives? We have a mind with a constant flux of thoughts. The moment we are conceived in the womb of a mother, the mind of our previous life goes on. One moment of consciousness becomes the cause for the next moment of consciousness. Mind cannot arise from any other cause or condition. It is consciousness itself which gives rise to consciousness. It is through this line of argument that we can understand that there must have been previous lives, and that, moreover, there is no beginning to the chain of rebirths.

Another reason is that all sentient beings seek to avoid suffering, and in this respect are identical to myself. There is no fundamental difference. When we are sick and in pain, we wish to get rid of it and hope that it never comes back. We wish that the pain together with the disease that caused it may be eradicated. Compassion is wishing, with the same sincerity, that all sentient beings may be free from suffering, sickness, and sorrow, and also the causes of suffering, which are the mental afflictions. A person with such thoughts is a compassionate person.

Also animals have a certain amount of compassion. However, the particular compassion of the Great Vehicle is one that embraces *all* sentient beings. All beings, even those that might appear to be enjoying themselves, are under the sway of afflictions and suffering. Toward all of them we should generate compassion. Some are powerless, lack self-control and skill, and are subject to unbearable sufferings. Consider them with compassion. Likewise, arouse compassion toward the sick and dying, and toward the beings in the lower realms, namely the hells, hungry spirits, and animals. Not only do they suffer sickness and death once or twice, but countless times over and over again.

Wherever they are born, beings experience suffering and dissatisfaction. In sum, develop compassion for all sentient beings since they are powerless and subjected to nothing but misery.

Especially in situations when someone we consider an enemy, or simply unsympathetic, verbally or physically abuses us, we should take their aggressive words and their anger directed toward us as an opportunity for generating compassion. The abusive person accumulates negative karma, which will be a contributing cause for him or her to experience the suffering of the lower realms. Therefore, we must generate compassion.

The love and compassion of the Mahayana are unlike any other. Mahayana compassion does not mean having a few compassionate thoughts for sentient beings, but is the resolve, “I must eradicate the suffering of all sentient beings, as well as the causes of suffering, namely unwholesomeness or non-virtue.” Likewise, Mahayana loving-kindness means thinking, “I must bring temporary and ultimate happiness to all sentient beings, and I must assist them in creating the very causes of happiness.”

### **BODHICITTA, THE CAUSE FOR BUDDHAHOOD**

The next step, which is very important, is to generate the Mahayana resolve for attaining awakening. If you develop the mind of awakening in accordance with the Great Vehicle, you will definitely be able to attain buddhahood one day. As long as you have not brought forth bodhicitta, no matter how many virtuous practices you perform, it is certain that you will not be able to reach the state of a buddha.

How do we cause bodhicitta to arise? Several causes and conditions are necessary for the generation of bodhicitta, the foremost being compassion. All the qualities of the Mahayana path and all buddha qualities are brought about through training in compassion. How do we bring about this compassion-inspired mind of awakening? By generating thoughts such as, “I must do whatever I can so that all beings become free from suffering and genuinely happy. To the extent of my capacity, I must try.” No other method exists to generate bodhicitta. Once we have attained the state of buddhahood, our great goal will be accomplished as we will be working ceaselessly day and night for the benefit of the infinite number of sentient beings. Therefore, we must cultivate in our mind the intention to accomplish buddhahood for the sake of others. This intention is called the mind of awakening—bodhicitta. The thought, “I must attain the state of a buddha,” is called bodhicitta. However, the mere wish is not sufficient to attain buddhahood. Everything arises in accordance with its causes and conditions. This is dependent arising. Thus, it is the initial resolve that gives us the motivation to act virtuously and to accomplish many wholesome deeds. From this arises the notion that it is *for the purpose of attaining buddhahood* that we ought to practice virtue. This intention is what we call aspiration bodhicitta.

We need to accumulate virtue of which there are two types, namely skillful means and wisdom. Giving generously, for example, and observing

moral discipline, and all of the first five pāramitās belong to the category of skillful means. The sixth pāramitā, the realization of the nonexistence of the self, is wisdom. For our practice, we need the combination of skillful means and wisdom. Another way of talking about it is the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Both refer to the practice of the six pāramitās.

In this way, Gyalsé Thogmé teaches that the final result of buddhahood will be attained by engaging in these Great Vehicle practices. By attaining the state of awakening we accomplish our own benefit. Accomplishing our own benefit means that we will be completely without faults, without mental afflictions, without pain or suffering. Without any karmic imprints whatsoever. Instead, we will possess all the great qualities of the awakened body, speech, and mind. The body will display the one hundred and twelve major marks, the speech will be endowed with sixty qualities, and the mind will possess twenty-one categories of uncontaminated phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Such are the major qualities that we will attain, and with these in turn we will accomplish the welfare of both ourselves and others.

Buddhas are continuously working for the benefit of others. In the shortest time a buddha is able to carry out a great variety of skillful actions, thereby accomplishing immeasurable benefits for countless beings. Their activity is not limited to a few instances here and there. Buddhas work incessantly to accomplish the welfare of others on a grand scale.

All of you are engaged in the practice of Buddhadharma. You are studying the Buddhist doctrines, and you are putting them into practice. This is wonderful. I would like to express my joy at your practice, and I rejoice in the fact that you requested this Dharma teaching today.

#### **ATTACHMENT TO THIS LIFE:**

#### **FALLING PREY TO THE EIGHT WORLDLY CONCERNS**

We have discussed the importance of renouncing this life in order to practice the Dharma, and Gyalsé Thogmé gave many reasons for us to do so. When he explains the attachment to this life, he refers, more specifically, to our wish to experience only pleasure and no pain; to receive compliments and no criticism; to gain fame but no bad reputation; to have gain but no loss. These eight traps are traditionally called the eight worldly dharmas. We spend a lot of energy in pursuing them, and thereby they rob us of the possibility to practice the Dharma. Even when we

engage in Dharma practice, our mind is polluted by these wrong attitudes, thus making it impossible for our practice to become effective and excellent. Therefore, it is taught that there is no use in being attached to this life.

The great Sakya Paṇḍita explains in his own way why we should discard our attachment. That which we call this life is not something worth being attached to, nor is it appropriate to be attached to it. Our human life only lasts a short time, and when the moment comes for us to die, we will have to leave behind all those things we heaped up during this lifetime, and for the acquisition of which we carried out a lot of negative actions. Since we have to go beyond this world, there is nothing here worth being attached to.

We have to contemplate death and impermanence. In fact, the best method for abandoning attachment to this life and for inciting the desire to practice Dharma is the contemplation of death and impermanence. If we repeatedly train ourselves in reflecting upon impermanence and death, we will be very familiar with this idea and we will know with certainty and conviction that the time of our death is a complete uncertainty. This being so, we will naturally want to engage in Dharma practice. Any distaste for the practice, laziness, or lack of vigour will be cleared away. The *Teachings on the Path and its Result (Lamdré)* affirm that the blockages and interferences that prevent us from engaging in the practice of the Dharma in the first place is our concern with the aforementioned eight worldly dharmas. How do we protect our mind from them? The teachings tell us to have stable and firm faith in the Dharma protectors. When our faith in the Dharma is stable we will be able to discard thoughts concerned with the eight traps, or eight worldly dharmas, whenever they appear.

### A PATH FREE FROM EXTREMES

The instruction that we have to let go of this life in our mind can be understood in various ways. It does not mean that we have to endure many hardships and austerities. Asceticism for the sake of spiritual practice is part of the Hindu, but not of the Buddhist, tradition. According to certain aspects of Hindu thought, freeing yourself from cyclic existence entails discarding the root of it, and the body is considered to be that very root. Therefore, they teach that the body has to be subdued through hardships, enduring heat or cold, for instance, and therefore they would bathe in icy water in the winter time. These and other ascetic practices are

carried out in the Hindu tradition. Buddhist masters, however, have criticized these teachings as misleading since they do not consider the body to be the root cause of cyclic existence.

Another school of thought says that in order to carry out spiritual practice, we should have minimal clothing, minimal nutrition, and minimal housing. Buddhists refute such notions. According to instructions practiced in certain Hindu traditions, if we were to enjoy the comforts of plentiful food and clothing, the endless indulgence in our desires would increase, which would be incompatible with spiritual practice. In refutation, Master Āryadeva teaches that remaining in a state of deprivation fosters a disposition of aggression, and is therefore not conducive to practice. One of the epithets of the Buddha is the Sanskrit term *sugata*. The syllable *su* means happiness or bliss. Tibetan translators rendered this term as *de-war-sheg-pa* (*dbe bar gshegs pa*), which implies that by progressing on an agreeable or pleasant path one reaches the final goal of bliss. The epithet therefore means *The One Gone to Bliss*, and also *The One Gone Blissfully*.

According to the Vinaya, the scriptures of the monastic code, Buddha taught the monastics the importance of abandoning two extremes in their conduct. Assuming the middle way and avoiding the two extremes means navigating between the extreme of practicing strict asceticism and the extreme of indulging in one's desires. Buddha taught to stay clear of the two and take the middle way. If one manages to possess material wealth without committing negative actions and generating mental affliction to acquire it, Buddha teaches that it is permissible to be wealthy. The Vinaya allows ordained monastics to make use of dwellings of five hundred rooms, with some rooms serving as sleeping chambers, some as living rooms, some as prayer spaces, and some as dining rooms. When householders are rich, they have the resources to do enormous beneficial work for themselves and others. For this reason, many bodhisattvas in the past chose to be reborn as kings, and with their royal wealth they benefitted many sentient beings.

Although our teacher Buddha Śākyamuni practiced asceticism for six years, he did not teach that austerities were part of the path. His reasoning was that six long years of asceticism had not yielded any accomplishment. Therefore, he explained that the austerities practiced by the Hindu yogis did not belong to the path of liberation. Indeed, his motive for engaging in ascetic practice was precisely to demonstrate and prove that such were

not the path. He engaged in them not in order to promote self-mortification, but to show an alternative.

After his period of asceticism, the Buddha accepted milk-rice and other nutritious food, which revived his physical strength. Arriving at the foot of the great Bodhi-tree in Bodhgayā, he sat down and practiced the correct meditation of settling the mind, through which he demonstrated the attainment of buddhahood. Thereby he proved that it is not through asceticism that one attains the highest goal, but through correctly engaging in the practice of a valid path.

We also know that Milarepa and other great yogis endured comparable hardships. However, their practice style is not within our capacities. They were exceptional persons with high realizations who were able to remain in meditative absorptions without taking any food. Despite lack of clothing, they did not freeze. They were able to maintain such a lifestyle because they were extraordinary beings. Everyone else needs to rely on adequate food and clothing and should avoid living in extreme poverty.

In the Mind Training (*lojong*) teachings it says:

*Whichever of the two occurs, bear it patiently.*

The meaning of this instruction is that we should train to bear whatever situation manifests, whether things are going good or bad. What does that mean? When we are filled with joy, it should not stop our Dharma practice. If we happen to find ourselves in poverty, we should take that as the condition most conducive to our Dharma practice. When we own no property, for example, and have no skills and no job, there and then we have good conditions for practicing Dharma. Thinking, “Now I won’t have any distractions,” we should integrate being penniless into our practice and make it a supportive condition. On the other hand, when we are joyful, very rich, or a highly respected person, there and then we should recognize that these are good conditions for practicing Dharma and encourage ourselves to practice accordingly. In sum, if we manage to integrate all situations, both joyful and painful ones, into our practice, then, it is taught, “We patiently bear both.”

The great master Deshung Tulku Rinpoche explained that beyond putting the pith instructions on attaining liberation into practice, we do not need to engage in austerities in order to become free. All our activities should be carried out without inflicting undue pain upon ourselves. This is how we will produce the best results. This is the way of the wise.

This means that we should practice the Dharma with enthusiasm. When we study the Dharma, train in it, and apply it in different ways, we should do so with enthusiasm, and thereby develop great diligence. Whatever we do, we should undertake it with a joyful mind.

### LETTING GO OF OUR FASCINATION WITH SAMSARA

Gyalsé Thogmé teaches that as long as we entertain a fascination for worldly life, that is, for life anywhere in the three realms of samsara, we will never manage to attain liberation. The method for letting go of our fascination is to reflect upon the many flaws and drawbacks of worldly life. This is the way to let go of our attachment to samsara explained previously.

What is the correct method for reflecting upon the many flaws so as to be able to let go of our fascination? Consider the following analogy: If somebody seduces our spouse or companion, we would see plenty of bad character traits in such a person. In such a situation, we might even consider committing suicide, which is a terrible mistake. However, when we come to see the drawbacks in our spouse, we can let go of our attachment. That is called renunciation of, or, literally translated, definite emancipation from samsara. However, even animals have the wish to escape the suffering aspect of samsara, so something more is meant here. We should want to be free of even the pleasure and enjoyments of samsara. That is an important point. Once we have seen the unsatisfactory nature and many faults of worldly entertainment and pleasure, we give up our fascination for them.

Consider another analogy: When a forest is on fire, the wildlife living there, gripped by fear, will try to escape. Likewise, cyclic existence is a terrifying place of suffering and a huge prison. Understanding that, we should make up our mind and be determined to get free from it. What is this cyclic existence, or samsara, and how can it be abandoned? There are definitely means to abandon samsara, but worldly people who do not practice the Dharma entertain the unreasonable hope that one could get rid of the fully manifest result of suffering. The Dharma teaches us that we cannot abandon that which is an already ripened karmic result, but what we can abandon are the causes thereof. For example, if we want to prevent the burning caused by a fire, we have to extinguish the cause, the fire itself. Similarly, if someone has the painful symptoms of a disease, the disease must be cured by getting rid of its cause.

The root cause of samsara is clinging to a self. Clinging to a self means having a mind that is thinking “me, I, myself.” The thought of “I” entails the thought of “other.” And between the two, a whole range of emotions, such as desire, attachment, aversion, and so on develop. Due to these kinds of emotions, we accumulate a lot of karma, and that is how we end up floundering in cyclic existence. The root cause of everything can be reduced to this clinging to an “I.” It is the “I” that wants to be appreciated by others, that wants to win over the entire country, that wants to be the most famous of all. The “I” wants to be rich, wants others to be inferior; and that is what we mean by self-cherishing. This selfishness incurs a multitude of afflictions, negativities, pain, and suffering. It is not only detrimental to our spiritual goals, but it is also contrary to the expected worldly norms of the society in which we live: selfish people do not respect anybody but themselves. They disrespect their parents, their relatives, and do not feel concern for anybody. All they can think about is how to get the greatest profit for themselves. In doing so, they create disharmony and conflict with everyone else. Their lives’ projects tend to go terribly wrong and they become lonely people, unable to find satisfaction or happiness.

On top of that, whatever arises, good or bad, it is very important to understand that our mind-states also condition all of our worldly activities. All quarrels are caused by selfishness. Parents and children fight, religions fight with one another, countries fight against each other—all because of selfishness. When we think carefully about this, we understand what problems our self-cherishing creates. Śāntideva teaches that all the suffering that exists in the world: all terror, injury, and harm, are the product of selfishness. Thus, as long as we are not able to abandon selfishness, it is not possible to interrupt the ongoing stream of suffering.

## CONQUERING THE INNER ENEMIES

As beginners on the path, we have to reflect upon the drawbacks of clinging to an “I” and being under the influence of the afflictions. Thinking about the right and wrong courses of action will greatly benefit our practice, as we’ll be able to discern what to adopt and what to discard. This is why we have to carefully think about the defects and disadvantages of samsara. We should see afflictions as our real enemies. All the harm we experience is authored by afflictions, and this is going on incessantly. We find them impossible to escape. We cannot rely on them. We cannot

judge them. Unless we are able to conquer them, they will not disappear by themselves. These are all reasons for which Gyalsé Thogmé teaches that afflictions are a real enemy with powerful troops.

As soon as afflictions arise in the mind, we have to cut them out without hesitation. Noticing their arrival, we should think, “These are my enemies,” and we should be extremely wary. As Geshe Potowa says, we practice Dharma all the time, but what we really need to train in are the key points of the Dharma. This means we have to understand that the afflictions are enemies in our mind. To recognize and apprehend them the moment they appear, we post a guard in our mind. That is real Dharma practice.

The affliction of desire is an almost omnipresent affliction. There are numerous objects with which we have a relationship of desire. Take the physical body for instance. It is the prime object of our attachment. Of course, it is important for us to safeguard the wellbeing of our body because it is the vehicle that allows us to practice for the sake of all beings. It is, for example, the basis for taking monastic vows. However, if we let attachment to the body grow out of proportion, we become excessively concerned with it. In the end, this attachment enslaves us to our bodies, so much so that we have very little tolerance for discomfort, and there seems to be no end to the needs of the body.

Śāntideva teaches us that everyone—those close to us, those who are distant, and we ourselves—must die one day. Since that is so, it does not make sense to hold some people as close and develop attachment, and others as distant and generate aversion. The Buddha teaches that if we want to attain the state of buddhahood, there is one Dharma practice in particular we have to take to heart and that is cultivating impartiality toward all beings. What is this impartial attitude, or mind of equality? It is an attitude of wanting to be of benefit to all beings equally. We have no anger or aversion; we have no bias, but we are in a state of equanimity where we do not regard some as close and others as far.

One of the Mind Training verses instructs us:

*Always train in the three challenges.*

The first difficult task is to remember the antidote when afflictions arise. When we experience an emotion, it prompts us to act in certain ways, and it is difficult to remember the antidote. Secondly, even if we do remember a remedy, it is difficult to effectively apply it and counteract the

affliction. And thirdly, even if we do manage to control an emotion once, it is difficult to eradicate it and stop its arising altogether. Although these tasks are difficult, they are extremely important and we should persist in training in them.

The emotion of anger or aggression is a particularly dangerous one to which we have to pay close attention. When we let hatred dominate our mind, it destroys a lot of our positive potential. It annihilates the results of the roots of virtue that we have been accumulating for a long time. In this way it causes a lot of damage.

Lord Maitreya teaches that the afflictions harm not only yourself, they hurt others too. And on top of that they also destroy the roots of virtue. When you are in the grip of hatred, it causes you and others harm in this life and also in future lives. The antidote for hatred is tolerance, or patience. If you persistently cultivate it, patience will benefit you and others, and it will yield benefits in all future lives for yourself and others. If you train again and again in remembering the remedy, you will eventually be able to see the benefit of it each time aggression arises. In this context, there is a set of four spiritual exercises that the Buddha taught: First, when somebody is angry with you, do not respond with anger. Secondly, if somebody verbally abuses you, picks on you, or slanders you, do not retaliate. Third, if somebody points out your faults, do not point out theirs in return. And fourth, even if someone abuses you physically, do not retaliate physically, do not beat them. These are the four practices of a disciple intent on accruing virtue.

Anger brings disharmony between you and your friends and family members. An angry character is mean and chases others away. When your mind is filled with aggression, your destructive energy will spoil all your endeavors. Nothing you do will turn out well, and you'll make mistakes all the time.

Pride or arrogance is another of the root causes of samsara and one that brings immense harm. People feel proud when they have accomplished something great. But not only that, some are also proud of their bad actions. Some people are proud when they kill another, even though killing is extremely immoral. They believe that they are heroes and they are proud of their actions. One can develop pride about anything and everything. Some people are proud of their Dharma practice even if their practice is only minimal. They believe themselves to be great practitioners and become proud, thereby spoiling their practice. Even thinking that there are a lot of beings who live pitiful existences is a form of arrogance

and pride. Instead, one should think, “I am the lowliest of all beings, lower than me is only water.”

The Buddha said that in his former lives as a bodhisattva, he showed courtesy to his Dharma brothers and served them. He paid homage to them in every possible way. Our teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni, also paid homage to the venerable masters of other religions. As a result of having revered other qualified masters, he too was respected when it was his time to become the Buddha. And not only was he respected by all beings, but even the flowers, plants and trees alongside the paths that he walked bowed down to honor him, too. These were the results of having eradicated his pride. When we become bloated with pride and arrogance, we should look up to those who are superior to us, thinking about the many qualities and great fortune that they possess. This will humble us and will be an effective means to overcome pride.

Another affliction that should be noted is miserliness. It means that we are not able to share the Dharma or the material wealth that we have accumulated. The inability to make donations or offerings is miserliness, and it is the direct cause for poverty. Stinginess makes us poor in this life, and in the next life we will be reborn among the hungry ghosts. Generosity, on the other hand, will make us rich in this life, and in future lives it will help us to attain the state of a buddha. We should carefully think about the advantages and disadvantages of our attitude. In training to become generous, we should first train to give small quantities of little gifts. Then we train to progressively give more.

Jealousy, or envy, is another affliction. It refers to a mind that is displeased when others are fortunate, for example, when they have a lot of wealth, when they are famous, or when they have a good character. Jealousy is a major character flaw and is a cause for rebirth in the lower realms. Therefore, we should train to rejoice when other people do something good, or find happiness. If we do so, we accumulate great merit.

If we want to completely eradicate the afflictions, the most effective method is the practice of meditation. By mastering calm abiding (Skt. *śamatha*; Tib. *zhi-né*), we will pacify coarse afflictions. If in addition we practice superior insight (Skt. *vipaśyanā*; Tib. *lhak-tong*), we can also eradicate the seeds of the afflictions.

## TRANSFORMING OUR MIND FOR GOOD

We discussed earlier how self-cherishing is the main obstacle on the Mahayana path. On this path, we have friends and enemies. The only enemy is self-cherishing; it is never other beings. Indeed, all sentient beings are to be considered immensely kind. So, how can we get rid of this enemy, our self-cherishing? Thinking about our faults is very helpful in understanding that our selfishness is the source of all downfalls, and that cherishing others is the source of all joy and goodness. We can generally assume that we do not have any good qualities, and that we need to build them all anew.

Our best friend is compassion; it is the most important remedy. Now we need to generate this compassion in meditation. If we pursue a sincere, long-term training in thinking compassionate thoughts, we will bring about genuine compassion, and we will not find it difficult to help other beings. We will work for their benefit, and not be concerned with our own advantage. How do we cultivate such compassion? We request teachings from our lamas and teachers about compassion, and train according to their instructions. We can also understand the various methods for cultivating compassion through reading and studying a wide range of texts. Once we have a theoretical understanding, we deepen it in meditative absorption. A stable mind is the best support for developing compassion as it will make our training much more effective. Even if we don't have great meditation, we should train in compassion analytically. This means that we remember and reflect on the many reasons for developing compassion for sentient beings, and then we generate compassion.

Sometimes we can forego all the reasoning and repeat compassionate thoughts many times over in our mind instead. Another training method is verbalizing compassionate wishes. In the prayer books there are many examples, such as, "May all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering." We recite this prayer many hundred thousand times. Our mind must be free of distractions in order for this to be a tool of transformation. If we do so, our self-cherishing attitude will be thoroughly reformed, and in fact replaced by a compassionate one. If we have a lot of distracting thoughts in our mind while we recite the words, we cannot expect any major results in our practice.

We can also pray to the Triple Gem that we become compassionate. We make offerings on the shrine to the Triple Gem, and we offer charity

to beings. In this and other ways we accumulate merit. When our mind is disturbed by negative attitudes and defilements, we cannot bring our mind in line with the Dharma. We have to purify our mental defilements with various practices so as to prepare our mind for compassion.

In addition to the reasons we have discussed for generating compassion and working for the benefit of beings, Śāntideva mentions another one. He states that all beings wish to avoid suffering. They wish to get rid of the pain they have right now and don't want to experience this or similar sorrow ever again. Yet, they don't know how to get rid of it, and they are busy creating the causes for more suffering. Therefore, we need to think, that we would do anything to soothe and eliminate the suffering of all beings. Śāntideva goes on to say that the Triple Gem and sentient beings are equal in that they both are the basis for accumulating merit. Worshipping the Buddha but not honoring sentient beings is wrong. We have to honor both the Buddha and sentient beings. The cause for happiness in this world and beyond is our merit. The accumulation of merit can be thought of as a harvest. A good harvest depends on the ground. For our practice, there are two types of ground: the sublime ground being the Triple Gem, and the common one being sentient beings. Cultivating the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, we harvest the merit of faith. When we focus on sentient beings, we harvest loving-kindness, compassion, the mind of awakening, the four persuasive means of gathering disciples, and so forth. It is clear then that sentient beings are very important and we should honor and respect them.

## OTHER WORDS OF ADVICE

### *The benefits of pilgrimage*

Going on pilgrimage is a meritorious practice. Pilgrimage places are considered sacred because many holy beings have been there in the past and the Buddha's teachings have flourished there for a very long time. Wherever numerous Dharma practitioners have meditated, the ground itself carries a lot of blessing. It is said that when we practice virtuous deeds at such a place, they are enhanced by the merit of all those practitioners of previous times. Since Nepal is a blessed land in which the Buddha's teachings have flourished, it is a place with great energy. According to the Buddha's teaching in the Vinaya, we have here one of

the four major holy places. Nepal is Buddha's land of birth. Here he gave the sacred Dharma teachings, which were then transmitted from one master to the next, who preserved them without corruption. It is said that when we pay homage by offering prostrations and prayers at these places, thinking that here the Buddha has come, stayed, and carried out his activities, we will not be born in the lower realms. To give a contrary example, if you try to practice virtue at a place that has been desecrated by war, where many people were killed, then your virtue will be comparatively weaker. Just by seeing such a place, the mind becomes tainted.

There are many Buddhist sacred sites in Nepal. There are, for example, the three great stupas,<sup>3</sup> and, in the Kathmandu Valley, the four stupas that were erected by the Dharma king Aśoka.<sup>4</sup> We believe that they enshrine relics of the Buddha, and therefore carry great blessing. The Buddha had prophesized that stupas would be built, and that it would be very beneficial for pilgrims to visit such holy places. When you visit the Boudhanath stupa *Jarung Kashor*, you should pay homage thinking that this stupa is inseparable from all the many other Buddhist stupas in the world. With such a mind state, you are paying homage to all stupas in the world. The Buddha's body, speech, and mind are embodied in the *Mahābodhi* stupa in Bodhgayā, in the various stupas of Nepal, in the Śākyamuni statue (*Jowo*) in Lhasa in Tibet, and in many other holy places. We consider all these place to be very special and sacred. Going on pilgrimages, making prostrations, circumambulations, and presenting offerings at those holy places will plant the seed for liberation, and for attaining the supreme state of buddhahood. We can say that the Buddha becomes our helper by means of a holy place because, even if we do not properly know what to think, and even if we do not entirely understand what it means to attain buddhahood, the seed of liberation will be planted in our mind nevertheless. It is my hope that after finishing your pilgrimage, you will be inspired by the Dharma and that you will put it into practice, strengthening and improving it continuously.

### *On the recitation of prayers*

At the beginning of all Dharma activities we recite the refuge and bodhicitta prayers. The correct way to do our prayers is to recite with an undistracted mind while contemplating the meaning of the words that

we are saying. At the conclusion, we dedicate the roots of virtue gained through our practice so that sentient beings, whose numbers are measureless like space, will reach perfect buddhahood. There was once a Tibetan lay practitioner by the name of Palmoche who complained that reciting was too difficult. If we just recite, but we do not know the correct manner, and do not request explanations from Dharma teachers either, our practice will be full of mistakes. Especially when we recite texts belonging to the Secret Mantra of the Tantrayāna, we can do a lot of damage. It is, therefore, extremely important to know the different correct ways to carry out recitations.

In Tibet, at the time of King Songtsen Gampo, many people recited texts belonging to the Yogatantra class of scriptures. When they learned that it was harmful to recite texts of the Secret Mantra tradition without having received the proper empowerments, they translated the *Sutra of the Purification of Negativities* for the purpose of recitation, followed by the *Heart Sutra*. All the protectors of Tibet gathered to recite the *Heart Sutra*. Whereas the recitation of the discourses of the Buddha brings immeasurable benefit, reciting the sutras of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) surpasses them all in terms of benefit. Therefore, reciting the *Heart Sutra* is an excellent practice.

### *On the importance of studying under a qualified teacher*

It is said that language instructors, or teachers in general, show great kindness in teaching their students and should therefore be respected. How much more valuable are Dharma teachers, since their work is much more beneficial than introducing somebody to a language. Buddha says that while scholars who teach worldly sciences may or may not deserve respect, there is no doubt that Dharma masters and teachers are worthy of veneration. Dharma teachers are the representatives of the Buddha. They carry out the work of the Buddha, so to speak. From the time of the Buddha up until today, from lama to disciple, the Dharma has been transmitted without interruption. Therefore we should pay homage to the masters who teach us the Dharma as if they were the Buddha himself. It is stated in the Vinaya and in the Sutra Piṭaka that we should perceive them as the Buddha.

As for the teacher who transmits the Buddha's teachings, she or he should have a compassionate attitude and take good care of the students

in accordance with the Dharma. The students should implement the instructions they receive as best as they can.

In the sutras, we find the advice, “Emulate the character of a pious son!” A pious son refers to an exceptional son who does not insist on his own independence but works to accomplish the tasks that his father has entrusted him with. Think about it.

At the time of the Buddha, in Śrāvastī, the king Prasenajit’s queen and her entourage received a lot of Dharma teachings from one of her servants. This servant had had a lot of opportunities to go to places where the Dharma was taught. However, the queen and her entourage were not successful in bringing about the corresponding results of the practice. At the same time, the Buddha and a few arhats also gave teachings, and at the end of their teaching there would always be many people in the audience who attained arhatship and other levels of realization. People asked the Buddha why the queen and her entourage did not manage to attain the fruit of the practice. The Buddha answered: “The reason is that you do not properly honor the person who gives you the Dharma. If you see the Dharma teacher as lower than yourself, the teachings do not penetrate your mind. You have to place the Dharma teacher on a throne, and those who want to receive the Dharma should sit around it and listen with a respectful attitude. Then your practice will be successful.” For this reason, Tibetan Buddhist teachers sit on a throne. Thinking about the greatness of the Dharma, and the kindness of the master, you should maintain a respectful attitude when you practice and study the Dharma.

*Translated by Julia Stenzel.*

*ngag lam 'bras slob bshad chen mo: bla ma'i rnam thar skor, pod KA*). The last volume is entitled *Supplement to the Lamdré Collection, vol. 43 (lam 'bras kha skong, pod NGI)*.

12. *Rje btsun sa kya pa'i bka' srol ltar rgyud 'chad nyan byed pa la nye bar mkho ba'i gsung rab rnam*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2010.
13. Skyabs rje mkhan chen a pad rin po che. *Bzang spyod smon lam gyi 'grel ba phyogs sbrigs*. Dehradun: Sakya College, 2013; and *Thub pa dgongs gsal gyi bka' 'grel (pod 2)*. Dehradun: Sakya College.
14. *Mkhan chen a pad rin po che mchog gi gsung 'bum (pod 4)*. Kan su'u rig gnas dpe skrun khang, 2014.

## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE BUDDHADHARMA

1. Noble beings (Skt. *ārya*) are those who have achieved high levels of accomplishment and liberation through the practice of the Dharma.
2. Refer to Sakya Paṇḍita (translated by David P. Jackson). *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*. In: Institute of Tibetan Classics. *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings: Three Key Texts*, volume 10 in the Library of Tibetan Classics. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2015, p. 397.

## 2. PITH INSTRUCTIONS OF NGÜLCHU THOGMÉ

1. Although Gyalsé Tokmé is not explicitly mentioned here, the translator inserted his name whenever the Tibetan remains ambiguous since Khenchen Appey Rinpoche stated at the beginning that his teachings were based on instructions by this master.
2. According to the Mahayana teachings, buddhas manifest in innumerable forms to help suffering beings throughout all universes. Every buddha's body, speech, and mind displays qualities that indicate their inner qualities. The qualities of the body are traditionally listed as one-hundred-twelve physical faculties, namely the thirty-two excellent signs and eighty minor marks. These include, for example, the impression of a thousand-spoked wheel on the sole of the feet and the palm of the hands, a golden skin, and a crown-protrusion. The sixty qualities of the buddha's speech include purity, clarity, and majesty. The mind is described as possessing twenty-one uncontaminated exalted wisdoms, such as the four immeasurables, the eight meditative liberations, the ten powers, etc.
3. The three great stupas in Nepal are the *Jarung Kashor* stupa in Boudhanath, the *Pagpa Shingkün* stupa in Swayambunath, and *Takmo Lüdjin* stupa in Namobuddha.
4. The four stupas ascribed to Aśoka are located in Lalitpur, Patan.